

Thick, Thin, and Becoming a Virtuous Arguer

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Abstract A virtue account is focused on the character of those who argue. It is frequently assumed, however, that virtues are not action guiding, since they describe how to be and so fail to give us specific actions to take in a sticky situation. In terms of argumentation, we might say that being a charitable arguer is virtuous, but knowing so provides no details about how to argue successfully. To close this gap, I develop a parallel with the thick-thin distinction from ethics and use Hursthouse’s notion of “v-rules”. I also draw heavily from the work in argumentation by Daniel Cohen to develop Wayne Brockriede’s notion of arguing lovingly. But “argue lovingly” has a delicious ambiguity. For Brockriede it describes how we engage with others arguers. It can also mean, however, a loving attachment to knowledge, understanding, and truth. Applying the thick-thin distinction to argumentation in general and loving argumentation in particular shows that a virtue theoretic approach to argumentation is valuable for two reasons: it can provide one articulation of what it means to be a virtuous arguer and provide some insights into how to become one.

Keywords Virtuous argumentation · Virtuous community · Thick-thin · V-rules · Articulacy · Deliberative groups · Argue lovingly · Hursthouse · Annas · Brockriede

1 Introduction

When thinking about argumentation, what easily comes to mind is a set of rules to follow or stratagems to employ. Arguing is doing. It is the application of rules and stratagems. When we talk about arguments we often hear military metaphors: winning an argument, attacking an opponent’s premise, battling a critic. On the other hand, when we think of a good arguer, we think of traits or virtues a person has, such as fidelity to truth or argumentative charity. Virtues are often described as expressing character. In ethics, it is frequently argued that virtues are not action guiding, since they describe how to be and so fail to give us specific actions to take in a sticky situation. Thus, there is a seeming gap between being virtuous, and doing right. In terms of argumentation, we might say that being a charitable arguer is virtuous, but knowing so provides no details about how to argue successfully. This criticism states that virtues provide no action guiding rules.¹

Julia Annas and Rosalind Hursthouse have responded to this criticism by claiming that virtues *are* action guiding. Annas claims “Virtue ethics guides us to act”. In the jargon of ethical philosophers it provides an account of right action” (2014, 1). Annas and Hursthouse claim that virtues are “thick” concepts, which produce rules for action. Hursthouse calls the rules that result from virtue’s thick concepts “v-rules” (1999, 36–39). If Annas and

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¹ Another way to express this is to say that there is a gap between “good arguer” and “good argumentation”. It might be similar to the gap between “good soldier” and “good soldiering”. We think of a good soldier in virtue terms such as courageous and loyal. But “good soldiering” defeats the enemy. Below I develop a notion of “good argumentation” that rejects the rules and strategies/military metaphors approach to argumentation.

Hursthouse are correct, then we will have found a way to bridge the gap between being a virtuous arguer and arguing well. Note, however, that I do *not* say that a virtue account will tell us which arguments are sound or cogent and which are not. A virtue account is not focused on methods for evaluating arguments. It is focused on the character of those who argue.

If it makes sense to talk about a virtuous arguer, then there should be many parallels between virtue ethics and virtuous argumentation. Virtue in argumentation, however, doesn't line up in an exact parallel with virtue ethics. The small area of the parallel I discuss here is the use of the "thick-thin" distinction as a way to consider the relation between being a virtuous arguer and taking the right actions in argumentation. The thick-thin distinction does apply, but in argumentation there is reason to deviate from a straightforward parallel with the use of it made by Annas and Hursthouse in virtue ethics.²

In this paper I draw from Annas and Hursthouse in a way that allows me to describe argumentative concepts along a thick-thin continuum.³ I also draw heavily from the work in argumentation by Daniel Cohen to develop Wayne Brockriede's notion of arguing lovingly. But "arguing lovingly" has a delicious ambiguity. For Brockriede it describes how we engage with other arguers. It can also mean, however, a loving attachment to knowledge, understanding, and truth. Applying the thick-thin distinction to argumentation in general and loving argumentation in particular enables me to show that a virtue theoretic approach to argumentation is valuable for two reasons: it can provide one articulation of what it means to be a virtuous arguer as well as providing some insights into how to become one.

² There are three, fairly standard questions for virtue accounts: (1) Are virtues defined by a telos? (2) Are virtues identified a priori or a posteriori? (3) Are argumentative virtues necessarily moral virtues? Below I will discuss several parallels with virtue ethics, but I will not claim that argumentative virtues are necessarily moral virtues. The account I develop here will allow the thick/thin distinction to be applied no matter how that issue is resolved. So too, what I say here about the thick/thin distinction will be workable for either answer to the first two questions.

³ I focus on Annas and Hursthouse, but there are several philosophers applying a virtue framework to action. There is a philosopher in particular I want to highlight. Christine Swanton has developed a virtue-ethical account of right action in *Virtue Ethics: A pluralistic view* (2003). Snow draws on social psychology to examine virtues as a subset of enduring traits of individuals in *Virtue as Social Intelligence*. (2010).

2 Thick, Thin, and V-Rules

A thin concept lacks robust content. Usually 'good', 'bad', 'right', and 'wrong' are listed as examples of thin concepts.⁴ We can apply these concepts to people, objects, ideas, processes, or anything else we might want to evaluate. Concepts like "wrong" are thin because if I say of something that it is wrong, I have expressed my negative evaluation, but I haven't said in what way it is wrong. Statements with thin concepts make flat evaluations and because they have little content, are thought of as not offering us much advice for action. "That action is wrong" labels the action and may motivate me, but it provides little specific guidance for what I should do.

Thick concepts, on the other hand, are robust. Bernard Williams said thick concepts "seem to express a union of fact and value".⁵ This leaves open the possibility that fact and value are two entangled elements. Others, such as Debbie Roberts claim that thick concepts are not a union of elements, but that there simply is one thick evaluation (2013). The view I develop here can accommodate either of these positions. What I reject is the separatist claim that fact and evaluation are independent. To say that someone is a charitable arguer is to say something factual about her methods, attitudes, and motivation. At the same time, it is to express a positive value about the methods she employs, and her characteristic attitudes and motivations. It is to describe her character and express a positive evaluation both of her charitable character and of her actions that stem from her charity. This evaluation is sufficient to consider her someone to admire and emulate. Admiration, and the desire to emulate, not only motivates, but provides practical content for figuring out what to do (Zagzebski 2006, 2010).

To bridge the gap between the being of character and the action guidance of rules, Rosalind Hursthouse claims that because virtues are thick concepts, virtues do provide us with rules for action (Hursthouse 1999). 'Do what is honest, do not do what is uncharitable' are two such rules, one stemming from the virtue of honesty and one from the virtue of charity. Every virtue has similar rules attached. Hursthouse calls the rules that result from virtue's thick concepts "v-rules" (1999, 36–39). There are v-rules in argumentation as well. "Don't play fast and loose with the

⁴ Julia Annas claims that 'good' and 'bad' are not thin concepts. To illustrate this is so, she suggests we consider the different content in "Be a good girl" versus "Be a good boy". Since the content carried in 'good' changes from one sentence to the next, Annas considers 'good' to be a thick concept.

⁵ Kirchin credits Bernard Williams with coining "thick concept", but Gilbert Ryle used the "thick description" to indicate the specific, full-blooded description needed to categorize actions. See Kirchin 2013c, 60.

truth” might be a v-rule generated from the virtue of fidelity to the truth. Argumentative charity might result in the v-rule: “Don’t off-handedly minimize others’ arguments”.

In argumentation, there are thin concepts and thick concepts and some concepts rest on a continuum between the two.⁶ On the thin side, for example, are the deductive inference rules for propositional logic. If I am studying propositional logic, I may be motivated to use modus ponens, and use it correctly, but the rule itself offers me no advice on when it should be used. Some may wish to disagree here, claiming that deductive rules do give us advice. For example, if I have a conditional and its antecedent, then modus ponens advises me to assert the consequent. This, of course, is a valid move; but in the middle of a proof, it might not be a wise move. It may not advance the deduction of the conclusion. Thus, modus ponens only describes an inference; it provides no advice on when the inference should be made. So it would seem that the rules for deduction are thin concepts.⁷

Hursthouse responds to a standard criticism of thick concepts found in ethics. This criticism states that we learn our first ethical rules “at our mother’s knee” but “act charitably” (or argue charitably) and other concepts are too thick for a child to grasp. I want to consider Hursthouse’s response here, because it will be important for justifying my claim that treating argumentative virtues as thick concepts will help us gain insights into becoming virtuous arguers. Hursthouse’s response is to say that this criticism

pinpoints a condition of adequacy that any normative ethics must meet, namely that such an ethics must not only come up with action guidance for a clever rational adult, but also generate some account of moral education, of how one generation teaches the next what they should do.... Virtue ethicists want to emphasize the fact that, if children are to be taught to be honest, they must be taught to love and prize the truth, and that merely teaching them not to lie will not achieve this end. But [we] need not deny that, to achieve this end, teaching them not to lie is useful, or even indispensable. (OVE, 38–9)

⁶ This is a contentious claim. Some ethicists argue that thick and thin differ in kind. For a short summary of the arguments on both sides, see Kirchin 2013b, 2–6.

⁷ Wayne Brockriede recognized the distinction between thick and thin concepts in his 1972 article “Arguers as Lovers”. At the very beginning of his article he states: “Perhaps as good a way as any to distinguish the study of logic from the study of argument is to understand that logicians can safely ignore the influence of people on the transaction; arguers cannot”. (1) I take it that this means logic doesn’t need a virtue approach, but argumentation does.

Hursthouse denies the criticism that we don’t teach thick concepts to children, because teaching children thick concepts is an important part of moral education. We may not teach young children concepts like ‘just’ and ‘unjust’, but we do teach them ‘fair’ and ‘unfair’. The same can be said about the thick concepts of argumentative virtue. As soon as children can talk we begin to teach them to do so within the sphere of reason. Early on, we begin to inculcate the virtue of consistency. Starting with rules such as “Make sense”, we teach children the love of good reasoning. We teach them the value of asking “Why?” and the associated requirement of providing reasons, even while we make room for their developing sense of what counts as a reason. We also teach children to sequence, which is an important skill for argumentation.

Julia Annas claims that we can learn to apply thin concepts and the rules they generate “without having any clear independent idea of why they function as they do” (2014, 4). This is true in general. We can learn how to use a complex function on a calculator without understanding why we do so. So too, we can learn to apply “right” and “wrong” at socially acceptable times without knowing why. I will be agnostic about whether Annas’ claim is true of all or even most ethical concepts, but it is true of the thin rules of formal logic. Students can learn the mechanics of logic, e.g., to apply argument structures, especially a *reductio ad absurdum*, without understanding why they are taking the steps they do. Students can also produce valid proofs without understanding the role the rules play in soundness and completeness for the system they are studying.

If virtues are thick concepts, then they require not only knowing how, but also knowing why. If you have the argumentative virtue of charity, you can give an account of what it means to be a charitable arguer and how you go about exercising your virtue. Knowing why is part of the motivation for developing and exercising virtues. Knowing what, how, and why to exercise a virtue is part of the expertise in the practice of giving and asking for reasons. Like skills that develop with learning, practice, and guidance, argumentative virtues develop over time and with effort. When we move to thicker concepts required for sustained argumentation, “right” and “wrong” fade away to be replaced by strong and weak, sound and unsound, or cogent and non-cogent. To reach cogent arguments in novel situations, a virtuous arguer goes beyond learned examples. This occurs with a kind of articulacy that is an ability to describe your reasoning and give an account (Annas 2011, 110).

As thick concepts, virtues contrast sharply with thin concepts. Because virtues are thick concepts, the v-rules they generate are not codifiable as are thin concept rules. Articulacy for a virtuous arguer means more than the

ability to explain why an argument is cogent. It means the ability to explain what it is to be a charitable arguer, what actions a charitable arguer will take and why argumentative charity is desirable as a virtue. It is the ability to explain what charity in argumentation is. The same is true for any of the argumentative virtues one has. Merely being a good arguer is not sufficient. To be a virtuous arguer requires the reflective, meta-level ability to explain argumentative virtue and to describe what actions a virtuous arguer would take.

Some caution is needed here. Articulacy is part of virtue at its best. There may be a sense of a virtuous arguer, however, that does not require it. I have in mind someone who through years of experience has learned to argue correctly and well but who has not developed the meta-level reflective awareness that articulacy requires. Most of us have known someone whom others almost always find positive and insightful. This is someone who habitually exhibits argumentative virtues, yet when asked about those virtues says only something like, “You have to treat people right”. “You get further with honey than vinegar”. It is reasonable to label such a person virtuous, and it will be important for groups or communities to have many such people as mentors. Nonetheless, articulacy is deliberate reflection about experience in order to hone virtue. As with any skill, deliberate focus and deliberate practice leads to excellence.

3 The Trouble with Thick and Thin

There are two concerns surrounding the use of ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ in ethics that don’t arise for argumentation. Understanding why will provide further insights into the value of a virtue theoretic approach. One issue I mentioned above when I simply assumed “non-separatism”, the view that thick concepts cannot be disentangled into two distinct parts, one of which is descriptive and one of which is evaluative. This is to assume that thick concepts cannot be broken down into components. Some ethicists, however, argue for “separatism”. Separatists claim that thick concepts are composed of a bare evaluative attitude (pro or con) and some descriptive content. What underlies this view is the long-standing assumption that there is a distinction between facts and values. There is much to be said on both sides of this debate for ethics.⁸ This issue is not felt acutely for a virtue account, however. We can, of course, list some criteria for cogent argumentation, which would be in part listing some factual content, but it would not be merely factual content. To claim of someone that he is a

virtuous arguer is to make a positive evaluation of him for the way he goes about arguing. Built into the notion of a virtuous arguer is the *result* of cogent arguing. Virtue is a success term, but it also carries a positive evaluation. Argumentative success means meeting the standards of what is of value in argumentation: sound and persuasive arguments. What is of value and what is descriptive cannot be pulled apart. Thus, separatist issues don’t arise.

A second concern is what ethicists call “evaluative flexibility” (Kirchin 2013c). A flexible thick concept can be associated with a positive attitude in one context, but a negative attitude in another. Separatists can easily accommodate evaluative flexibility since the evaluative attitude is separate from the descriptive content. Evaluative flexibility would seem to be a challenge for non-separatists. As with the first issue, evaluative flexibility doesn’t arise for an account that applies the thick-thin distinction to argumentative virtues. Assume open-mindedness is an argumentative virtue. What this means is that when I am involved in argumentation, to be virtuous I need to have an open mind to *the right degree*. What that degree is will vary depending on the context and the strength of my argument. I’m agreeing with Aristotle that a virtue will be the mean between two vices. What the mean is will change given the context. To use an Aristotle-like analogy: the right amount of calories, i.e., the mean, for an athlete will be more than the right amount of calories for a sedentary philosopher. If the philosopher were to eat the same calories as an athlete, the philosopher would commit the vice of gluttony. Another example is that the predicate “tall” isn’t evaluative flexible, but “tall enough” is because being tall enough depends on the context. For argumentation, consider the virtue of open mindedness. If I am wise, i.e., a virtuous arguer, then I will know how to scale my open mindedness based on evidence, including the strength of arguments I have for what I believe and the new evidence and arguments presented to me. For example, I have significant, well-structured arguments for my belief that citizens should be liberally educated. It is good for our republic to have citizens that are educated about science, social science, the humanities, and the fine arts. I am only weakly open minded to counterarguments. On the other hand, I am quite open minded to arguments about other beliefs for which I have weak support. So if I have the virtue of open mindedness, I know how to find the mean between the vice of closed mindedness on one side and credulity on the other. What the right amount is depends on the context, so evaluative flexibility is context dependent, but evaluative flexibility highlights for us (1) that the focus in argumentation is knowledge and understanding and (2) how neither knowledge nor understanding are separate from doing

⁸ For a substantial discussion on separatism and non-separatism, see Kirchin 2013a.

even if that doing is no more than arriving at a conclusion. Hence, this knotty issue for non-virtue ethicists is not one for the virtuous arguer.⁹

These concerns help inform what it means to be a virtuous arguer because they tell us about the nature of virtuous argumentation. First, facts inform virtues. An understanding of a factual background, including my attempts to argue virtuously, is needed for understanding argumentative virtues as thick concepts. Learning to be virtuous requires experience including experience about attempted applications of thick terms. This Aristotle knew. Being skilled at finding the mean when I apply an argumentative virtue is a matter of experience; trying, reflecting, evaluating my success, and trying to be (and do) better next time. Yet, none of this is possible without a positive emotional attitude toward cogent argumentation. Second, evaluative flexibility ties directly to the requirement of articulacy. Being able to produce arguments, even persuasive arguments, is not enough. A virtuous arguer can articulate the virtues of argumentation she used this time, and explain why she used the particular argumentative virtues she did for this particular case. To do so requires evaluative flexibility. Further, virtues don't work in isolation. When we act, we bring multiple virtues to bear and we must tense and balance them if we are to argue well. It should be clear "arguing well" is not equated with winning an argument, but with broader notions of success.

4 A Virtuous Arguer

Before I begin this discussion, I want to note that what I present here is one kind of virtuous arguer. I doubt that there is one, and only one, viable characterization. There may be multiple ways to be a virtuous arguer and different characterizations may be needed for different situations. These characterizations may be more than notational variants.

I begin my characterization of a virtuous arguer with Daniel Cohen's statement of the tripartite system for evaluating arguments.¹⁰ I do so because this tripartite system could be stated in terms of traits or skills a virtuous arguer has, and frequently in the virtue literature, 'trait' and 'skill' are used as synonyms or near synonyms for

"virtue". In "Evaluating Arguments and Making Meta-Arguments", Cohen develops an account comprised of logic, dialectic, and rhetoric (2001). He states:

The logical axis evaluates the inferences that the participants make (the components of 'arguments'). The dialectical axis is for the disputants' engagement with their opponents....And the rhetorical axis measures the efficacy of the arguments (e.g., the effects on the 'audience'). (74)¹¹

Cohen makes clear that the logical axis includes more than deductive inferences. It is meant to capture cogency. I discuss each axis in turn, but note that they are interrelated in a virtuous arguer.

First, a virtuous arguer has the baseline skill of producing cogent arguments. This includes using the right evidence at the right time to be rhetorically effective. Second, the way we engage with others as we argue can be virtuous or not. I want to move away from any hint of the military metaphor for arguing, so I use Wayne Brockriede's metaphor of arguing lovingly to replace "engaging with opponents". We need a general characterization and I rely in part on Brockriede's metaphor of arguing as sex, both good and bad (1972). His description of good arguers as lovers is an apt description of virtuous argumentation and I use the metaphor of arguing lovingly, but it will help to recast this virtue with a less metaphorical description.

Virtuous arguers are in a bilateral relationship.¹² This could mean that there is power parity and arguers are peers. It also means that if arguers are not peers, there is a sincere effort to establish a bilateral relationship. You are arguing with a person whose experience and reasoning you respect no matter what the state of development. Also, a virtuous arguer cares deeply about the issues in which arguments are engaged, deeply enough to be willing to risk much; a virtuous arguer cares deeply about coarguers as well. These twin cares keep him from falling into vice on either side, neither trying to win by overpowering his coarguer, nor allowing care for the coarguer to overpower his arguments for non-epistemic reasons. It is an attitude of a mutual investigation where the issue at hand is the focus, not the arguers themselves. Virtuous coarguers, as Brockriede says, ask for free assent based on reasons, not forced assent, and arguments advance openly by asking for open

⁹ Cohen (2009) argues that "proportionality" is a virtue that is needed in conjunction with open mindedness to avoid vices. It is possible to think of 'proportionality' as a virtue. Here, however, I consider proportionality to be the recognition that virtue is the mean between vices. One advantage of taking this Aristotelian approach is that proportionality is a part of every virtue and need not be discussed separately.

¹⁰ This tripartite approach is as old as Aristotle, but I use Cohen's description here.

¹¹ Brockriede says that arguing requires logic, an arguer, and relationships among those who argue (1972). It would seem that he focuses on only the first two of these elements. His discussion of the relationship between arguers, however, includes a sense of rhetoric in the way Cohen uses it here.

¹² For ease of statement, I focus on bilateral relationships here. Sometimes, however, arguers are in a multi-lateral relationship. I discuss group deliberative virtues below.

criticism (7). The virtuous person argues about what concerns him deeply. He does not toy with coarguers.

Vicious argumentation Brockriede characterizes as not being interested in warranted assent, but assent through power or beguilement. An arguer who lacks virtue sees coarguers either as objects or as inferior human beings. The goal is winning at all costs. If reason does not work, the vicious arguer quickly shifts to threats, coercion, or seduction. The vicious arguer tries “to eliminate or limit his coarguer’s most distinctively human power, the right to choose with an understanding of the consequences and implications of available options” (5).¹³

Arguing lovingly gives us a raft of v-rules. Among them are:

- Be respectful of your coarguer’s humanity.
- Seek truth as opposed to seeking to win the argument.
- Don’t coerce assent.
- Don’t use seduction to gain assent.
- Be motivated by an open exchange of ideas.
- Don’t seek arguments that are for the sole benefit of one of the parties.

To be fair, Cohen also states: “An arguer has argued well dialectically when all the objections and questions that have been raised have been answered satisfactorily” (2001, 74–75). ‘Answered satisfactorily’ easily fits with loving dialogue. It is a thick concept that generates two v-rules. The first is something like: A virtuous arguer should discharge epistemic obligations. At a minimum, this requires producing cogent arguments. One note of caution: the epistemic requirement is not that every objection and question must be answered satisfactorily. That, unfortunately, is beyond human ability. A virtuous arguer will answer satisfactorily when she should. There is no obligation to answer inauthentic objections and questions, and knowing when they are inauthentic is a skill a virtuous arguer must develop. Also, some coarguers cannot be satisfied. A virtuous arguer will know when her epistemic obligation has been fulfilled, even if her coarguer claims not to be satisfied. The second v-rule is something like: Whether questions or criticisms are stated lovingly or aggressively, answer lovingly aiming for answering satisfactorily. The best of all dialogical exchanges occur when coarguers both do so lovingly. This, of course, is not always the case. Nonetheless, a virtuous arguer will know when to respond, but will do so lovingly.

¹³ Brockriede distinguishes between arguers as rapists and arguers as seducers. The difference between the two is important for thinking about vice in argumentation. Since my focus here is virtuous argumentation, I have conflated them. If we think of rape and seduction on the excess side of vice, we might think of abstinence on the side of deficiency. Not being willing to reason with a coarguer would be a different sort of vice, although also related to power.

The third skill in Cohen’s list is rhetorical efficacy. I recast this as the ethical use of rhetoric because it puts restrictions on the way rhetoric can be used. There are lots of ways to be rhetorically persuasive that are out of bounds for a virtuous arguer. Deliberate use of fallacies, though at times effective, is a vice. Also vicious is deliberately misunderstanding objections, failing to listen to coarguers, ignoring the strongest of your coarguers objections and focusing on minor ones in an attempt to side step a difficult objection. All of these rhetorical tricks, and more besides, focus on winning. A virtue account of argumentation doesn’t equate success with winning. Success is arguing well. This includes using background information cogently and persuasively, but as importantly, it includes how you engage others in argumentation. Motivating others to see your argument is part of rhetoric, so presentation does matter. To use rhetoric well, a virtuous arguer respects coarguers enough to learn to see from their point of view. In so doing, you can be rhetorically persuasive and virtuous. Here we tie back to the first skill above: producing cogent arguments includes using the right evidence at the right time to be rhetorically effective. This illustrates the interdependence of these virtuous skills. A virtuous arguer is cogent and uses dialectic lovingly, which includes making ethical use of rhetoric.

Some of the v-rules associated with the third skill are:

- Don’t argue fallaciously.
- Listen sympathetically to your coarguer.
- Work to understand your coarguers’ argumentative perspective.
- Attempt to respond to the major objections with a satisfying response to your coarguer.
- Present your argument in a way that respectfully responds to your coarguer’s background.

Cohen provides several v-rules that could be used to add to this list and the list above. They include: listen carefully, reason well, and interpret with charity (2009, 54). Brockriede includes: diligence, fairness, and not silencing critics without hearing them out (1972, 6–7). Both Cohen and Brockriede provide thick concepts from which v-rules can be generated.

In addition to being a coarguer in the sense of arguing with one other person, we often find ourselves as part of deliberative groups. Being a virtuous arguer also requires what Scott Aikin and J. Caleb Clanton have described as “group deliberative virtues” (2010). Aikin and Clanton claim that groups that deliberate virtuously develop a synergy for greater epistemic output. They are more likely to produce creative solutions to problems that are pragmatically useful.¹⁴ Many of the virtues they list in “Developing Group-Deliberative

¹⁴ Aikin and Clanton’s list of deliberative virtues is insightful, in part because they also discuss deliberative vices. An entire manual of v-rules could be produced from their (2010).

Virtues” overlap with virtues discussed above. Nonetheless, they highlight the fact that our epistemic obligations to others are where our virtues are exercised, and reasoning in groups may require the development of additional argumentative virtues. Kathryn J. Norlock recognizes the intellectual work community requires in “Receptivity as a Virtue of (Practitioners of) Argumentation” (2013). Her account of receptivity as a virtue is developed from Nel Nodding’s ethics of care. Norlock’s view is more tightly tied to ethics than is the view developed by Aikin and Clanton. Nonetheless, reciprocity is a commitment to at least one other person. It is both an act and a disposition, and like arguing lovingly, requires some distance and objectivity. The value Norlock finds in the ethics of care and reciprocity is that they helpfully direct “attention to those times when we ought to take the relational and interpersonal aspects of a project as the priorities which should guide our conduct” (2013, 2). Reciprocity is a group-deliberative virtue because the interpersonal context heightens the demands for arguing virtuously. Aikin, Clanton, and Norlock also highlight that being a virtuous arguer in group deliberations requires a sensitivity to which virtues assume greater prominence. So, in addition to developing new virtues, prioritizing which virtues to exercise may be essential for deliberating well in groups.

None of what has been said necessitates a lack of intensity from a virtuous arguer. On the contrary, arguing well may require a fierce intensity. A virtuous arguer will most likely care passionately about some ideas and beliefs, especially if the virtuous arguer is warranted in those beliefs and the importance of the ideas. As Norlock aptly states: “We care *about* ideas, we care *for* persons” (7). As we argue passionately and intensely about our ideas, attempting to convince others of their truth, we do so lovingly.

The v-rules stated thus far, plus those that could be generated from the intellectual work of deliberative groups, bridge the gap between being virtuous, and doing right, between being a virtuous arguer and knowing how to argue. Describing what it means to be a virtuous arguer has given us thick concepts from which we can generate pragmatic v-rules for what to do and how to act as a coarguer. It should be clear that to argue lovingly is not a softheaded sentimentalism. On the contrary, it requires clear, hardheaded thinking about your own beliefs and the argumentative challenges to them. Nor does it require that we view coarguers with besotted eyes, believing that they can do or say nothing wrong. Rather, it is a pro emotional attitude to the humanness of those with whom you argue.

5 How to Become a Virtuous Arguer

There is no step-by-step guide for becoming a virtuous arguer. Nonetheless, the characterization of a virtuous arguer I have given has provided an outline for developing

into one. What we have learned above includes the following: Learning to argue well requires meta-level reflection on what we know and don’t know, what our attitudes are, our emotional responses, and the adoption of community level deliberation norms. We learn how to argue within an epistemic community. As Hursthouse notes above, one generation teaches the next. Thus, each generation must mentor the very young into a mental life within the sphere of reason. Over time, memorizing “right” and “wrong” is replaced with a deep understanding of cogency. This is partly a matter of knowledge; partly a matter of attitude; and partly a matter of emotional response. As I begin to develop my argumentative virtues, I find admirable arguers within my epistemic community to emulate. I have said that virtue is a success term. In ethics, if I have the virtue of courage, then I will act courageously in situations that call for courage. When looking for a virtuous arguer to admire, I look for someone who is successful because she argues well fulfilling the thick concepts embedded in arguing lovingly.

Above I equated arguing well with broad notions of success, including cogency, a loving use of dialectic, and an ethical use of rhetoric. To learn to be virtuous arguer, I must be mentored by the previous generation infusing the facts of what works in argumentation with the values of virtuous argumentation. This is again to assume non-separatism. The value of arguing well can’t be separated from the methods of doing so virtuously.

I have been careful to equate success with arguing well rather than being right or knowing the truth. Yet, being a virtuous arguer, including arguing cogently, is tied to success in terms of knowing well and understanding much. There is another sense of success, however, in terms of convincing others. In a community of virtuous arguers, success in terms of arguing well and knowing much will not come apart from success in terms of convincing others. In practice, however, these two senses of “success” are separable. This issue is too large to fully address here, but we can note that the motivation to be virtuous lies with the arguer’s relation to her epistemic community.¹⁵ Only in relation to others do you learn how to be virtuous, have the motivation to do so, and have the ability to teach others how to become a virtuous arguer. Thus, a community of knowers can be evaluated by how well the community inculcates the virtues of argumentation and its tolerance for robust criticism. So becoming a virtuous arguer depends in part on the community of arguers in which you are embedded. If the community as a whole lacks some virtues or

¹⁵ Above I said that knowing why is part of the motivation to be virtuous. But knowing why is part of being in an epistemic community because it is part of the expertise in the community practice of giving and asking for reasons.

exhibits some argumentative vices, success in terms of arguing well and knowing much and success in terms of convincing others can come apart.

Yet, why do we argue lovingly? Even those who value winning an argument over an opponent use argumentative strategies to reach what they consider success. For such arguers, there need not be a separation of fact and value either. Certain methods are valued because they enable such arguers to reach what they value, namely, winning. Evaluative flexibility is also an asset. If winning is the overriding value, shifting pro and con attitudes, or the degree with which they are held, can prove to be rhetorically effective.

I assume that we value arguing lovingly in part because we want to lead ethical lives. But “argue lovingly” has a delicious ambiguity. As Brockriede uses it, and as I have been using it here, it is, in one sense, about how we engage with other arguers. I have also been insisting that arguing well not be equated with winning an argument. This highlights the second meaning of “argue lovingly”, namely, that to argue well there needs to be a loving attachment to understanding, knowledge, and truth. If my sole focus is on winning, it is likely I will miss the opportunity to deepen my understanding and knowledge by conversing respectfully and lovingly with others. This loving attachment to knowing well, understanding much, and seeking truth is what makes developing my argumentative virtues worthwhile. Merely a surface-level pro attitude toward knowledge and understanding is not sufficient to learn to become a virtuous arguer. To become a virtuous arguer, a deep emotional attachment to knowing well and understanding much is necessary. This emotional attachment to knowing well and understanding much you must develop in yourself and help inculcate in others.

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