

# *Argument is War . . . and War is Hell: Philosophy, Education, and Metaphors for Argumentation*

DANIEL H. COHEN *Colby College*

**Key words:** metaphor, argument, philosophy, education.

**Abstract:** The claim that argumentation has *no* proper role in either philosophy or education, and especially not in philosophical education, flies in the face of both conventional wisdom and traditional pedagogy. There is, however, something to be said for it because it is really only provocative against a certain philosophical backdrop.

Our understanding of the concept “argument” is both reflected by and molded by the specific metaphor that argument-is-war, something with winners and losers, offensive and defensive moments, and an essentially adversarial structure. Such arguments may be suitable for teaching *a* philosophy, but not for teaching philosophy. Surely, education and philosophy do not need to be conceived as having an adversarial essence—if indeed they are thought to have any essence at all. Accordingly, philosophy and education need more pragmatic goals than even Pierce’s idealized notion of truth as the *end* of inquiry, e.g., the simple *furtherance* of inquiry. For this, new metaphors for framing and understanding the concept of argumentation are needed, and some suggestions in that direction will be considered.

What I want to do—but won’t do—is argue for the thesis that there is no place for argumentation in either philosophy or education, and, accordingly, it is especially true that there is no place for argumentation in philosophical education. Since this is both a philosophical and pedagogical issue, there would be something paradoxical, and self-defeating, about any possible argument that I could offer, so I won’t even try, although I am sure some pretty interesting arguments for it could be constructed. Instead, I shall try to *explain* what I mean by the thesis, rather than *argue* for it or *defend* it, in the usual sense of the words, from critical comment. Like a first proposal before a small town meeting, the ideas suggested here are not offered as final products, but as fodder for others to develop.

Any explanation needs to begin with the relevant concepts of *argument*, of *philosophy*, and of *education* because the thesis at hand is most provocative or objectionable against only some specific, but common, conceptual backdrops. Although these three concepts can be thought of separately, there are important connections among them, and it is not easy to weave them into a single coherent fabric that preserves their integrity as autonomous concepts while respecting their nuanced inter-relations. Certain conceptions of what philosophy is, for example, are incompatible with some teaching methodologies, and conversely, some pedagogies implicitly depend on certain assumptions about the nature of philosophy.

Specifically, I think the inclusion—or intrusion—of argument into philosophy occurs in one of two ways, with very different consequences for education. First, arguments may be thought of as the testing ground for ideas, and thus the way of *securing the truth*. As such, this implicates the kind of realist

metaphysics that, at the metaphilosophical level, is at odds with both the anti-dogmatic conception of process education and the notion that education is really more a matter of edification than of indoctrination. In that case, argumentation may well be an appropriate way to *teach a philosophy*, but it is an altogether inappropriate way to *teach philosophy*.

Alternatively, an argument-centered pedagogy might issue from a Post-Modern rejection of logic and concomitant embrace of rhetoric with the result that, in effect, all possible philosophies are devalued in favor of the act of philosophizing itself. In that case, argumentation becomes an end in itself and a means to nothing at all. Skill in argumentation would then be relevant *for training a philosopher*, but at the expense of making *philosophical training* irrelevant for any philosophy. There has to be a middle ground.

As Lakoff and Johnson point out, our understanding of the concept “argument” is both reflected by and molded by the particular metaphor that argument-is-war.<sup>1</sup> While this is not meant to serve as a definition for “argument,” it does characterize how we think about arguments, talk about arguments, and engage in arguments. Despite all the ambiguities and subtle nuances of the word “argument,” this metaphor manages to permeate to all corners of our discourse about arguments and our argumentation practice. We routinely speak, for example, of *knockdown*, or even *killer*, arguments and *powerful counterattacks*, of *defensible* positions and *winning strategies*, and of *weak* arguments that are easily *shot down* while *strong* ones have a lot of *punch* and are *right on target*. Moreover, we continue to use this language even after we have very carefully and very conscientiously distinguished what we do as philosophers, critics, and educators from the shouting, name-calling, and animosity that characterize dysfunctional families, relationships gone awry, and contentious faculty meetings.<sup>2</sup>

The arguments that concern us as intellectuals are supposed to be sustained chains of reasoning, impersonal in their execution and with only the noblest provenance in the dispassionate search for truth. *Our* arguments, it goes without saying, exhibit only the highest kind of critical detachment and academic objectivity. In what may be called the “official pedagogical” understanding of arguments, they are more like mathematical proofs than they are like verbal warfare. Well, once upon a time, that Enlightened, Modern story may have been plausible, but we live in a Post-Modern, more cynically self-aware time. We now know that that story really does have to follow the words “once upon a time” because it describes a fairy-tale sort of time and place. We do want our arguments to be civil, of course, and our goal is carefully reasoned sequences of the purest rationality, conceptual constructions whose elegance, if not Truth, is plain for all to see. But we also want them to be forceful and strong and, well, *compelling*. The language of warfare remains. There is still a victory to be won. “Wouldn’t it be better,” asks Robert Nozick, fancifully but both provocatively and insightfully,

if philosophical arguments left the person no possible answer at all, reducing him to impotent silence? Even then, he might sit there silently, smiling, Buddhalike. Perhaps philosophers need arguments so powerful they set up reverberations in the brain: if the person refuses to accept the conclusion, he *dies*. How's that for a powerful argument?<sup>3</sup>

We need to take a reflective step back and ask, along with Nozick, "Why are philosophers intent on forcing others to believe things? Is that a nice way to behave toward someone?"

The point is that whether the operative notion of argument is as proof-leading-to-truth or as language-game-leading-to-agreement, arguments are being conceived as having an essentially *adversarial* structure. The true beliefs which an argument's losers have been given, are *coerced* beliefs; and, alternatively, the agreement to which they are now party, is an *imposed* agreement. This is the sort of consideration that, if carried to its extremes, has led one feminist critic to say that any intent to persuade is an act of violence,<sup>4</sup> an attitude that effectively puts an end to all rational discourse and any possible exchange of ideas. But surely, education and philosophy do not need to be conceived as having an adversarial essence<sup>5</sup>—if indeed they are thought to have any essence at all. The argument-is-war metaphor does both reflect our thought and inform our practice, but it is still just a metaphor. It is not an immutable part of the conceptual landscape; it can be changed; and indeed it should be changed to fit the contexts of philosophy and education. They should have goals more in line with the original Pragmatic vision than either *Truth*, whether thought of as a transcendental ideal or even as Peirce's idealized notion of truth as the end of inquiry, or else argumentative *Victory*, the merely rhetorical accomplishment of persuasion. A more orthodox Pragmatic goal for philosophy and education is the simple "furtherance of inquiry." For this, new metaphors for arguments are needed, metaphors that can accommodate cooperation as well as competition.

There are, of course, some very significant educational benefits to be reaped by building the curriculum around arguments—conceived now as chains of reasoning to convince, persuade, or (let's face it) *force* the listener to accept a conclusion. But what if there just aren't any propositions that it is so important for our students to believe that we are philosophically justified in *forcing* our students to believe them? If the Truth really is mighty and shall prevail, our arguments should not be necessary. Still, regardless of the metaphysics, there is an obvious and legitimate place in the classroom for argumentation simply because of the undeniable value of clear and careful thinking, of rigorous and exact expression, and of quick and able evaluation. These skills are intellectual coin of the realm, immediately recognizable as valuable in any endeavor whatsoever, and so need not be rehearsed here. Moreover, they can indeed be taught (or at least improved with the right kind of tutelage), so their place in the classroom should be non-controversial. Such skills are, to revert to the metaphor, effective *weapons* in the intellectual *arsenal*. But, like all other weapons, they can be misused, and that can be dangerous. And, like any weapons, they practically beg to be used. Who is as insufferable as the beginning logic student

who has finally learned how to let *post hoc ergo propter hoc* and *argumentum ad hominem* roll flowingly off the tip of her tongue, or the first year law student as he eagerly cites burden of proof precedents or insists on simple answers to complex questions?

I do not mean to be facetious in offering these minor nuisances as examples of a possible downside to structuring the classroom environment around competitive debate, but there are these costs, and others, to be considered. From the start, debates presuppose that the subject at hand can be carved into distinct and opposing positions, and this tends to squeeze the discussion of even the most complex questions into a black-and-white view of the world.<sup>6</sup> And in the end, dialogues framed by the argument-is-war metaphor require winners and losers. There is, accordingly, a price to be paid in terms of “casualties,” in this case, the personal humiliation suffered by the vanquished. I have no doubts but that the fear of humiliation can be a very powerful motivational tool, and one that can be very, very effective. I also recognize that it has even been a pedagogical method of choice in some long-standing and still vital traditions. However, it seems to have fallen into some disrepute recently, and not, I think, without very good reason.

There are a number of different ways that this can be counter-productive to education. First, and most obvious, there is a high personal price to be paid in terms of individuals’ self-images, and even if that were discounted as being outside the classroom or irrelevant or negligible to the business of teaching some specific subject matter, there is also an attendant risk of long-term alienation from education. Both long-range utilitarian calculations and Kantian considerations from the dignity of the person as a member of the kingdom of ends-in-themselves converge on the idea that this is *not* how we ought to be treating our students. This is not to say that we should be overprotective in nurturing our students, although that direction has probably not been the extreme more commonly taken, but simply that we should enter into the business of actively promoting adversarial argumentation with some circumspection.

There are also potential costs to be paid by the other side, by the “winners” who are regularly successful disputants. These are much easier to overlook. Victory can be intoxicating, and its effect can be further magnified by the nearly irresistible positive reinforcement of the full range of scholastic rewards. There is a clear message here, and it is not the officially stated one: Insight and understanding are nice, of course, but if you want to get ahead, cleverness and rhetorical dexterity are what really matter in life. It’s the flashy Philadelphia lawyers who attain celebrity status, not the reflective legal scholars. Besides, who is there to argue the point? It may be expecting too much of academics, whose careers, after all, are often built precisely on the talents in question, to offer sustained critiques of those talents.

One series of dangers, then, of arguments in the classroom is that when such education is successful, i.e., when students acquire the skills and become adept in the art of forensics, the result may well be not just able arguers, but *argumentative*

arguers: proficient, pedantic and petty. And when the use of argumentation in the classroom is not successful, the students have not just failed to gain anything, they may well have lost something.

If we set aside the Realism that supposes arguments lead to truth—that line of thinking that takes a mathematical proof as the paradigm form of argument—a different set of benefits and costs can come into focus. For example, one of the great pedagogical virtues of argumentation is that it demands a certain degree of engagement with the subject matter. It combats “passive learning,” the bane of educators the world over. But even this might have a negative aspect to it. Without going so far as to celebrate passivity, we can recognize that there can be as many different successful learning styles as there are teaching styles. There may be some students who really do learn best just by listening very well. In that case, the classroom use of argumentation is a Procrustean bed into which all students can be made to fit . . . but for some the fit will be more damaging than for others.

Arguing about some topic does presuppose some engagement with that topic, and that is all to the good, but what about the quality of that engagement?<sup>7</sup> Proficient debaters, like good lawyers, are prepared to argue either side of a question, and that kind of preparation generally precludes a strong commitment to one side or the other. What if a genuine understanding of one side in the debate requires at least the commitment of a sympathetic reading? If that is ever the case, then preparing to argue will get in the way of interpretation. Thus, when we ask our students to argue for one side in a debate on some issue, we could be making it harder for them even to understand the other side.<sup>8</sup> And shouldn't our students—and we ourselves, for that matter—have *some* strong commitments? Everything may be debatable, but that does not mean that everyone should in fact debate everything. Good trial lawyers should not be the only recognized legitimate end product of an educational system. There ought to be room for educating activists. Put another way and with a slightly different emphasis, a pragmatic philosophy of education will recognize more ways of being practical than just the vocational.

Along with these questions about the level and quality of the engagement with the material required by arguments, and about learning styles and pedagogical strategies, there is another, more fundamental question to be considered, one that will be raised here, but left to others to pursue: What is the *ideology* of argumentation? *Academic objectivity* is presupposed by arguments-as-proofs, while *critical detachment* is a presupposition for arguments-as-language-games, yet from another perspective, both “academic objectivity” and “critical detachment” are grotesque oxymorons. There is a largely unexamined ideology to arguments that needs to be subject to its own argumentative scrutiny. What the pervasive argument-is-war metaphor reveals is that the operative ideology commits us, if not to truth and falsity, or to right and wrong sides, at the very least to winners and losers.

To be sure, there are alternative understandings of argumentation available. I think it completely justified to speak of the *progress* that has been made in characterizing argumentation by exploiting the resources of speech act theory, critical theory, formal logic, rhetorical analysis, and all the other relevant conceptual tools at our disposal. To take one example, arguments can be characterized in terms of their various linguistic roles or in terms of their effects as conversational episodes. From that perspective, one of the primary functions of an argument is “enhancing the acceptability of the speech act for which it is an argument.”<sup>9</sup> What I like about this particular formula, besides its succinct elegance, is how it abstracts to a level from which the adversarial element can be regarded as merely an accidental means to a more important end, and thereby allows for other means to that end. It creates room for answers to the question of why someone might seek arguments for something she already believes; the argument-is-war metaphor does not. It also endorses the possibility of arguing *for* something without arguing *against* anybody; and again, the argument-is-war metaphor cannot accommodate that. Specifically, explanations qualify as arguments under this conception, and this seems meet since explanations constitute a large part of many arguments. Explanation can indeed serve as a kind of justification, and justification generally is the province of argument.

This points to a way to articulate the connection between interpretation and argumentation that was suggested earlier: in order to understand some texts, a certain kind of sympathetic reading can be necessary. This might involve speculating about an author’s motives, providing a charitable interpretation for apparently inconsistent passages, or the like. From the perspective provided by thinking of arguments along the speech-act lines just presented, reading looks a lot like arguing with the author. Readers need to argue *with*, meaning *alongside*, the author rather than *with*, meaning *against*, the author, in order to enhance whatever it is that the text is saying, showing, or doing. And, needless to say, authors and readers do not have to be adversaries. The “argument” between them is not adversarial. This is not, to be sure, how students of philosophy are typically taught to read a philosophical text. They are trained to read “critically,” i.e., they are trained to read with a combatant’s eye, an eye that is open for any weaknesses in the argument that can be turned to advantage in a critical paper. All too often we read the way we argue in another respect: we read with “our defenses up” lest we be convinced of something we didn’t want to believe. “I’ll be damned if I’m going to let this author teach me something new!” Since this is not the attitude we want in the classroom, we should think along different lines:

(1) *Argument is not war; it is reciprocal reading.*

Speech-act approaches have shown that they can shed light on the subject of argumentation. Unfortunately, what should be understood as helpful characterizations are all too often interpreted as definitive analyses or necessary and sufficient conditions, i.e., as *definitions*. These can then be taken as challenges to other workers in the field to find or construct both counterexamples

that *should* belong to the category but do not fit the description, and counterexamples that do fit the description but *should not* count as arguments. For the example at hand, it might be pointed out that one way of enhancing a speech act is to say it with a smile, but that should hardly count as an *argument*. Or, again, revising a poem seems a clear example of a speech-act-enhancing activity that is just as clearly not an argument. Arguments may include interpretations, but that does not make all interpreters into arguers. Conversely, when I tell my son to wear his seat belt, and answer his question, "Why?" by offering appropriate reasons, I am not arguing for or enhancing the acceptability of any *speech-act*, except under some *ad hoc* reading, although I am certainly arguing for *some act*: his buckling his seat belt. While it is certainly helpful to have as wide a variety of examples as possible at hand, this can degenerate into an esoteric exercise, indeed an idle *academic* exercise of exactly the same sort of nit-picking that I have just done with the counter-examples here. I have taken a very illuminating characterization and managed to show that, being very, very legalistic, it is, to no one's surprise, inadequate as a definition. What we need are not new definitions, but new metaphors. Fortunately, Aristotle was wrong in thinking that metaphor is the work of genius. On the contrary, metaphor is a linguistic commonplace, something that every competent language user understands and employs (although, to be sure, creating the brilliant metaphors that permanently reshape our thoughts is no mean feat).

I sometimes think that what good philosophizing and, more generally, effective teaching of any kind have in common is that they revolve around the same kind of activity: the search for just the right metaphor. Metaphors are more than merely elliptical similes or stylistic affectations for embellished expression. They are vehicles for making the unfamiliar familiar, which is what makes them particularly important for *education*. There is, however, something funny about characterizing metaphors as linguistic devices for articulating unfamiliar thoughts by transplanting them into a more familiar context: it buys into the questionable dichotomy of thought and language. The implied model is that we think things, and then we somehow translate them into written or spoken words. Thinking and speaking or writing are not nearly as easily distinguishable as this model suggests. There is some wisdom in the old chestnut "How am I supposed to know what I think until I hear what I have to say?" Metaphors are not just elegant or clever ways of conveying new thoughts; they are also ways of thinking new thoughts, of grasping those thoughts, and even of formulating them in the first place. And this is what makes the art of metaphor so important for *philosophy*. Because I think of both philosophy and education this way, I think the question that we really should be addressing is not where and how arguments fit into philosophy and education, but what metaphors for arguments fit in with the goals of philosophy and education. It is especially appropriate to ask the question in this form when philosophy and education are being sung in a Pragmatist key.

The meaning of a metaphor is invariably, and notoriously, under-determined. This is what stymies reading them as elliptical similes. Sure, arguments are like

war, but how? Everything is like everything else in some respect, if we are but clever enough to see it. Arguments are rafts on the sea of uncertainty carrying us to the *terra firma* of truth. Arguments are verbal dances responding to inaudible Gricean rhythms and unknown Jungian syllogisms. Arguments are the mortar holding together the bricks out of which theories are built. Arguments are mental exercises for athletes of the intellect. It is not hard, I think, to make sense out of any of these metaphors, but it is an amazing ability nonetheless. Interpreting metaphors is nearly the art that creating them is.

In some respects, interpreting metaphors may actually be the greater art. The exercise of creating metaphors can with relatively little effort be extended indefinitely. Even restricting ourselves just to traffic metaphors (and getting carried away with the exercise), we can say that arguments are (i) conversational traffic jams—(ii) gridlock with a lot of honking and little movement; (iii) arguments are conversational traffic accidents; (iv) they are wrong turns, or (v) detours, or (vi) dead ends or (vii) roundabouts on the streets of discourse; or should we have said that they are (viii) short cuts to the truth at the end of the road; maybe (ix) they are long and winding roads to nowhere; or, instead, we can conceive of arguments as (x) intellectual one way roads to their conclusions—although maybe they are really (xi) one-lane roads but with two-way traffic. More positively, they can be thought of as a case of (xii) a merging traffic of ideas or even better as (xiii) conceptual roads under construction.

Conceptual connections like these can be constructed almost at will. The list can be expanded, if not *ad infinitum*, then at least *ad nauseam*, so that almost any arbitrarily constructed metaphor, even an initially inscrutable one, such as that arguments are the road kill alongside the highways of life (*ad nauseam* indeed!), can be made intelligible and plausible: both arguments and road kill are to be avoided, they are the tragic end for those who innocently enter areas of high traffic, they are what can happen when we aren't careful, and so on. Admittedly, this is stretching the point, but that is exactly what metaphors do so well. Still, the fact that so many traffic metaphors are so readily available suggests that they identify an important set of features about arguments, viz., something about their internal dynamics and the possible interactions that can arise from them.

In contrast to the argument-as-traffic metaphors, the argument-is-war metaphor makes a different point. What it emphasizes (or creates!) is the adversarial aspect of argumentation, which is why this particular metaphor is objectionable in the classroom. But, interpretation being an art, other conclusions could also be drawn from the metaphor. There will always be an indefinitely large supply of abstractable similarities between the tenor and vehicle of a metaphor, wars and arguments in this case. Wars may involve more than just two parties, but never less than two, and we usually assume that this is true of arguments as well; wars can be ended by simple agreement of the parties involved, and so can arguments; wars are occasions that test the national resolve and sense of identity, while arguments can do the same for the individual; wars need not end with a winner and a loser, because both sides might claim victory,



when in fact both sides may have lost a great deal, and there is surely a counterpart for arguments.

Of course, there are also great differences that might be offered as counterexamples or counterbalances to the value of this metaphor. Wars can be prevented by diplomatic efforts, so they represent a failure of diplomacy. Arguments are not always symptomatic of communicative failure. Often they are the expressly intended product of rational inquiry! Indeed, if we include rational discourse under the rubric “diplomacy,” then it is precisely arguments as we “officially” conceive them that can best prevent wars! Wars can be prevented by arguing, but arguing, obviously, cannot. Argument, as rational engagement, is antithetical to military engagement, and the metaphor would then have to be seen as an ironic reversal. (Then again, if fighting for peace can make sense, so might arguing for agreement.) If arguments are to be a positive way of addressing differences, then

(2) *Argument is not war; it is diplomatic negotiation.*

Two of these just-mentioned features common to war and argument merit particular attention. First, wars never end up where they started. The *status quo ante bellum* can never really be achieved. What starts out as a war of principle, especially when successful, might well end up as a war of conquest, and, conversely, the unsuccessful war for conquest is transformed into a war of principle. Successful defensive re-actions inevitably seek to pre-empt any possible future transgressions. What, for example, was the American Civil War all about? The Vietnam War? The Gulf War? The answers that today’s history books offer differ from the answers given by those wars’ own contemporaries.

Something very similar happens in arguments, especially when they are thought of as verbal wars. Interestingly, Imre Lakatos has made just this point with respect to mathematical proofs, the very paradigms for the “official” picture of arguments as exercises in pure reason.<sup>10</sup> Proofs and refutations, he argued, are two parts of the same dialectical process. Counter-examples to proposed theorems, he maintained, do not in general function as real refutations. Rather, the role they most often play in mathematics is to demand further clarification of the intended range of the thesis or to seek greater articulation in the definitions of the concepts used. The theorems that result from, or survive, this process are inevitably changed by the process. That is, what a proof is “all about” changes as the proof proceeds, and this is no less applicable to other kinds of arguments.

(3) *Thus, argument is not war; it is growth or adaptation.*

Wittgenstein reached a very similar conclusion about mathematical proofs, albeit for different reasons.<sup>11</sup> A proof, he asserted, never proves what it set out to prove. Proofs establish new conceptual connections between the thesis in question and other parts of the system of mathematics. These connections are *constitutive* of the meanings of the concepts involved, so the meaning of the sentence proved

always has new semantic-conceptual accretions. Therefore, the sentence that *has been proved*, the theorem, can never have exactly the same meaning as the sentence *to be proved*, despite their typographic identity. In just the same way, to revert to an earlier example, no poem can really ever be revised because any revisions would, in a very real sense, result in a new and different poem. Is there a way to think of arguments as altering, or even constructing, new meanings? That is, can what an argument is “all about” be subject to the same sorts of historiographic revisions as the *casus belli*? It seems so.

(4) *That is, argument is not war; it is metamorphosis.*

The other feature common to wars and arguments I want to note is that they are multiple-agent events (or, at least, multi-voice events, to accommodate those of us who habitually argue with themselves). It takes more than one party to start a war or an argument, it takes more than one party to sustain a war or argument, and it also takes more than one to finish a war or argument. Just as a war is never really over until both sides agree to a cessation of hostilities—otherwise there will be a prolonged guerrilla war, permanent tensions, or an uneasy truce without real peace—so too an argument is never really over until some sort of consensus has been achieved—lest there be continued verbal sniping, simmering resentments, or a lingering grudge beneath the surface. Arguments might result in situations that are analogous to the results of wars, but there is also the possibility that they end otherwise. Arguments may result in an exchange of ideas, rather than just the imposition of one side’s ideas on the other. And this is certainly a legitimate pedagogical role for arguments. In the classroom, then,

(5) *Argument should not even be like war; it should be a kind of cross-pollination, leading to hybridization.*

Alternatively, arguments can end in with the construction of a new conceptual order, as the Second World War gave birth to the United Nations. Ideally, in seminar

(6) *Argument is not at all war; it is brainstorming.*

The best arguments, then, rather than being destructively adversarial, involve a constructive co-operation between their participants. If debate is to be constructive for everyone involved, then

(7) *Instead of being a kind of war, argument can be more like a barnraising.*

Although the language of warfare is so readily used to describe arguments, there is a difference that is both obvious and important, but still easy to overlook: arguments, like brainstorming sessions or barn-raising, can be desirable in a way that wars cannot. If we focus on the possible outcomes rather than the origins, the ends rather than the beginnings, then one way to conceptualize arguments is

as those events in rational discourse that tend to create or lead to consensus. This combines the transformative-constructivist aspect with the multiple-agency aspect of arguments in a way that accommodates the move from philosophy as the pursuit-of-truth to philosophy as the pursuit-of-wisdom by shifting the balance in emphasis from (to borrow a phrase from Richard Rorty) objectivity to solidarity, while simultaneously respecting the possibility of non-competitive or even cooperative argumentation for educational ends. Simply put: "Let's hash it out" does not have to mean "let's fight it out."

Perhaps arguments are more like *town meetings* than anything else, because they are sometimes contentious, but sometimes co-operative; there may be several opposing factions, or only interested but as yet undecided citizens; sometimes they are divisive and inconclusive, but sometimes they are indeed constructive; they may begin with a consensus for action, and serve merely as strategy sessions for orchestrating actions, or they may begin with a cacophony of voices—and end the same way.

For all its openness to the variety of forms arguments can take, the purposes they can serve, and the many possible outcomes that can result from them, in the end, I don't think the town-meeting metaphor serves very well. It will not challenge the argument-is-war metaphor, if only because town meetings do not occupy as prominent a place in our conceptual geography as war. War is, however, a dangerous metaphor, particularly when it has been allowed to form, to *deform*, argumentation in the classroom. Other metaphors are available, and still others that are even better are waiting to be created, but in the end I am skeptical that any single metaphor can fit all the shapes that arguments take or serve all the purposes that arguments serve. In that case, we do not really need to come up with a new metaphor to reflect and reform our practice; we need instead to traffic in as many metaphors as possible—including all those traffic metaphors!

---

<sup>1</sup> Lakoff and Johnson 1980, pp. 1-6.

<sup>2</sup> Many others have noticed this as well., e.g., Nozick 1981, pp. 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Sally M. Gearheart, p. 195.

<sup>5</sup> Maryann Ayim 1991, and elsewhere, has also raised the question of the metaphors we use to talk about our philosophical discourse and educational practices.

<sup>6</sup> This important observation was first suggested to me by my colleague Jill Gordon.

<sup>7</sup> Andrea Nye, beginning with Nye 1981, has also argued against pedagogies that overemphasize rhetorical skills, and the combative structure of discourse about philosophical discourse.

<sup>8</sup> I think there is a very important, but all too often overlooked, connection between argumentation and interpretation that becomes more visible here than elsewhere. It is addressed more directly below.

<sup>9</sup> Haft-Van Rees 1989 attributes this to van Eemeren and Grootendorst.

<sup>10</sup> Lakatos 1976, esp., ch. I, parts 6-8.

<sup>11</sup> Wittgenstein 1956, e.g., §11-31: "One would like to say: the proof changes the grammar of our language, changes our concepts. It makes new connexions, and it creates the concept of

these connexions. It does not establish that they are there; they do not exist until it makes them."

## Bibliography

- Ayim, Maryann, "Dominance and Affiliation," *Informal Logic*, 13 (2) (Spring 1991), pp. 79-88.
- Black, Max, "Metaphors," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* N.S. 55 (1954-55), pp. 273-294. Reprinted in Johnson 1981.
- Davidson, Donald, "What Metaphors Mean," *Critical Inquiry*, 5 (1978), pp. 31-47. Reprinted in Johnson 1981.
- Haft-Van Rees, M. Agnes, "Conversation, Relevance, and Argumentation," *Argumentation*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (November 1989), pp. 385-393.
- Gearhart, Sally Miller, "The womanization of rhetoric," *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, Vol. 2, (1979), pp. 195-201.
- Grice, H. P., "Logic and Conversation" in P. Cole and J. Morgan, eds., *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 3, (London: Academic Press, 1975).
- Johnson, Mark, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981).
- Lakatos, Imre, *Proofs and Refutations*, John Worrall and Elie Zahar, editors (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
- Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
- Nozick, Robert, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1981).
- Nye, Andrea, "The Practice of Philosophy: Response to Van Der Bogert," *Teaching Philosophy*, Vol. 4 (January 1981), pp. 55-59.
- Rorty, Richard, *The Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).
- Rorty, Richard, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- Searle, John, "Metaphor," in *Expression and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 76-116. Reprinted in Johnson 1981.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness, trans. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961).
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956).
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, third edition, G.E.M. Anscombe, trans. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958).

DANIEL H. COHEN  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
COLBY COLLEGE  
WATERVILLE, ME 04901-4799

