Devil's Advocates are the Angels of Argumentation

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Is argumentation essentially adversarial? The concept of a devil's advocate – a cooperative arguer who assumes the role of an opponent for the sake of the argument – serves as a lens to bring into clearer focus the ways that adversarial arguers can be virtuous and adversariality itself can contribute to argumentation's goals. It also shows the different ways arguments can be adversarial and the different ways that argumentation can be said to be "essentially" adversarial.

KEYWORDS: argument-as-war, adversarial argument, cooperative argument, devil's advocate

1. INTRODUCTION

At risk of being overly dramatic, we would like to point out that there seems to be a bit of a war going on in argumentation theory. However, if it *is* a war, it is neither very destructive nor especially adversarial because it is an argument about the value of thinking about arguments in terms of wars, with a specific focus on the role of *adversariality* in argumentation. One of the questions that this little war is fought over is: *Is adversariality essential to argument?*

The broader discussion about adversariality in argument can be frustrating because every component of the claim that *adversariality is essential to argument* is ambiguous, beginning with what is meant by "argument", continuing with how we are supposed to understand "essential" and ending with some very serious confusion over what is to count as "adversarial". We can agree with the Pragma-dialecticians that

at the *start* of every critical discussion there is a *difference*[1] and admit with Govier, that at the *heart* of every argument there is a at least some *opposition*,[2] but still have no argument with Bailin and Battersby that *conflict* does not have to be an important *part* of argumentation because deliberation does not need it.[3]

Like many of the best academic arguments, the argument about adversariality in argument is a tangle of several arguments. It is an overgrown thicket of different perspectives, insights, and concepts, which connect to adversariality in various ways. The result is more of a cacophonous controversy than a fruitful critical engagement that can integrate all those perspectives, insights, and concepts.

We will not even try to adjudicate all those debates, but we will argue that adversariality really is essential to argumentation – in a specified sense of *adversariality* and in an appropriate sense of *essential*. We begin by distinguishing several things that might be meant by saying, "Arguments are essentially adversarial." We then introduce the kind of arguer who embodies the kind of adversariality that is essential: The Angelic Devil's Advocate. We use this figure to highlight the relevant kind of adversariality, and to explain both how and why it is essential.[4] We are, however, mindful of ideal-theory problems, so our faith in these angels does not extend to belief in their existence.

Let us sidestep the last of the three ambiguities in the claim "*adversariality is essential to argument*" by stipulating what we mean by "argument". We are interested in argumentation as a process, and a joint activity between two or more parties.[5] We will not enter debates about whether arguments understood as abstract sequences of inferentially structured propositions must somehow contain an implicit adversarial

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[1] Some difference in standpoint is necessary for the opening stage of a pragma-dialectical critical discussion, but the existence of a difference is not sufficient for argumentation.

[2] Govier (1999).

[3] Bailin and Battersby (2017). For example, among Walton and Krabbe's six suggested models for different ways to engage in argumentation, we find models that pit arguers against each other such as persuasion dialogues and negotiations, but also models that unite arguers in the common pursuit of the answer to a problem or question, like deliberations and inquiries. So not all dialogue types that count as arguments pit arguers against each other in an adversarial relation.

[4] We have not made this figure up, at least not entirely. She has had many prior incarnations in argumentation theory. She appears as the ideal interlocutor in Johnson's *Manifest Rationality*; she is part of the universal audience in Perelman and Olbrecht-Tyteca's *New Rhetoric*; and we find her embodied as the opponent in an idealized critical discussion in *pragma-dialectics*. Since she may be most fully realized in Wohlrapp's pragmatic theory, we will begin there. We suspect that in another guise and gender, she may also be the legendary *Argumensch* of the oral tradition.

[5] Arguments2, in O'Keefe's vocabulary (O'Keefe, 1977).

component to count as arguments. Nor will we address the argumentative status of solitary reasoning.[6] With these limits in place, we can begin to disentangle various concepts of adversariality in argument.

2. VARIETIES OF ADVERSARIALITY EXPERIENCE

In response to some feminist critiques of adversarial argumentation, Trudy Govier distinguished "ancillary" from "minimal adversariality" (Govier, 1999). *Ancillary* adversariality in argumentation is characterized by "lack of respect, rudeness, lack of empathy, name-calling, animosity, hostility, failure to listen and attend carefully, misinterpretation, inefficiency, dogmatism, intolerance, irritability, quarrelsomeness, and so forth" (Govier, 1999, p. 245). While acknowledging that ancillary adversariality is common in argument, Govier maintained it is neither necessary nor even central to argumentation. By contrast, *minimal* adversariality which casts arguers as opponents in arguments is both necessary and central. However, the opposition of argument opponents need not extend beyond the argument any more than the opponents in a friendly game of chess need be enemies outside the game. Minimal adversariality, she says, originates from the "bipolarity of "for and against" [that] seems to be inherent in thought itself" so is a necessary ingredient in argumentation. Thus, while making an argument tacitly acknowledges that others might disagree about the conclusion and explicitly implies that they would be mistaken,[7] it does not require anything more confrontational than just that.

Govier's distinction sparked a discussion on adversariality. Some criticisms targeted her concept of minimal adversariality as more than what was absolutely necessary for argumentation; others thought it needed to be fleshed out.[8] Our take-away from the literature is that thinking of arguments as either adversarial or not, or even as more or less

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[6] What we have to say will be relevant for those dramatic instances in which a reasoner really does take up (or experience) different voices in her mind on behalf of different standpoints. What makes these phenomena relevant is that many of the most important cognitive benefits to be gained from argumentation come directly from the engagement, i.e., from *arguing*. You are fortunate, then, if, like Socrates, you have an inner *daimon.* For the rest of us, it helps to be on speaking terms with our own inner Socrates – who, for the record, sounds suspiciously like another manifestation of an Angelic Devil's Advocate. But with worse people-skills.

[7] For current purposes, both explicitly rejecting and simply not accepting a claim when sufficient reasons are available would count as "mistaken" from the proponent's standpoint.

[8] For contributions trying to find an adversarial core, see, e.g. (Aikin, 2011, 2017; Casey, 2018). For contributions critiquing such attempts, especially Govier's, see e.g. (Hundleby, 2013; Rooney, 2004).

adversarial, is inadequate because when it comes to argumentation, "adversarial" can mean many things. Fortunately, the existing literature provides the conceptual means to develop a vocabulary for all the requisite distinctions.

As a start, we differentiate (1) the *adversarial attitude*, (2) an *adversarial stance*, (3) *adversarial functions*, and (4) the *persuasive-adversarial effects* of argument. This is surely not the only taxonomy for adversariality, but it builds on existing distinctions and it turns out to be useful.[9]

2.1. The adversarial attitude

Arguers with an adversarial attitude argue primarily *to win*, because there are obvious benefits from winning an argument, including making other people think or act to our advantage. In contrast, an arguer bringing a cooperative attitude to an argument is more concerned with bringing it to an *optimally successful conclusion* – a conclusion based on a fair representation of the balance of reasons applicable to the issue of the argument and available to the arguers. She argues not to win, but to *get it right.* Unlike Govier, we do not think that aggression necessarily accompanies an adversarial attitude – rather, the adversarial attitude will predispose the arguer to do what is necessary to win, even if that means suppressing a correct evaluation of the available balance of reasons (open aggression is one way to do so, but there are others).

It is the adversarial attitude that has deservedly attracted the most criticism: it encourages partisanship, elevates tactics over strategy and means over ends, and generates the negative behaviors that give argumentation a bad name.[10]

2.2. The adversarial stance

"What does it mean for a practice to be adversarial?" Govier asked, and answered, "It means that in this practice people occupy roles which set them against each other, as adversaries or opponents," citing law, politics, and debates as institutions in which conventionally defined,

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[9] This is the only way the concept of adversariality in argumentation could have been disambiguated. Another (for his purposes very useful) way to distinguish different kinds of adversariality in argumentation has been suggested by Casey (2018). However, we think that a careful reading of the work already done supports the distinctions we suggest and that making them will help structure the broader discussion about the place of adversariality in argumentation and remove some of the confusion that we at least felt when we first started reading about it. We will here describe each of these different kinds of adversariality and link them to the contributions that provided the grounds for them.

[10] Govier (1999, 245) cites, "lack of respect, rudeness, lack of empathy, name-calling, animosity, hostility, failure to listen and attend carefully, misinterpretation, inefficiency, dogmatism, intolerance, irritability, quarrelsomeness, and so forth", but see Hundleby (2013) for reasons for hesitating before signing on to Govier's praise of politeness: the weight of norms is never gender-equitably distributed.

oppositional roles are assigned. We shall call this taking an *adversarial stance*.

In assuming an adversarial stance, an arguer is committed at a minimum to finding reasons and formulating arguments for the associated standpoint, defending that position from objections, and, often, to raising objections to contrary alternatives. A *conscientious* court-appointed attorney would be an example of someone arguing this way without necessarily adopting an adversarial attitude or engaging in any of the aggressive behavior associated with it.[11] In a paper defending war- and sports-metaphors for argumentation, Aikin (2011) points out that the adversariality in competitive sports actually presupposes rather than precludes an underlying cooperative basis, and that same "cooperative adversariality" can inform argument. We have argued, similarly, that a globally cooperative attitude strategy can lead an arguer to adopt a tactical adversarial stance to further the chances for successfully resolving an argument by more fairly representing the balance of reasons[12] Indeed, a common justification for the Dominant Adversarial Model for arguments – the so-called "DAM account" – is that structuring arguments with arguers in adversarial stances enhances the prospects for optimal resolutions of difference: make sure each side has a champion presenting its case in the strongest light so we can better judge between them.[13] Many countries use this reasoning to justify their adversarial models for adjudication.[14]

As often noted, argumentation does not actually require arguers in opposing roles because arguers need not argue *against* each other.[15] Hundleby (2013) highlights this by pointing out that people may argue without even being committed to a claim, e.g., when pooling reasons to solve a problem or as a deliberative tool. This motivated some early criticisms of the DAM account, but in retrospect, we can see those objections conflated (not without some justification) the proponent-

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[11] The distinction between aggressive behavior in argument and argumentative adversariality as arguing against each other has been accepted an integrated by several authors, especially those aware and critical of Govier's contribution e.g.Aikin, (2011), Hundleby (2013), Rooney (2004). However, apart from Hundleby, we have seen little awareness that open aggression is not the core of the problem with Govier's ancillary adversariality, so that simply eliminating aggression will not solve the associated problems. We hope that our distinction between an adversarial attitude and an adversarial stance, instead of the distinction between minimal adversariality (as arguing against each other) an ancillary adversariality (as arguing aggressively), preserves Hundleby's important insight.

[12] Stevens and Cohen (2018).

[13] Zarefsky 2012 is a recent endorsement of this view.

[14] See, e.g. Fuller and Winston (1978), Luban (1988), and Sommaggio (2014).

[15] See, e.g. Bailin & Battersby (2017), Gilbert, (1994, 1997), Hundleby (2013), and Rooney (2004).

opponent structure of the DAM account with aggression and the argument-as-war metaphor, and thus were directed against the adversarial attitude not the adversarial stance.[16] Later criticisms on the basis that not all arguers can fulfill the tasks associated with an adversarial stance where more successfully directed against this form of adversariality (Burrow, 2010; Hundleby, 2013).

2.3. The adversarial function

Our refinement of Govier's (1999) distinction between adversariality as an attitude and taking an adversarial stance is meant to help clarify where exactly the distinction lies that Govier drew attention to. But these two are not the only kinds of adversariality we can identify in argument. A further distinction can be made between them and fulfilling *an adversarial function* in an argument, perhaps by merely serving as a sounding board for another or even just temporarily raising hypothetical objections against oneself. Of course, good sparring partners land real punches!

Aikin (2017), in response to Rooney's and Hundleby's criticisms that Govier's minimal adversariality is unnecessary, proposed an even more minimal version: *dialectically minimal adversariality*. He starts from the insight that arguing is necessary only when a view is or might be controversial, to mitigate its controversiality. Arguments target audiences who may have doubts about the view (possibly including the proponents themselves). Arguing is directed at critical challenges and objections. Aikin writes: "The thought is that without the role-related duties of critical dialogue, there are moves of critical probing that must be performed that are, in their dialectical function, *oppositional*" (Aikin, 2017, p. 16). Aikin's important insight is that even when arguers are not adversarial in the sense of taking thoroughgoing adversarial *stances*, there are still adversarial *functions* to be performed such as formulating objections, raising questions[17] – functions that show where arguments are broken, in contrast to functions belonging to what Hundleby calls "argument repair".[18]

Since the adversarial function can be filled by such helpful and cooperative arguers as sounding boards and sparring partners, the term *adversariality* should be understood according to its conventional usage

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[16] E.g. Cohen, (1995) and Moulton (2003 first publ. 1983). Rooney (2010) argues, helpfully, that the line between Govier's minimal adversariality and Govier's ancillary adversariality is porous.

[17] In the context of thinking of argumentation as calling for different tasks rather than different roles, Bailin and Battersby (2017) draw a similar distinction between Govier's minimal adversariality and "the confrontation of ideas". In Stevens and Cohen (2018), we argue for the value of thinking in terms of roles rather than tasks, but agree that the distribution of tasks can happen in different ways and need not result in oppositional roles.

[18] Hundleby (2010) is the source for this contribution to the discourse.

for opposition of any kind, including the opposition of ideas, without any connotations of personal animosity or the toxic combative aspects of arguing that reinforce the DAM account's stranglehold on the imagination of argumentation theorists.

2.4. Persuasion as an adversarial effect

John Casey (2018) suggests that argumentation's "essential" adversariality can be found in the effects of reason-giving as such, without reference to the opposition of either ideas or arguers. Our beliefs are not entirely subject to our willful control: the causal nexus of belief-production includes everything we experience and hear – including reasons given in argumentation. From this perspective, arguing appears as an attempt to *cause* changes in our cognitive systems. In Casey's view, then, argument is adversarial because, it tries to *impose* change, fighting the epistemic inertia of the status quo, thereby amounting to an "attack" of sorts on personal autonomy.[19]

However, Casey (2018) points out that arguments can be between consenting adults who may welcome or even seek the change that comes with understanding the reasons presented in arguments.[20] What makes even those arguments *adversarial* is that they work *against* the arguer's cognitive *status quo*, although neither coercively nor aggressively. Because they happen whether they are welcome or not, the change-invoking effects of persuasive argumentation are not above moral considerations. For example, when our attempts at rationally persuading others include arguing with an adversarial attitude, we are committed to changing the beliefs despite their own preferences. And even if we have their epistemic betterment in mind, arguing could be unjustifiably paternalistic if it happens without consent.[21]

3. BUT IS IT ESSENTIAL?

The literature on whether and what kind of *adversariality* is essential for argumentation largely ignores the question of what *kind* of essential presence adversariality might have. But the ambiguity of *adversariality* is nearly matched by the ambiguity of *essential*. Is the claim that adversariality, of whatever sort, is essential to argumentation meant *conceptually*, so that adversariality is a necessary part of arguing; is it

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[19] Nozick (1981) reaches a similar conclusion. It also resonates with the claim, albeit for very different reasons, from some early feminist epistemologists claim that every attempt to persuade is an act of violence. See, e.g., Foss and Griffin (1995), Gearhart (1979), or Nye (1990).

[20] Fulkerson (1996) and Govier (1999), *inter alia,* also raise this point.

[21] See Tsai (2010). Davis (2017) adds the important caveat that this is the case mainly or only when the argument is *unwanted*. Neither author seems to be aware of the literature on adversariality in argumentation, so they do not explain how they see their arguments interacting with the broader discussion on adversariality.

meant *descriptively*, so that it is universally present, or nearly so, and cannot be ignored by theory; or is it meant as a *normative* evaluation, saying that it is an *important* part of argumentation, regardless of whether it necessary or pervasive? Casey (2018) argues the conceptual claim while Zarefsky (2012) addresses the normative point. Others touch on all three in heterogeneous discussions. Critics of adversariality often stress its normative dangers before arguing that it is not conceptually necessary.[22] Defenders of adversariality often combine arguments that it is necessary with reasons why it is positive.[23]

Our earlier distinctions go a long way to answering the descriptive and conceptual questions of whether adversariality is essential to argument. Adversarial effect may be inevitable but only its possibility could be a pre-condition for arguing. Neither an adversarial attitude nor an adversarial stance is conceptually *necessary* for arguments, although both are sufficiently pervasive to be necessary for describing arguments. In practice, arguers tend to be torn between adversarial and cooperative attitudes: they want to win *and* to be right. We might say that anyone with an exclusively adversarial attitude is not genuinely arguing: since she is uninterested in the balance of reasons, she is not really engaged in the reasons-giving and reasons-responsive enterprise, and she no need for anyone to fill the adversarial function. Nonetheless, arguers engaged in genuine argument overwhelmingly often have an at least partially adversarial attitude. That leaves only the adversarial *function* as a candidate in need of investigation for being an essential ingredient of arguments. Is it? As noted, Hundleby (2013) showed how arguments can occur even without the adversarial function. Admittedly, this depends on where the line is drawn between arguing and other dialogue types. Others may draw the line differently. We will simply recognize the adversarial function as *central* to argumentation – especially to *good* argumentation – and sidestep the larger question of whether it is *necessary* to all argumentation to avoid having to define argumentation precisely.

The important question for us is the one whether it is essential in the *normative* sense: Is adversariality *indispensably important* for argumentation? Would eliminating it from arguments imperil what it is that makes argumentation valuable? It is, after all, the intuition that adversariality *is* valuable, despite good reasons for thinking it is *detrimental* to good argumentation, that motivates these debates about adversariality and argumentation. Here is where the taxonomy of adversarial kinds helps because it makes it possible to say *this* kind of argumentative adversariality – the adversarial function – is essential in

[22] Bailin & Battersby (2017), Foss & Griffin (1995), Hundleby (2013), Moulton (2003 ,first publ. 1983), and Rooney (2004).
[23] Both Govier (1999) and Aikin (2011) fit here.

the normative sense, but *those* kinds – the adversarial stance and its accompanying attitude, which are nearly universally present, descriptively – are potentially toxic sources for the negative effects. Thus, if the adversarial attitude is descriptively universal, but not conceptually necessary, while the normative function is *normatively* essential, but sadly not universally present, then what argumentation theorists need is normative models that will motivate arguers to perform adversarial functions while inhibiting our natural tendencies to let the adversarial attitude crowd out cooperation in arguments. This model, we think, can be represented in the ideal figure of the *Angelic Devil's Advocate*.

4. THE ANGELS OF ARGUMENTATION

Competitors, rivals, and opponents are all adversaries but they are not all enemies. A punch from a sparring partner feels the same as one from a match opponent but there is a difference that makes all the difference.[24] A sparring partner serves as an opponent but is really an ally. She is there to make the boxer *better*. She may try to win but winning is not her motivation.

The same thing holds for arguments: opposing arguers need not be enemies. They can be allies. When making difficult decisions or considering controversial claims, it pays to find someone to provide the input that comes only from opposition. We need others to fill the adversarial function, not to *be* adversaries. We want an arguer who *opposes* us to *help* us: an *advocatus diaboli,* a Devil's Advocate.[25]

A devil's advocate is not merely a useful interlocutor: in the idealized version described here, she is the ideal *other* who embodies what is best and most important about argumentation.[26] She is the opponent we need because her overall goal is to enhance the prospects of *successful* argumentation, i.e., getting it right.

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[24] Similarly, a football coach chooses the starting quarterback from rival *teammates*, not from *enemies.* The successful candidate has a very different relation to the now-back-up quarterback than he does to quarterbacks from other teams. Barack Obama used exactly this analogy in the 2008 Democratic primary to prevent the competition between him and Hillary Clinton from becoming hostile (and he did indeed keep her on his team).

[25] "*In 1587, Pope Sixtus V established a process involving a canon attorney in the role of Promoter of the Faith or Devil's Advocate. This person argued against the canonization (sainthood) of a candidate in order to uncover any character flaws or misrepresentation of the evidence favoring canonization."* Wikipedia

[26] Of course, if we see argumentation only as a tool to help us reach our practical goals by changing people's beliefs and actions in our favor, our ideal is an audience that uncritically accepts our every word.

Harald Wohlrapp highlights this role in his epistemic approach to argumentation.[27] Our ability to figure out the world is limited by our subjectivity – our prior beliefs, opinions, interests, and prejudices. Even when we can reason our way to a conclusion, perhaps even identifying reasons for and against it, we should not fully trust ourselves. The reasons we consider are *our* reasons; the inferential paths we follow are one *we* build; and the conclusions we reach have to be acceptable *to us*. This is where we can use a cooperative opponent: someone to help us transcend our limits by criticizing our argument in order to strengthen it, not to defeat it.

Along with our beliefs, experiences, and perspectives, we also bring a motley of biases to our reasoning. We are good at incorporating these biases into our arguments – indeed, the more skilled we are at arguing, the better we are at rationalizing those distortions, the harder it is for us to detect them, and the easier it is for us to be taken in by them.[28] Argumentation is – and *needs to be* – about more than just giving reasons. Arguing as a proponent *for* a conclusion is only part of it. Argument have other roles and there are other skill sets for those roles, including *hearing* reasons, *evaluating* inferences, *asking* the right questions, and raising good *objections,* and then *answering* those questions and *responding* to those objections.

The deck is stacked against solitary reasoners, but arguing *with others* helps the odds. It is not the only way to succeed, but it is better than discovering our epistemic flaws through practical failures.[29] Wohlrapp envisions an opponent who is adversarial insofar as her job is to find *flaws* in our reasoning. She tries to undermine our reasoning as part of her adversarial function, not from an adversarial attitude. It may hurt when opponents raise objections we cannot answer, but that is because our subjective view of the world is on the line: we are invested in our arguments. When they are revealed as flawed, so are we. But we should be able to recognize the short-term, apparent loss as a genuine long-term gain. Wohlrapp, like the outspoken critics of adversariality, realizes that losing an argument can be an epistemic gain.

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[27] Wohlrapp does not think, though, that arguing alone can produce knowledge. Knowledge can only arise when theory proves itself reliable in practice. Instead, arguing produces the *trust* in new theory to rely on it in practice (and give it a chance to become knowledge). He describes argumentation as an inter-subjective activity aimed at the testing of theses and proposed solutions. It is especially useful for epistemic gaps where our knowledge and well-grounded, established opinions run out, and where our well-rehearsed theories do not provide us ready solutions.

[28] This point is emphatically made in Kornblith (1999).

[29] Quine (1970) p. 48,, defending the use of inductive reasoning, put the point rather more dramatically: "Creatures inveterately wrong in their inductions have a pathetic but praiseworthy tendency to die before reproducing their kind."

Wohlrapp's opponent functions as a Devil's Advocate: an arguer brought in to save an arguer from his own subjectivity. She argues *against* an argument *for* the benefit of the argument. She is a Guardian Angel of Argumentation.

5. ANGELS AND VIRTUES

Mercier and Sperber provide a context for understanding why the social dimension of argumentation is integral to reasoning, and empirical data showing that some opposition helps us reason.[30] Wohlrapp complements this with a description of good opponents that identifies their specific skills and virtues, and an explanation of how they benefit arguments. So is the *Devil's Advocate* the ideal interlocutor? We think that she represents *one* ideal: adversariality scrubbed clean to preserve only its normatively essential aspects. Nonetheless, she is not all we need in an interlocutor. The DA's focus is too much on the response to proponents either by raising objections or asking questions. What is overlooked in the ideal of the DA are such argumentative moves as initiating new lines of reasoning or proposing improvements to the standpoint. The DA is essentially *reactive;* to be truly *angelic*, Devil's Advocates need to be *pro-active*. The original Devil's Advocates were called in by papal courts to fulfill their roles; Angelic Devil's Advocates – true Guardian Angels of argumentation – wouldn't wait for the call.

The thing to consider is *argumentative engagement*. An arguer can conduct himself impeccably whenever he finds himself in arguments, but if he is confrontation-averse and consistently avoids arguments, he would be hiding that light under a bushel: an able advocate, but not angelic. Alternatively, an arguer might argue cogently once in an argument, astutely pushing back where she should, but have no idea how or when to *disengage*: a devil of a Devil's Advocate. There is an art to engaging in arguments and an art to disengaging from arguments. A full account of ideal arguers should address the conduct, skills, and virtues associated with entering and exiting arguments in addition to the conduct, skills, and virtues associated with all of the different roles in ongoing arguments.

We identify four aspects of argument engagement and the virtues associated with them. In each case, the virtue can be located, following Aristotle's lead, as a mean between extremes.

The first form of failure for would-be guardian angels of argumentation is failure to report for duty. Colleague who have not served as sounding-boards for the drafts of your latest manuscript have not contributed and do not deserve acknowledgment; a friend who wasn't there to argue you out of a foolish course of action, was not a friend

[30] Mercier and Sperber (2011).

in deed. There are two different failures here: those who *don't* engage and those who *won't* engage. Some would-be arguers might miss an argument because they are unaware of them; others might hear them but deliberately choose not to enter. The former failure might be a lack of empathy or an inability to pick up on conversational markers that signal that a dialogue has become an argument. The latter could be due to being confrontation-averse, a condition that might not be blameworthy but it is evidence that an important argumentative virtue is lacking. However, sometimes the refusal to engage is culpable: for example, filibustering in order to prevent critical engagement is a transgression, even though it is technically not a "fallacy" in the sense of being a mis-step *in* an argument. Not-arguing is not a kind of bad arguing, but non-arguers can be vicious on account of the missing virtue.[31]

Second**,** there are corresponding failures at the other ends of those spectra: sometimes engagement is ill-advised and even the angels of argumentation should dare not tread. We are all too familiar with "argument provocateurs" who are too eager to argue and manage to turn every communicative exchange into an argument.[32] We also have too much experience with diehard arguers from whom we cannot disengage. Beating a dead horse need not involve any logical fallacies, but it is still an objectionable form of arguing. (The categories are not exclusive. Provocateurs who are also diehards are best avoided!)

Argumentative engagement is generally a yes-or-no situation, but sometimes it makes sense to consider degrees of engagement. Half-hearted engagement can sabotage argumentation. At the other end, half-hearted *dis*-engagement in the form of lingering hostilities can prevent us from processing and learning from an argument. However, for the purposes of triangulating in on the qualities that make Angelic Devil's Advocates the embodiment of what is essential to good argumentation, it is more helpful to ask about *how* arguers engage rather than *how much*. Again, the extremes are instructive. On one spectrum, we find an arguer who is so invested in his position that he takes any criticism as a personal attack contrasted with a parody of academic objectivity, someone so disinterested as to be unaffected by stomach-churning atrocities, uninspired by breath-taking beauty, or unmoved by mind-numbing injustice. On another spectrum, we find career contrarians at one end whose inability to bring closure to the role of a Devil's Advocate disqualifies them from being angelic, while the other end finds overly amenable enablers whose agreement encourages exaggeration and

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[31] See Cohen (2003) for a taxonomy of fallacies, transgressions and sins in argumentation beyond just inferential failures.

[32] The character of the "argument provocateur" was introduced in Cohen (2005) along with a bestiary of other arguers notably lacking in argumentative virtues.

radicalization.[33] She, too, fails as an Angelic Devil's Advocate, but not for a lack of angelicism.

In each case, there is a golden mean that represents an argumentative virtue: the willingness, ability, and skill to enter into argument; the willingness, ability, and skill to dis-engage from argument; the willingness, ability, and skill to genuinely engage without becoming inappropriately invested in the topic; and the willingness, ability, and skill to agree or disagree as needed. Taken together, they define an angelic devil's advocate.

And, we submit, she embodies the essence of good argumentation. Sadly, she is not real.

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