### 1NC

#### Debate follows an adversarial framework. In this framework, teams rely on agonism or ritualized refutation to win debates. Limiting discourse in this way can distort scholarship.

Tannen 2 Deborah Tannen, Linguistics Department, Georgetown University, Journal of Pragmatics 34 (2002) 1651–1669Journal of Pragmatics 34 (2002) 1651–1669 "Agonism in academic discourse" Elsevier

In doing discourse analysis, we use discourse to do our analysis, yet we seldom examine the discourse we use. There are, of course, important exceptions, such as Tracy (1997) on departmental colloquia, Fleischman (1998) on the erasure of the personal in academic writing, Goffman (1981) on ‘‘The Lecture’’, Herring (1996) on e-mail lists, Chafe and Danielewicz (1987) who include ‘‘academic speaking’’ and ‘‘academic writing’’ in their comparison of spoken and written language, and Swales’ (1990) study of academic writing as well as his recent examination of the physical and interactional contexts that give rise to it (1998). Perhaps most closely related to my topic is Hunston (1993), who examines oppositional argumentation in biology, history, and sociolinguistics articles (two each), and concludes that the less empirical disciplines are more ‘argumentative’. Here I turn my attention to an aspect of academic discourse that, as far I know, has not previously been examined: what I call ‘‘agonism’’. Ong (1981: 24), from whom I borrow the term, defines agonism as ‘‘programmed contentiousness’’, ‘‘ceremonial combat’’. I use the term to refer not to conflict, disagreement, or disputes per se, but rather to ritualized adversativeness. In academic discourse, this means conventionalized oppositional formats that result from an underlying ideology by which intellectual interchange is conceptualized as a metaphorical battle. In a recent book (Tannen, 1998), I explore the role and effects of agonism in three domains of public discourse: journalism, politics, and law. Here I turn to the discourse domain in which I first identified the phenomenon and began thinking about it: the academy. My goal is to uncover agonistic elements in academic discourse and to examine their effects on our pursuit of knowledge and on the community of scholars engaged in that pursuit. In arguing that an ideology of agonism provides a usually unquestioned foundation for much of our oral and written interchange, I focus on exposing the destructive aspects of this ideology and its attendant practices. I do not, however, call for an end to agonism a goal that would be unrealistic even if it were desirable, which I am not sure it is. Rather, I argue for a broadening of our modes of inquiry, so that agonism is, one might say, demoted from its place of ascendancy, and for a re-keying or ‘toning down’ of the more extreme incarnations of agonism in academic discourse. In what follows, I begin by sketching my own early interest in agonism in conversational discourse. Then I briefly present some historical background, tracing the seeds of agonism in academic discourse to classical Greek philosophy and the medieval university. Against this backdrop, I move to examining agonistic elements as well as the cultural and ideological assumptions that underlie them in academic discourse: both spoken (at conferences, in classrooms, and in intellectual discussions) and written (in grant proposals, journal articles, books, and reviews of all of these). I demonstrate some unfortunate consequences of the agonistic character of these discourse types, both for the pursuit of knowledge and for the community of scholars and others who hope to gain from our knowledge. I then suggest that the existence and perpetuation of agonistic elements in academic discourse depends on the ideological conviction that the pursuit of information, on one hand, and the people who pursue it, on the other, can be separated, whereas in reality—as we know and argue with respect to other domains of discourse—they cannot. Finally, I suggest alternative metaphors and conventions that might supplement those I have characterized as agonistic, and further suggest that moving away from the more extreme and destructive agonistic conventions would be part of a trend that Fleischman (1998) identifies as restoring ‘‘the person of the scholar’’ to the endeavor of scholarship.

#### Traditional debate is a paradigmatic instance of how agonism distorts the acquisition of knowledge

Tannen 2 Deborah Tannen, Linguistics Department, Georgetown University, Journal of Pragmatics 34 (2002) 1651–1669Journal of Pragmatics 34 (2002) 1651–1669 "Agonism in academic discourse" Elsevier

3.3. Cultural variation in modern academic discourse

If there are cultural traditions in which agonism is less associated with intellectual interchange, there are others in which it is more so. It is a commonplace among American academics that many British, German, and French counterparts are more given to vitriolic attacks and sarcastic innuendo than are American-trained scholars. Perhaps the paradigm model of agonistic academic exchange is what is associated with Oxford debating style. Nonetheless, although one can find more extreme examples of agonism in historical and non-American accounts of academic interchange, my goal in what follows is to show that such formats are pervasive in contemporary American academic discourse—and in ways more subtle than simply hurling vitriolic invective. 4. Agonism in US academic discourse There are many aspects of academic discourse that can be described as agonistic. For example, a common framework for academic papers (one that I myself have implemented, as I suspect nearly all of us have at one time or another) prescribes that authors position their work in opposition to someone else’s, which they then prove wrong. This is agonistic to the extent that it is conventionalized and prescribed. This standard framework creates a need to make others wrong which tempts—indeed, requires—scholars to (1) at best oversimplify, at worst distort or even misrepresent others’ positions; (2) search for the most foolish statement and the weakest examples to make a generally reasonable treatise appear less so; and (3) ignore facts that support the opponent’s views and cite only those that support theirs. I would use the term ‘‘agonistic’’ only to describe the sense in which it is conventionalized to position one’s work in opposition to prior work. I would not use the term in instances in which a scholar reads another’s work and spontaneously finds it limited or even wrongheaded. (Of course the distinction between these two conditions will never be completely clear; as with so many terms and concepts, we are dealing with a ‘fuzzy set’ or prototypical categories.) The agonistic or ritualized aspect of this tradition (as distinguished from disagreement that grows organically out of differing views) can be captured in the speech event of a formal, staged debate in which two parties take opposing positions on an issue, not because they believe in one or the other position, but because one or the other has been assigned to them. Each listens to the opponent’s statements not in order to learn but in order to refute; the goal is not to better understand the other’s position but to win the debate.

#### Using this adversarial method is not good for truth-testing – encourages binary, polarizing debates

Menkel 96 Carrie Menkel-Meadow, Professor of Law, Georgetown and UCLA Law Schools and CoDirect or, UCLA Center for Conflict Resolution. William & Mary Law Review October, 1996 38 Wm. & Mary L. Rev. 5 W.M. KECK FOUNDATION FORUM ON THE TEACHING OF LEGAL ETHICS: THE TROUBLE WITH THE ADVERSARY SYSTEM IN A POSTMODERN, MULTICULTURAL WORLD lexis

I. Introduction

In this Essay I suggest the heretical notion that the adversary system may no longer be the best method for our legal system to deal with all of the matters t hat come within its purview. If late- twentieth century learning has taught us anyth ing, it is that truth is illusive, partial, interpretable, dependent on the characteristics of the knowers as well as the known, and, most importantly, complex. In short, there may be more than just two sides to every story. The binary natur e of the adversary system and its particular methods and tactics often may thwart some of the essential goals of any legal system. This Essay argues that our epistemology has changed sufficiently in this era of poststructural, postmodern knowledge so that we need to reexamine the attributes of the adversary system as the "ideal type" of a legal system, and also reexamine the practice based on the premises of that system. Although some scholars justify the adversary system on the grounds that it satisfies a variety of truth and justice criteria, n1 I believe that consideration of those criteria [\*6] is, itself, contingent and must be historicized and reconsidered as our knowledge base changes.

In this Essay I argue that the adversary system is inadequate, indeed dangerous, for satisfying a number of important goals of any legal or dispute resolution system. My critique operates at several different levels of the adversary system: epistemological, structural, remedial, and behavioral. I suggest that we should rethink both the goals our legal system should serve and the methods we use to achieve those goals. For those who cleave to the adversary system, n2 I want to shift the burden of proof to them to convince us that the adversary system continues to do its job better than other methods we might use.

My critiques, to be further elaborated below, are briefly as follows: n4 Binary, oppositional presentations of facts in dispute are not the best way for us to learn the truth; polarized debate distorts the truth, n3 leaves out important information, simplifies complexity, and obfuscates rather than clarifies. n5 More significantly, some matters mostly civil, but occasionally even criminal, cases are not susceptible to a binary (i.e., right/wrong, win/los e) conclusion or solution. The inability to reach a binary resolution of these disputes may result because in some cases we cannot determine the facts with any degree o f accuracy. In other cases the law may bestow conflicting, though legitimate, legal rights giving some entitlements to both, or all, parties. n6 And, i[\*7] yet another category of cases, human or emotional equities cannot be divided sharply. n7

Modern life presents us with complex problems, n8 often requiring complex and multifaceted solutions. Courts, with what I have called their "limited remedial imaginations," n9 may not be the best institutional settings for resolving some of the disputes that we continue to put before them.

#### The traditional debate model of adversarial confrontation limits understanding and acquisition of knowledge and moves in ways that are dehumanizing

Tannen 2 Deborah Tannen, Linguistics Department, Georgetown University, Journal of Pragmatics 34 (2002) 1651–1669Journal of Pragmatics 34 (2002) 1651–1669 "Agonism in academic discourse" Elsevier

4.2. The adversary paradigm in philosophy

What Elbow calls ‘‘the doubting game’’ is closely related to what Moulton (1983) identifies as ‘‘the Adversary Paradigm’’ in philosophy. In her words, ‘‘the philosophic enterprise is seen as an unimpassioned debate between adversaries who try to defend their own views against counterexamples and produce counterexamples to opposing views’’. According to the Adversary Paradigm, ‘‘the only, or at any rate, most extreme opposition’’. Furthermore, ‘‘it is assumed that the best way of presenting work in philosophy is to address it to an imagined opponent and muster all the evidence one can to support it’’ (p. 153). Moulton exposes many weaknesses in the Adversary Paradigm. For example, it requires the refutation of claims and arguments as isolated entities, whereas in fact they are part of an interrelated system of ideas; systems of ideas are not amenable to examination within the Paradigm. For another, she notes, ‘‘we understand earlier philosophers as if they were addressing adversaries instead of trying to build a foundation for scientific reasoning or to explain human nature. Philosophers who cannot be recast into an adversarial mold are likely to be ignored’’ (p. 155). Furthermore, ‘‘The only problems recognized are those between opponents, and the only kind of reasoning considered is the certainty of deduction, directed to opposition. . . . Non-deductive reasoning is thought to be no reasoning at all’’ (p. 157). Of particular interest to linguists is Moulton’s observation: ‘‘Semantic theory has detoured questions of meaning into questions of truth’’ (p. 157). Like Elbow, Moulton does not deny all validity to the Adversary Method. What she objects to is the monopoly that this paradigm has on her field: the conviction that this is the only way to reason and argue. Moulton further points out that we think of the Adversary Method as the Socratic Method, whereas the true Socratic method (use of counter-argument, elenchus; from the Greek, elenchos) is designed to convince the other person, not to show others that their views are wrong. She notes that ‘‘the justification of the elenchus is not that it subjects claims to the most extreme opposition, but that it shakes people up about their cherished convictions so they can begin philosophical inquiries with a more open mind. The aim of the Adversary Method, in contrast, is to show that the other party is wrong, challenging them on any possible point, regardless of whether the other person agrees’’ (p. 156). In contrast to the true Socratic Method, Moulton shows, the Adversary Method is not likely to convince those who do not agree, because few people regard having lost a debate as a reason to give up their beliefs; they simply attribute their loss to their own poor performance or to the opponent’s tactics, not to the inherent strength of their arguments. What struck me, however, in this important distinction, is that if the purpose of the Socratic Method is to convince, then one is actually talking to the person addressed – whom one is regarding as a person. But if the purpose is simply to demolish another’s arguments, then the other person has been reduced to an opponent, an object of attack, not a person at all. This is a point I will return to below: what Fleischman (1998) calls the ‘‘erasure of the personal’’ in academic discourse (see Sections 6.2, 7).

#### The adversary system falsely assumes binaries in every instance and distorts perception to fit that model

Menkel 96 Carrie Menkel-Meadow, Professor of Law, Georgetown and UCLA Law Schools and CoDirect or, UCLA Center for Conflict Resolution. William & Mary Law Review October, 1996 38 Wm. & Mary L. Rev. 5 W.M. KECK FOUNDATION FORUM ON THE TEACHING OF LEGAL ETHICS: THE TROUBLE WITH THE ADVERSARY SYSTEM IN A POSTMODERN, MULTICULTURAL WORLD lexis

Let me illustrate the particular dilemma of oppositional, binary thinking a t trial when linked with recent work in cognitive psychology and trial practice. If we take seriously the recent studies demonstrating that facts presented to fact finders are processed through "schemas," "filters," or common narratives, n55 then the presentation of two oppositional stories or conclusions may color how all of the facts are heard. Consider how the framing of a story by both sides then colors h ow each piece of evidence is interpreted. The oppositional story may work well when the fact finder has an off/on, guilt/innocence determination to make, n56 though it still carries the danger that all the fact finders will process incremental f acts through a preexisting frame, n57 but will not work as well when polycentric factual findings, legal conclusions, and mixed fact/law questions are at issue: comparative negligence, business necessity defenses, excuse and justification in criminal law, and the best interest of the child, are a few examples. My argument here is that the "false" or "exaggerated" representation n58 of oppositional stories may oversimplify the facts n59 and not permit adequate consideration **[\*18]** of fact interpretations or conclusions that either fall somewhere in between, or are totally outside of, the range of the lawyers' presentations. n60 Indeed, one version of postmodernism could read the adversary system as totally and arbitrarily imposing order through its binary decision making process where no order exists, and where we cannot determine relevance rationally. n61\

#### The binaries of the adversary method distort understanding and inherently limits the utility of debate as a space for identity reclamation

Menkel 96 Carrie Menkel-Meadow, Professor of Law, Georgetown and UCLA Law Schools and CoDirect or, UCLA Center for Conflict Resolution. William & Mary Law Review October, 1996 38 Wm. & Mary L. Rev. 5 W.M. KECK FOUNDATION FORUM ON THE TEACHING OF LEGAL ETHICS: THE TROUBLE WITH THE ADVERSARY SYSTEM IN A POSTMODERN, MULTICULTURAL WORLD lexis

I want to address briefly one other element of postmodernism: the explicit recognition that we reason in binary oppositions n70 with a hierarchy of values, usually subordinating one side of an opposition, as in male/female, white/black, rule/discretion, law/equity, market/family, etc. n71 In postmodernism this is the method of deconstruction the recognition that every "text" has its ambiguity, its negation, its opposition, its "silence." In some versions , the idea is to reverse or re-situate the oppositions, which, of course, preserves them. n72 In some forms, however, the purpose of deconstruction is to demonstrate that binary oppositions do not explain the world. Hierarchies of claims hide more than they reveal. Thus, many in Los Angeles hoped the jury would convict Rodney King's attackers, not because it was "a white or black thing," but becaus e they were appalled by the beating. n73 [\*21] Taken out of its postmodern context, deconstruction is a useful tool for those who criticize the adversary system because it exposes the distorting properties of both the "text" of adversarial argument n74 and of the literary texts that deconstructionists analyze. In concrete legal terms, and none of these claims are new or original to my argument, oppositional presentation often though not always n75 distorts the truth n76 by making extreme claims, n77 by avoiding any potentially "harmful" facts, by [\*22] refusing to acknowledge any truth in the opposition, n78 by limiting story telling to two, rather than allowing for a multiplicity of stories, by refusing to share information, n79 or, conversely, by strategically giving or demanding too much information, n80 by manipulating information (as in the "battle of experts"), by making the true look false (cross-examining a truthful witness) or the false look true (by offering false or misleading evidence or by actively "coachi ng" witnesses). n81 Another common complaint about the adversary system demonstrates one of the claims made by deconstructionists. In litigation, the unequal resources of the parties will often determine the hierarchy of opposition. In an ideal and abstracted form, the adversary system clearly contemplates adversaries of equal skill and economic support; the result should not depend upon the resource s or "skill" of the[\*23] argument's representative, but on the merits of the argument. n82 We all know, however, that "the 'haves' come out ahead." n83

#### Agonism's focus on disagreement ignores positive contributions and becomes exclusively negative critique. This hurts development of critical thinking skills.

Tannen 2 Deborah Tannen, Linguistics Department, Georgetown University, Journal of Pragmatics 34 (2002) 1651–1669Journal of Pragmatics 34 (2002) 1651–1669 "Agonism in academic discourse" Elsevier

4.3. The influence of agonism on academic discourse If the task of academic inquiry is seen primarily (or exclusively) to be exposing weaknesses and faults in another’s scholarship, then one result is odd assumptions about what belongs in a paper and what does not. Whereas pointing out others’ weaknesses is regarded as a primary responsibility, acknowledging others’ contributions is sometimes thought to be less important, even extraneous.3 But in reality, authors’ contributions are part of the historical significance and context of their work. Part of the reason it might not seem so is the agonistic framework underpinning academic discourse. In the same spirit, a colleague remarked that, when asked to comment on others’ papers at an academic meeting, she finds herself searching for something to criticize, to avoid the impression of having read superficially or of not caring about the task assigned her. Underlying such a concern is the assumption that negative criticism reveals more thought than would, for example, highlighting contributions made or drawing parallels to other work. One pervasive effect of agonism is that work which gets attention is immediately opposed. It’s easy to see the strengths of this: Weaknesses will be exposed. But among the limits is that it makes it difficult for those outside the field (or inside, for that matter) to gauge the accuracy of published research. In the words of policy analysts David Greenberg and Philip Robins (1986: 350), ‘‘The process of scientific inquiry almost ensures that competing sets of results will be obtained... Once the first set of findings are published, other researchers eager to make a name for themselves must come up with different approaches and results to get their studies published...’’. Greenberg and Robins point out that, as a result, it is almost impossible for public policy to be influenced by academic research. Greenberg and Robins indirectly offer an explanation for the requisite nature of disagreement in academic discourse. The ideology underlying this requirement is that ‘critical thinking’, which, in theory, includes many types of thinking other than criticizing, in practice is interpreted as synonymous with ‘critique’’ (in itself a term that, in theory, refers to any kind of intellectual evaluation but in practice denotes exclusively negative criticism). This conviction means that many young scholars feel they must flex their attack muscles in order to advance their careers, rather like a puberty rite by which young men must slay their first lion. As one young scholar put it, he obviously could not get tenure by writing articles simply supporting someone else’s work; he had to ‘stake out a position’ in opposition to the work of an established scholar.

#### The agonistic paradigm is often compared to the battlefield. As in the military metaphor, the adversarial approach pits the two sides against one another, precluding their cooperation. Knowledge and understanding are limited in 4 ways

Tannen 2 Deborah Tannen, Linguistics Department, Georgetown University, Journal of Pragmatics 34 (2002) 1651–1669Journal of Pragmatics 34 (2002) 1651–1669 "Agonism in academic discourse" Elsevier

There is something so appealing about conceptualizing differing approaches as warring camps that such dichotomies are readily picked up and echoed by others. This happens precisely because warring-camps dichotomies appeal to our sense of how knowledge should be organized. It feels ‘natural’ and ‘right’. It feels right because it reflects our agonistic ideology. But because it feels right does not mean it is right. On the contrary, there is much wrong with the metaphorical assignment of research to warring camps. It obscures the aspects of disparate work that overlap and can learn from each other. It obscures the complexity of research. These dichotomies imply that only one framework can apply, when in the vast majority of instances, both can. I am reminded here of a comment attributed to Kenneth Pike, which I heard from A. L. Becker: Most scholars are wrong not in what they assert but in what they deny. In other words, scholars eager not only to make themselves right but also to make others wrong risk distorting and misrepresenting their opponents’ views – and setting us all back in our common quest for understanding and knowledge. 6. The expense of time, spirit, and creativity There is yet another way that framing academic discourse as a metaphorical battle results in less knowledge rather than more: It wastes scholars’ time and talent. Critics spend large amounts of energy looking for faults in others’ work that could better be spent building on it, or developing their own work in new directions. At the same time, those who are the object of agonistic attack are forced to expend energy dispelling misrepresentations of their work, energy that could better be spent doing new creative work or incorporating the insights of genuine critics—those who represent the work accurately but raise significant questions and offer competing research findings. Another way that the agonistic conventions of academe result in the loss of creative work is that many scholars are discouraged from presenting or publishing their work, or from contributing to oral interaction, by the agonistic tone of academic discourse. Herring (1996) examined the postings on the electronic ‘linguist’ list. At one point, a rancorous, polarized debate broke out. Herring sent a questionnaire to list subscribers, asking their views of the debate and why they did not contribute, if they didn’t. She found that 73 percent of respondents who said they had not taken part in the debate gave ‘‘intimidation’’ as the reason.5 There is yet another way in which our agonistic conventions result in loss of knowledge and understanding. As an anonymous reviewer of this paper commented, American academic discourse can function ‘‘like a kind of bullying to conform to a norm/trend. It’s when you have a different point of view than the trendy barbies that you get shot down, not if you’re in the in group’’. I would add, however, that feeling safe within the confines of one group does not protect you from attack by an opposing group. Quite the contrary, when bullets are flying, nearly everyone feels vulnerable and edgy, even if they are temporarily protected by fortress walls.

#### The negative position is a break from traditional debate forms. Unlike the affirmative, we see problems with adherence to agonism, to adversarial argument. Our position is one of cooperation and collaboration.

#### So, we agree with the affirmative and offer our assistance and cooperation in order to advance the ideas they have presented.

#### As an alternative, the distortions caused by agonism and the adversarial system are avoided. Additionally, the alternative opens debate to other types of discourse

Menkel 96 Carrie Menkel-Meadow, Professor of Law, Georgetown and UCLA Law Schools and CoDirect or, UCLA Center for Conflict Resolution. William & Mary Law Review October, 1996 38 Wm. & Mary L. Rev. 5 W.M. KECK FOUNDATION FORUM ON THE TEACHING OF LEGAL ETHICS: THE TROUBLE WITH THE ADVERSARY SYSTEM IN A POSTMODERN, MULTICULTURAL WORLD lexis

After I critique the adversary system, you will wonder what I would substitute for it. It should be obvious that as a postmodern, multicultural thinker I have no one panacea, solution, or process to offer instead, I think we should contemplate a variety of different ways to structure process in our legal system [\*12] to reflect our multiple goals and objectives. For example, to achieve the goal of determining criminal guilt a different process may be required than is required for allocating money or human, parental, or civil rights. Sometimes other processes, such as mediation, inquisitorial-bureaucratic investigation, public fora or conversations, "intermediate sites of discourse," n32 private problem-solving (negotiation) or group negotiation, and coalition and consensus building n33 would resolve better the legal and other issues involved. I am thus suggesting variety and diversity for our legal process that will, in turn, require more diverse and com plex thinking about which legal ethics would be appropriate in different settings. n34 Some might prefer to reform the adversary system to keep it protean enough to remain inclusive, as a model, for our entire legal system. In my own view, this will not be adequate. We need to explore alternative models of legal process and ethics that will better meet the needs of more complex postmodern, multicultural disputes and issues.

#### We should replace the idea of adversarial debate with one of a collaborative model with common goals – there is still value in questioning, but constructive motivations are key

Tannen 2 Deborah Tannen, Linguistics Department, Georgetown University, Journal of Pragmatics 34 (2002) 1651–1669Journal of Pragmatics 34 (2002) 1651–1669 "Agonism in academic discourse" Elsevier

8. Conclusion: looking ahead

We need new metaphors by which to conceptualize what we are about. In the realm of teaching, McCormick and Kahn (1982: 16), professors of organizational behavior, suggest that critical thinking can be better taught if we replace the metaphor of a boxing match with that of a barn-raising: ‘‘a group of builders constructing a building, or a group of artists fabricating a creation together’’. We could observe, moreover, that a group of builders will not always agree on which tool to use, or how to go about solving an engineering problem. But at least they are focused on a shared goal rather than on a result in which one must win while the other must lose. In our research, how much more might be learned if we think of theory not as static structures to be demolished or assertions to be falsified, but a set of understandings to be questioned and shaped. In this spirit, we could replace the traditional battle and sports imagery with a metaphor from cooking. Daly (1996: xv), in an introduction to his study of families and time, suggests that ‘‘theories should be treated like bread dough that rises with a synergetic mix of ingredients only to be pounded down with the addition of new ingredients and human energy’’. If the conventions of academic discourse are what I have described them to be, then many readers will have read this essay with an eye toward where they might disagree. So let me emphasize what I have not said. I have not claimed that no one should disagree or critique in the negative sense. After all, nearly everything I have written here is in disagreement with, and critical of, commonly held views. Scholars must feel free to voice disagreement when they encounter opinions or findings they believe are wrong, misguided, or dangerous. Only through the open expression of disagreement can ideas be honed and mistakes corrected. In fact, a liability of agonism in academic discourse is that it squelches the open expression of disagreement: many are afraid to speak up for what they believe because they fear being stigmatized by association with a warring camp, or fear becoming the object of agonistic attack. What I am suggesting is that we examine the effect of agonism on intellectual inquiry. I am suggesting that understanding, knowledge, and insight come not only from oppositional debate but also from exploring complexity, culling insight from disparate sources, seeking connections—and that these types of inquiry are discouraged by our agonistic ideology and conventions. I am not calling for an end to oppositional debate. But if adversativeness and attack are the only or primary frameworks for intellectual interchange, if ‘critique’ becomes the overwhelming avenue of inquiry, a formula that requires scholars to frame their work in opposition to their predecessors’, if a lust for opposition privileges extreme views and devalues conciliatory ones, if our eagerness to find weaknesses blinds us to what we can learn from others’ work, if the atmosphere of animosity generated by the warring-camps mentality precludes respect and poisons our relations with each other, if it drives out of the field gifted minds who simply have no taste for contentiousness, then the spirit of agonism is not serving us well. I am suggesting, in sum, that we who have made a vocation of understanding language in context should be attuned to how the agonistic conventions driving our own discourse are affecting both the scientific understanding that, I continue to believe, is our primary goal, and the human community of which we are a part.