JANICE MOULTON

A PARADIGM OF PHILOSOPHY:
THE ADVERSARY METHOD

THE UNHAPPY CONFLATION OF AGGRESSION WITH SUCCESS

It is frequently thought that there are attributes, or kinds of behavior, that
it is good for one sex to have and bad for the other sex to have. Aggression
is a particularly interesting example of such an attribute. This paper in-
vestigates and criticizes a model of philosophic methodology that accepts
a positive view of aggressive behavior and uses it as a paradigm of philosophic
reasoning. But before I turn to this paradigm, I want to challenge the broader
view of aggression that permits it positive connotations.

Defined as "an offensive action or procedure, especially a culpable un-
provoked overt hostile attack," aggression normally has well deserved negative
connotations. Perhaps a standard image of aggression is that of an animal
in the wild trying to take over some other animal's territory or attacking
it to eat it. In human contexts, aggression often invokes anger, uncontrolled
range, and belligerence.

However, this negative concept, when it is specifically connected to
males *qua* males or to workers in certain professions (sales, management,
law, philosophy, politics) often takes on positive associations. In a civilized
society, physical aggression is likely to land one in a jail or a mental institution.
But males and workers in certain professions are not required to physically
attack or eat their customers and coworkers to be considered aggressive. In
these contexts, aggression is thought to be related to more positive concepts
such as power, activity, ambition, authority, competence, and effectiveness –
concepts that are related to success in these professions. And exhibition
of these positive concepts is considered evidence that one is, or has been,
aggressive.

Aggression may have no causal bearing on competence, superiority,
power, etc., but if many people believe aggressive behavior is a sign of these
properties, then one may have to learn to behave aggressively in order to
appear competent, to seem superior, and to gain or maintain power. This
poses a dilemma for anyone who wants to have those positive qualities, but
does not wish to engage in "culpable unprovoked overt hostile attacks."

Of reluctant aggressors, males have an advantage over females. For as

149

members of the masculine gender, their aggression is thought to be "natural." Even if they do not engage in aggressive behavior, they can still be perceived as possessing that trait, inherently, as a disposition. And if they do behave aggressively, their behavior can be excused – after all, it's natural. Since women are not perceived as being dispositionally aggressive, it looks like they would have to behave aggressively in order to be thought aggressive. On the other hand, since women are not expected to be aggressive, we are much more likely to notice the slightest aggressive behavior on the part of a woman while ignoring more blatant examples by men just because they are not thought unusual. But when done by a female, it may be considered all the more unpleasant because it seems unnatural. Alternatively, it may be that a woman who exhibits competence, energy, ambition, etc. may be thought aggressive and therefore unnatural even without behaving aggressively. Since, as I shall argue, aggressive behavior is unlikely to win friends and influence people in the way that one would like, this presents a special problem for women.

Some feminists dismiss the sex distinction that views aggression in a female as a negative quality and then encourage females to behave aggressively in order to further their careers. I am going to, instead, question the assumption that aggression deserves association with more positive qualities. I think it is a mistake to suppose that an aggressive person is more likely to be energetic, effective, competent, powerful or successful and also a mistake to suppose that an energetic, effective, etc. person is therefore aggressive.

Even those who object to sex-roles stereotyping seldom balk specifically at the assumption that more aggressive people are better suited to "be the breadwinners and play the active role in the production of commodities of society", but only at the assumption that aggression is more natural to one sex than the other.[1] Robin Lakoff assumes that more aggressive speech is both more effective and typical of males, and objects to the socialization that forbids direct questions and assertions, devoid of polite phrases, in women's speech.[2] Lakoff recognizes that the speech she characterizes as women's speech is frequently used by male academics, but she still assumes that aggressive speech is more powerful and more effective. She does not see that polite, nonabrupt speech, full of hesitations and qualifiers can be a sign of great power and very effective in giving the impression of great thought and deliberation, or in getting one's listeners on one's side. Although polite, nonabrupt speech can be more effective and have more power than aggressive speech, the conceptual conflation of aggression with positive concepts has made this hard to remember.

Consider some professional occasions where aggression might be thought an asset. Aggression is often equated with energy, but one can be energetic and work hard without being hostile. It may seem that aggression is essential where there is competition, but people who just try to do their best, without deliberately trying to do in the other guy may do equally well or even better. Feelings of hostility may be distracting, and a goal of defeating another may sidetrack one to the advantage of a third party. Even those who think it is a dog-eat-dog world can see that there is a difference between acting to defeat or undermine competition and acting aggressively towards that competition. Especially if one's success depends on other parties, it is likely to be far wiser to *appear* friendly than to engage in aggressive behavior. And in professions where mobility is a sign of success, today's competitors may be tomorrow's colleagues. So if aggression is likely to make enemies, as it seems designed to do, it is a bad strategy in these professions. What about other professional activities? A friendly, warm, nonadversarial manner surely does not interfere with persuading customers to buy, getting employees to carry out directions conscientiously, convincing juries, teaching students, getting help and cooperation from coworkers, and promotions from the boss. An aggressive manner is more likely to be a hindrance in these activities.

If these considerations make us more able to distinguish aggression from professional competence, then they will have served as a useful introduction to the main object of this essay: an inquiry into a paradigm of philosophy that, perhaps tricked by the conflation of aggression and competence, incorporates aggression into its methodology.

SCIENTIFIC REASONING

Once upon a time it was thought that scientific claims were, or ought to be, objective and value-free; that expressions of value were distinguishable from expressions of fact, and that science ought to confine itself to the latter. This view was forsaken, reluctantly by some, when it was recognized that theories incorporate values, because they advocate one way of describing the world over others, and that even observations of facts are made from some viewpoint or theory about the world already presupposed.[3]

Still devoted to a fact-value distinction, Popper recognized that scientific *statements* invoked values, but believed that the *reasoning* in science was objective and value-free.[4] Popper argued that the primary reasoning in science is deductive. Theories in science propose laws of the form "All *A*'s are *B*'s" and the job of scientific research is to find, or set up, instances of

A and see if they fail to produce or correlate with instances of *B*. The test of a theory was that it could withstand attempts to falsify it. A good theory encouraged such attempts by making unexpected and broad claims rather than narrow and expected claims. If instances of *B* failed to occur given instances of *A,* then the theory was falsified. A new theory that could account for the failure of *B* to occur in the same deductive manner would replace the old theory. The reasoning used to discover theories, the way a theory related to physical or mathematical models or other beliefs, was not considered essential to the scientific enterprise. On this view, only the thinking that was exact and certain, objective and value-free was essential to science.

However, Kuhn then argued that even the reasoning used in science is not value free or certain.[5] Science involves more than a set of independent generalizations about the world waiting to be falsified by a single counter-instance. It involves a system, or "paradigm," of not only generalizations and concepts, but beliefs about the methodology and evaluation of research: about what are good questions to ask, what are proper developments of the theory, what are acceptable research methods. One theory replaces another, not because it functions successfully as a major premise in a greater number of deductions, but because it answers some questions that the other theory does not – even though it may not answer some questions the other theory does. Theory changes occur because one theory is more *satsifying* than the other, because the questions it answers are considered more *important.* Research under a paradigm is not done to falsify the theory, but to fill in and develop the knowledge that the paradigm provides a framework for. The reasoning involved in developing or replacing a paradigm is not simply deductive, and there is probably no adequate single characterization of how it proceeds. This does not mean that it is irrational or not worth studying, but that there is no simple universal characterization of good scientific reasoning.

This view of science, or one like it, is widely held by philosophers now. It has been suggested that philosophy too is governed by paradigms.

PHILOSOPHY REASONING – THE ADVERSARY PARADIGM

I am going to criticize a paradigm or part of a paradigm in philosophy.[6] It is the view that applies the now-rejected view of value-free reasoning in science to reasoning in philosophy. On this view all philosophic reasoning is, or ought to be, deductive. General claims are made and the job of philosophic research is to find counterexamples to the claims. And most important,

the philosophic enterpriese is seen as an unimpassioned debate between *adversaries* who try to defend their own views against counterexamples and produce counterexamples to opposing views. The reasoning used to discover the claims, and the way the claims relate to other beliefs and systems of ideas are not considered relevant to philosophic reasoning if they are not deductive. I will call this the Adversary Paradigm.

Under the Adversary Paradigm, it is assumed that the only, or at any rate, the best, way of evaluating work in philosophy is to subject it to the strongest or most extreme opposition. And it is assumed that the best way of present-ing work in philosophy is to address it to an imagined opponent and muster all the evidence one can to support it. The justification for this method is that a position ought to be defended from, and subjected to, the criticism of the strongest opposition; that this method is the only way to get the best of both sides; that a thesis which survives this method of evaluation is more likely to be correct than one that has not; and that a thesis subjected to the Adversary Method will have passed an "objective" test, the most extreme test possible, whereas any weaker criticism or evaluation will, by comparison, give an advantage to the claim to be evaluated and therefore not be as objective as it could be. Of course, it will be admitted that the Adversary Method does not *guarantee* that all and only sound philosophical claims will survive, but that is only because even an adversary does not always think of all the things which ought to be criticized about a position, and even a proponent does not always think of all the possible responses to criticism. However, since there is no way to determine with certainty what is good and what is bad philosophy, the Adversary Method is the best there is. If one wants philosophy to be objective, one should prefer the Adversary Method to other, more subjective, forms of evaluation which would give preferential treatment to some claims by not submitting them to extreme adversarial tests. Philosophers who accept the AdversaryParadigm in philosophy may recognize that scientific reasoning is different, but think "So much the worse for science. At least philosophy can be objective and value free."

I am going to criticize this paradigm in philosophy. My objection to the Adversary Method is to its role as a paradigm. If it were merely *one* procedure among many for philosophers to employ, there might be nothing worth objecting to except that conditions of hostility are not likely to elicit the best reasoning. But when it dominates the methodology and evalua-tion of philosophy, it restricts and misrepresents what philosophic reasoning is.

It has been said about science that criticism of a paradigm, however warranted, will not be successful unless there is an alternative paradigm available to replace it.[7] But the situation in philosophy is different. It is not that we have to wait for an alternative form of reasoning to be developed. Nonadversarial reasoning exists both outside and within philosophy but our present paradigm does not recognize it.

DEFECTS OF THE ADVERSARY PARADIGM

The defense of the Adversary Method identified adversary criticism with severe evaluation. If the evaluation is not adversarial it is assumed it must be weaker and less effective. I am going to argue that this picture is mistaken.

As far back as Plato it was recognized that in order for a debate or discussion to take place, assumptions must be shared by the parties involved.[8] A debate is not possible among people who disagree about everything. Not only must they agree about what counts as a good argument, what will be acceptable as relevant data, and how to decide on the winner, but they must share some premises in order for the debate to get started.

The Adversary Method works best if the disagreements are isolated ones, about a particular claim or argument. But claims and arguments about particular things rarely exist in isolation. They are usually part of an interrelated system of ideas. Under the Adversary Paradigm we find ourselves trying to disagree with a system of ideas by taking each claim or argument, one at a time. Premises which might otherwise be rejected must be accepted, if only temporarily, for the sake of the argument. We have to fight our opponents on their terms. And in order to criticize each claim individually, one at a time, we would have to provisionally accept most of the ideas we disagree with most of the time. Such a method can distort the presentation of an opponent's position, and produce an artificially slow development of thought.

Moreover, when a whole system of ideas is involved, as it frequently is, a debate that ends in defeat for one argument, without changing the whole system of ideas of which that argument was a part, will only provoke stronger support for other arguments with the same conclusion, or inspire attempts to amend the argument to avoid the objections. Even if the entire system of ideas is challenged, it is unlikely to be abandoned without an alternative system to take its place. A conclusion that is supported by the argument in question may remain undaunted by the defeat of that argument. In order to alter a *conclusion,* it could be more effective to ignore confrontation on the particular points, not provide counterexamples, however easy

they may be to find, and instead show how other premises and other data support an alternative system of ideas. If we are restricted to the Adversary Method we may have to withhold evaluation for a system of ideas in order to find a common ground for debate. And the adversarial criticism of some arguments may merely strengthen support for other ideas in the system, or inspire makeshift revisions and adjustments.

Moreover, the Adversary Paradigm allows exemptions from criticism of claims in philosophy that are not well worked out, that are "programmatic". Now any thesis in philosophy worth its salt will be programmatic in that there will be implications which go beyond the thesis itself. But the claims that have become popular in philosophy are particularly sketchy, and secure their immunity from criticism under the Adversary Paradigm *because* their details are not worked out. A programmatic claim will offer a few examples which fit the claim along with a prediction that, with some modification (of course), a theory can be developed along these lines to cover all cases. Counterexamples cannot refute these claims because objections will be routinely dismissed as merely things to be considered later, when all the details are worked out. Programmatic claims have burgeoned in philosophy, particular in epistemology and philosophy of language. It has become a pattern for many philosophy papers to spend most of the paper explaining and arguing against other claims and then to offer a programmatic claim or conjecture of one's own as an alternative at the end without any support or elaboration. (Perhaps this is the beginning of a new paradigm that is growing out of a shortcoming in the evaluation procedures of the Adversary Paradigm.) Some programmatic claims that were once quite popular are now in disrepute, such as sense-data theories, but not because they were disproved, perhaps more because they failed to succeed – no one ever worked out the details and/or people gave up hope of ever doing so. The Adversary Method allows programmatic claims to remain viable in philosophy, however sketchy or implausible, as long as they are unrefuted.

MISINTERPRETING THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

Under any paradigm we are likely to reinterpret history and recast the positions of earlier philosophers. With the Adversary Paradigm 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.[9] But our reinterpretations may be misinterpretations and our

choice of great philosophers may be based not so much on what they said as on how we think they said it.

One victim of the Adversary Paradigm is usually thought to be a model of adversarial reasoning: The Socratic Method. The Socratic method is frequently identified with the elenchus, a method of discussion designed to lead the other person into admitting that her/his views were wrong, to get them to feel what is sometimes translated as "shame" and sometimes as "humility". *Elenchus* is usually translated as "refutation", but this is misleading because its success depends on convincing the other person, not on showing their views to be wrong to others. Unlike the Adversary Method, 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. In fact, many contemporary philosophers avoid considerations of how of convince, supposing it to be related to trickery and bad reasoning.

In general the inability to win a public debate is not a good reason for giving up a belief. One can usually attribute the loss to one's own performance instead of to inadequacies in one's thesis. A public loss may even make one feel more strongly toward the position which wasn't done justice by the opposition. Thus the Adversary Method is not a good way to convince someone who does not agree with you.

The *elenchus,* on the other hand, is designed just for that purpose. One looks for premises that the other person will accept and that will show that the original belief was false. The discussion requires an acceptance by both parties of premises and reasoning.

Of course, one could use the *elenchus* in the service of the Adversary Paradigm, to win a point rather than convince. And it has been assumed by many that that is what Socrates was doing, that his style was insincere and ironic,[10] that his criticisms were harsh and his praise sarcastic. But in fact Socrates' method is contrasted with that of an antagonist or hostile questioner in the dialogues.[11] Socrates jokes frequently at the beginning of a dialogue or when the other party is resisting the discussion, and the jokes encourage the discussion, which would not be the case if they were made at the expense of the speaker.[12] Any refusals and angry responses Socrates received occurred when cherished ideas were shaken and not as a result of any adversary treatment by Socrates.[13] Socrates avoided giving an opinion in opposition to the

one being discussed lest it be accepted too easily without proper examination. His aim is not to rebut, it is to show people how to think for themselves.

We have taken the *elenchus* to be a duel, a debate between adversaries, but this interpretation is not consistent with the evidence in the dialogues. I suspect that the reason we have taken Socrates' method to be the Adversary Method, and consequently misunderstood his tone to be that of an ironic and insincere debater instead of that of a playful and helpful teacher, is that under the influence of the Adversary Paradigm we have not been able to conceive of philosophy being done any other way.

RESTRICTIONS OF PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES

The Adversary Paradigm affects the kinds of questions asked and determines the answers that are thought to be acceptable. This is evident in nearly every area of philosophy. The only problems recognized are those between opponents, and the only kind of reasoning considered is the certainty of deduction, directed to opposition. The paradigm has a strong and obvious influence on the way problems are addressed.

For example in philosophy of language, the properties investigated are analyzed when possible in terms of properties that can be subjected to deductive reasoning. Semantic theory has detoured questions of meaning into questions of truth. Meaning is discussed in terms of the deductive consequences of sentences. We ask not what a sentence says, but what it guarantees, what we can deduce from it. Relations among ideas that affect the meaning are either assimilated to the deductive model or ignored.[14]

In philosophy of science, the claim that scientific reasoning is not essentially deductive has led to "charges of irrationality, relativism, and the defense of mob rule".[15] Non-deductive reasoning is thought to be no reasoning at all. It is thought that any reasons which are good reasons must be deductive and certain.

In ethics, a consequence of this paradigm is that it has been assumed that there must be a single supreme moral principle. Because moral reasoning may be the result of different moral principles that may make conflicting claims about the right thing to do, a supreme moral principle is needed to "adjudicate rationally [that is, deductively] among different competing moralities".[16] The relation between moral principles and moral decision is thought to be deductive. A supreme moral principle allows one to deduce, by plugging in the relevant factors, what is right or wrong. More than one principle would allow, as is possible if one starts from different premises,

conflicting judgments to be deduced. The possibilities that one could adju-
dicate between conflicting moral percepts without using deduction, that
there might be moral problems that are not the result of conflicts in moral
principles, and that there might be moral dilemmas for which there are no
guaranteed solutions, are not considered.

There is a standard "refutation" of egoism that claims that egoism does
not count as an ethical theory and therefore is not worthy of philosophical
consideration because an egoist would not advocate egoism to others (would
not want others to be egoists too). It is assumed that only systems of ideas
that can be openly proclaimed and debated are to count as theories, or as
philosophy. Again this is the Adversary Paradigm at work, allowing only
systems of ideas that can be advocated and defended, and denying that
philosophy might examine a system of ideas for its own sake, or for its
connections with other systems.[17]

There are assumptions in metaphysics and epistemology that language
is necessary for thinking, for reasoning, for any system of ideas. It is denied
that creatures without language might have thoughts, might be able to figure
out some things, because the only kind of reasoning that is recognized is
adversarial reasoning and for that one must have language.[18]

With the Adversary Paradigm we do not try to assess positions or theories
on their plausibility or worthiness or even popularity. Instead we are expected
to consider, and therefore honor, positions that are most *un*like our own
in order to show that we can meet their objections. So we find moral theories
addressed to egoists,[19] theories of knowledge aimed at skeptics. Since the
most extreme opposition may be a denial of the existence of something,
much philosophic energy is expended arguing for the existence of some
things, and no theory about the nature of those things ever gets formulated.
We find an abundance of arguments trying to prove that determinism is false
because free will exists, but no positive accounts giving an explanation, in
terms of chance and indeterminism, of what free will would be. Philosophers
debate and revive old arguments about whether God exists, but leave all
current discussions about what the nature of God would be to divinity
schools and religious orders.

Philosophy, by attention to extreme positions because they are extreme,
presents a distorted picture about what sorts of positions are worthy of
attention, giving undo attention and publicity to positions merely because
they are those of a hypothetical adversary's and possibly ignoring positions
which make more valuable or interesting claims.

THE PARADIGM LEADS TO BAD REASONING

It has mistakenly been assumed that whatever reasoning an adversary would accept would be adequate reasoning for all other circumstances as well.[20] The Adversary Paradigm accepts only the kind of reasoning whose goal is to convince an opponent, and ignores reasoning that might be used in other circumstances: To figure something out for oneself, to discuss something with like-minded thinkers, to convince the indifferent or the uncommitted. The relations of ideas used to arrive at a conclusion might very well be different from the relations of ideas needed to defend it to an adversary. And it is not just less reasoning, or fewer steps in the argument that distinguishes the relations of ideas, but that they must be, in some cases, quite different lines of thought.

In illustration, let us consider the counterexample reasoning that is so effective in defending one's conclusions against an adversary. When an adversary focusses on certain features of a problem, one can use those features to construct a counterexample. To construct a counterexample, one needs to abstract the essential features of the problem and find another example, an analogy, that has those features but which is different enough and clear enough to be considered dispassionately apart from the issue in question. The analogy must be able to show that the alleged effect of the essential features does not follow.

But in order to reach a conclusion about moral issues or scientific theories or aesthetic judgments, one may have to consider *all* the important features and their interactions. And to construct an analogy with all the features and their interactions, which is *not* part of the issue in question, may well be impossible. Any example with all the features that are important may just be another example of the problem at issue. If we construct an analogy using only some of the important features, or ignoring their interactions, a decision based on this could be bad reasoning. It would ignore important aspects of the problem.

Consider a work in the Adversary Paradigm, Judith Thomson's excellent 'A Defense of Abortion'.[21] Thomson says: All right, let's give the "right to lifers" all their premises. Let's suppose, for the sake of argument, that a fetus is a person, and even that it is a talented person. And then she shows by counterexample that it does not follow that the fetus has a right to life. Suppose that you woke up one morning and found that you were connected to a talented violinist (because he had a rare kidney disease and only you had the right blood type) and the Music Lover's Society had plugged you

together. When you protested, they said, "Don't worry, it's only for nine months, and then he'll he cured. And you can't unplug him because now that the connection has been made, he will die if you do." Now, Thomson says to the right-to-lifers, surely you have the *right* to unplug yourself. If the time were shorter than nine months, say only nine minutes, you might be an awful person if you did not stay plugged in, but even then you have the *right* to do what you want with your body.

The violinist analogy makes the main point, and Thomson explains it by comparing the right to one's own body to the right to property (a right that the right-to-lifers are unlikely to deny). One's right to property does not stop because some other person needs it, even if they need it to stay alive.

The argument using a counterexample is as effective against adversaries as any argument could be, and therefore a good method for arguing within the adversary tradition. One uses the premises the adversary would accept – property rights, the fetus as a person – and shows that the conclusion – that "unplugging" yourself from the fetus is wrong – does not follow. In general, in order to handle adversaries one may abstract the features they claim to be important, and construct a counterexample which has those same features but in which the conclusion they claim does not hold.

All Thomson tried to show was that abortion would not be wrong just because the fetus were a person.[22] She did not show that abortion would, or would not, be wrong. There are many features beside personhood that are important to the people making a decision about abortion: That it is the result of sexual intercourse so that guilt, atonement or loyalty about the consequences may be appropriate; that the effects only occur to women, helping to keep a power-minority in a powerless position; that the developing embryo may be genetically like others who are loved; that the product would be a helpless infant brought into an unmanageable situation; that such a birth would bring shame or hardship to others. There are many questions connected to whole systems of ideas that need answers when abortion is a personal issue: What responsibility does one have to prevent shame and hardship to others – parents, friends, other children, future friends and future children? When do duties toward friends override duties of other sorts? How is being a decent person related to avoiding morally intolerable situations – dependence, hate, resentment, lying? There is a lot of very serious moral reasoning that goes on when an individual has to make a decision about abortion, and the decisions made are enormously varied. But this moral reasoning has largely been ignored by philosophers because it is different

from the reasoning used to address an adversary and it is too complex and interrelated to be evaluated by counterexamples.

A good counterexample is one that illustrates a general problem about some principle or general claim. Counterexample reasoning can be used to rule out certain alternatives, or at least to show that the current arguments supporting them are inadequate, but not to construct alternatives or to figure out what principles *do* apply in certain situations. Counterexamples can show that particular arguments do not support the conclusion, but they do not provide any positive reason for accepting a conclusion, nor can they show how a conclusion is related to other ideas.

If counterexample reasoning is not a good way to reach conclusions about complex issues, and it is a good way to construct arguments to defeat adversaries, then we should be careful when we do philosophy to bear this in mind. Instead, most of the time we present adversary arguments as if they were the only way to reason. The adversary paradigm prevents us from seeing that systems of ideas which are *not* directed to an adversary may be worth studying and developing, and that adversarial reasoning may be incorrect for nonadversarial contexts.

How would discarding the Adversary Paradigm affect philosophy? Any paradigm in philosophy will restrict title way reasoning is evaluated. I have argued that the Adversary Paradigm not only ignores some forms of good reasoning, but fails to evaluate and even encourages some forms of bad reasoning. However, criticism of the Adversary Paradigm is not enough; we need alternatives.

One of the problems with a paradigm that becomes really entrenched is that it is hard to conceive of how the field would operate without it. What other method of evaluating philosophy is there but the Adversary Method?

An alternative way of evaluating reasoning, already used in the history of philosophy and history of science, is to consider how the reasoning relates to a larger system of ideas. The questions to be asked are not just "Must the argument as it stands now be accepted as valid?" but also "What are the most plausible premises that would make this argument a good one?" "Why is this argument important?" "How does its form and its conclusion fit in with other beliefs and patterns of reasoning?" For example, one can consider not only whether Descartes' proofs of the existence of God are valid, but what good reasons there are for proving the existence of God; how Descartes' concept of God is related to his concept of causation and of matter. One can examine the influence of methodology and instrumentation

in one scientific field on the development of a related field.[23] With such an approach relations of ideas that are not deductive can also be evaluated. We can look at how world views relate to different philosophical positions about free will and determinism, about rationality and ethical values, about distinctions claimed between mind and body, self and other, order and chaos.

A second way of treating systems of ideas involves a greater shift from the Adversary Paradigm. It may even require a shift in our concept of reasoning for it to be accepted. It is that experience may be a necessary element in certain reasoning processes. While many philosophers recognize that different factual beliefs, and hence basic premises, may arise from different experiences, it is believed that philosophical discussions ought to proceed as if experience plays no essential role in the philosophical positions one holds. Experience may be necessary to resolve factual disputes but aside from errors about the facts, any differences in experience that might account for differences in philosophical beliefs are ignored or denied. It is thought that all genuine philosophical differences can be resolved through language. This belief supports the Adversary Paradigm, for adversarial arguments could be pointless if it was experience rather than argument that determined philosophical beliefs. Yet might it not be possible, for example, that belief in a supreme deity is correlated with perceived ability to control one's future? When there is little control, when one is largely powerless to organize one's environment, then belief in a deity helps one to understand, to be motivated to go on, to keep in good spirits. When one feels effective in coping with the world, then belief in a supreme being does not contribute to a satisfactory outlook. Belief in a deity would benefit, would be rational for the very young, the very old, the poor and the helpless. But for others, with the experience of being able to control their own lives and surroundings, the difference in experience would give rise to a different belief.

I am not arguing for this account, but suggesting it as an illustration for how different experiences could determine different philosophical positions which are not resolvable by argument. A similar case might be made for differences in the free will/determinism issue.

These alternatives to the Adversary Paradigm may be objected to by philosophers who are under the delusion that philosophy is different from science, that unlike science, its evaluation procedures are exact and value-free. But for those who accept that what philosophers have said about science (that scientific evaluation is not free from uncertainty and values, because it is

dependent on paradigms) is also true of philosophy, other means of evaluation besides the Adversary Method will not be so objectionable.

I have been criticizing the use of the Adversary Method as a paradigm. And I think one of the best ways to reduce its paradigm status is to point out that it *is* a paradigm, that there are other ways of evaluating, reasoning about and discussing philosophy.

Smith College

NOTES

[1] From Ann Ferguson, 'Androgyny as an Ideal for Human Development', in *Feminism and Philosophy,* eds. M. Vetterling-Braggin, F. Elliston and J. English (Totowa, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams and Co., 1977), p. 47.

[2] Robin Lakoff, *Language and Woman's Place* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

[3] Logical positivism.

[4] Sir Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958.

[5] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 2nd edition (University of Chicago Press, 1962).

[6] It may be that the Adversary Method is only part of the larger paradigm that distinguishes reason from emotion, and segregates philosophy from literature, aligning it with science (dichotomies that Martha Nussbaum [*Philosophy and Literature* **1**, 1978] attributes to Plato). Believing that emotions ought not to affect reasoning, it may seem to follow that who one addresses and why, ought not to affect the reasoning either. I consciously employ the kinship philosophy claims with science in this paper, arguing that truths we have learned about scientific reasoning ought to hold for philosophic reasoning as well.

[7] T. Kuhn, in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge,* 'Reflections on My Critics', ed. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (Cambridge University Press, 1970), 231–278.

[8] See the *Meno,* 75d–e.

[9] Perhaps this is why Emerson, Carlyle and others are discussed only as part of English literature, and their views are not studied much by philosophers. They are not addressing adversaries, but merely presenting a system of ideas.

[10] See Richard Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953) for this view of Socrates' style. I don't mean to single out Robinson for what seems to be the usual interpretation of Socrates. Robinson, at least thought irony and insincerity objectionable. The term "irony" covers a variety of styles including feigned ignorance to upset an opponent, vicious sarcasm and good natured teasing. It is only the latter that would be justifiably attributed to Socrates from the evidence in the dialogues.

[11] See *Euthydemus* 227d, 288d, 295d, where Socrates' method is contrasted with Euthydemus' jeering and belligerent style, and *Meno* 75c–d where Socrates contrasts the present friendly conversation with that of a disputatious and quarrelsome kind. Socrates disapproved of ridicule (*Laches* 1959, *Gorgias* 473d–e, *Euthydemus* 278d, and *Protagorus* 333e).

[12] Socrates teases Polus to get him to change his style (*Gorgias* 461c–462a) and responds to Callicles' insults with praise to get him to agree to a dialogue. Socrates flirts with Meno when he resists questioning (*Meno,* 76b–c) and draws out Lysis by getting him to laugh at his questions (Lysis, 207c and ff.).

[13] *Euthydemus* 288b, 259d, 277d.

[14] For example, Donald Davidson, 'Truth and Meaning' *Synthese* **17** (1967), 304–323.

[15] T. Kuhn, 'Reflections on My Critics', op. cit., p. 234. See Feyerabend, Watkins, etc. in that volume and Dudley Shapere's review of *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* in *Philosophical Review.*

[16] For example, Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality* (Chicago University Press, 1978).

[17] See particularly Brian Medlin, 'Ultimate Principles and Ethical Egoism', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 39 (1957), 111–18.

[18] See, for example, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel* 12.9.16 "Now it is becoming clear why I thought that thinking and language were the same. For thinking is a kind of language."

[19] Many people disagree with the universal beneficence and supremacy of moral considerations advocated by current ethical theories and think that they, and many others, by putting their own interests first, are thereby egoists. But their limited beneficence, which Hume thought was the foundation of morality, is very different from the egoism headlined by philosophers. A philosopher's egoist has *no* moral beliefs and not only thinks "me first" but does not care who comes second, third, or last. A philosopher's egoist has no loyalties to ideals or people and is quite indifferent about the survival and well being of any particular individual or thing.

[20] See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971), p. 191, where he says: "Nothing would have been gained by attributing benevolence to the parties in the original position" rather than egoism because there would be some disagreements even with benevolence. But surely the reasoning needed for people who care about others will be different than for people who do not care about others at all.

[21] Judith Jarvis Thomson, 'A Defense of Abortion,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* **1**, no. 1,1971.

[22] Thomson, in general, makes it very clear that she is addressing an adversary. Nevertheless, she does claim to reach some conclusion about the morality of abortion, although the central issues for people making the decision are barely discussed – the consequences. See her section 8.

[23] Lindley Darden and Nancy Maull, 'Interfield Theories', *Philosophy of Science* **44** (1977), 43–64.