

From the Virtues of Argumentation to the Happiness of Dispute

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1. Introduction

Happiness and virtue can contribute to educational activities related to argumentation, supporting the basic idea that genuinely practical training in the regulated debate activities should carry out «happy disputes» in real discussions (Mastroianni 2017). The pursuit of happiness is the most suitable perspective, from the pedagogical point of view, to draw the maximum effect from regulated debate models for schools, universities, and other training institutions.

Such a perspective is capable of bringing a twofold advantage. The first is to act as a corrective to the risk of reductionism that can always afflict regulated debate activities. For a complete preparation to the discussion, all the ontological constituents of argumentation (Godden 2016, 345) must be valued: actors (arguers and audiences), arguments (what is exchanged between arguers and their audiences), and arguing (understood as the activity through which arguments are exchanged). An approach based on happiness, that is, on achieving the maximum possible satisfaction in obtaining the good from a discussion, can reconcile the interdependence of these three elements best, enhancing each in its importance.

The second advantage is that the perspective of the pursuit of happiness forces us to anchor every regulated and ‘laboratory’ activity to criteria of good discussion applicable to the reality of the real debates that take place in everyday life. Otherwise, the risk is a production of a ‘kind of gym’ in which they train the

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muscles for artificial debates, which are then hardly applicable to real situations. It is a perspective that goes beyond the pure theoretical interest in the study of argumentation and instead considers the reality of imperfect argumentation in which one is involved continuously in real interactions.

This essay will follow a reverse methodology by examining a typical unhappy and non-virtuous online discussion in section 2. The intent is to consider how a quarrel produces some satisfaction for the actors and the public, however negatively influencing the arguments and arguing. Starting from these real and imperfect characteristics, we will try in section 3 to imagine an alternative model of a dispute capable of competing with the immediate but ephemeral satisfaction that produces the quarrel. It will be the perspective of virtues, understood as the pursuit of excellence in discussing even in adverse conditions, and meant to compete with the temptation to produce non-constructive discussions.

In section 4, we will exploit some promising ideas from the so-called Virtue Argumentation Theory (VAT) which some authors have proposed in recent years (Cohen 2008; 2013; Aberdein 2010; 2014; Paglieri 2015; Gascón 2016), and we will trace the difference between skills and virtues.

Section 5 provides a possible articulation between the dimension of competition and cooperation in argumentation, searching for criteria that can inspire the evaluation of the regulated debate. The approach of the virtues of argumentation is the one that can best motivate to conduct disputes with a competitive and cooperative attitude at the same time. Instead, in the perspective based only on argumentation skills, the opposite is achieved.

The conclusion is that ‘being right’ is not everything. Our idea is that a dispute is made up on one side of authentic dissent – the competition of the arguments – but at the same time it is always bound by the priority of searching for the real and possible good for arguers – the cooperation between agents.

It will be this ability to stand in dissent without quarreling that will allow debates to be deliberative in a renewed sense: not so much in reaching an agreement as a point of balance between adverse positions, but in recognizing the other’s difference as an essential element for the contemplation of a truth investigated together. It can be defined as *the contemplation of difference*, borrowing it from the Aristotelian conception of contemplation as a path to happiness (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b, 20-25). It provides the motivation that can lead to conduct debates that arrive at something (that can be deliberative), instead of quarrels which, despite their ephemeral satisfaction, lead nowhere.

2. A real case of a quarrel: what does not work

Let us consider a real case of failed discussion. During the worst days of the first Coronavirus crisis in Italy, in March 2020, I came across one of the numerous online discussions that populated the social networks. It was a discussion with a special feature: it took place between two experts, trained on the subject and equipped with all the necessary and sufficient skills to address the issue. In

this case, they had engaged in a dispute over the adequacy of the contact tracing application proposed by the Italian Government.

We will not consider all the passages of the discussion for our reflection, but only those from a certain point on, when the exchange suddenly stops being an argument and counter-argument and becomes a quarrel, effectively putting an end to the debate. Here are more or less some of the last steps of the interaction:

Interlocutor 1: «As you can see, I have to rebut, but it is a futile exercise, there is no ability to discuss».

Interlocutor 2: «So it is you who is good at discussing!».

Interlocutor 1: «Oh well, it takes one to know one, without answering on the merits».

Interlocutor 2: «Without answering on the merits? We spent weeks providing evidence, and you say this?».

From discussing the question where they started, they moved on to the meta-discussion on the (inadequate) way of being in it on each part; or rather, each interlocutor has gone on to charge the other with a lack of argumentative capacity. That is, a shift from disagreement about content to relationship has occurred (Watzlawick 1971, 73-4); so much so that in these interactions, the initial theme is no longer even mentioned or considered. They no longer discuss the ideas, but the fact that the people involved are presenting the ideas in a certain way. This passage from discussing a topic to questioning people is what I will mean by the term 'quarrel' in these pages.

Let's observe at least three effects that this type of discussion failure brings with it (Mastroianni 2020, 21-31). The first, as we have seen, is *the loss of the topic* under discussion: they stop discussing and arguing about what they started from in the debate, and they begin to turn to something else, such as the personal characteristics of the interlocutor, the way the other is managing the debate, and so on.

The second effect I would define as *transparency*. While the two accuse each other and go on clashing, they show to those who attend the discussion some of their character traits and attitudes towards the other (negative in this case), without the usual social filter that usually makes you keep control over your reactions in a confrontation. In this case, the two experts end up in a kind of childish competition to prove who is the best, not based on the ideas proposed, but on the behaviour taking place in the dispute dynamics.

The third effect, which is the most serious, is the *spectacularity*. Anyone who observes two people who clash, who engage in a quarrel, can experience a form of pleasure. The quarrel, in fact, always has its attraction. The first form of satisfaction might be that, when we witness a failed public discussion between two people who do not understand each other, we feel better, superior: observing them fail, we tell ourselves, «I would not have made such blunders». In this lies its negativity: more than being a pleasure that comes from pursuing a good, it is a satisfaction for the confirmation of one's superiority compared to another

who is undergoing a ‘poor discussion’ meaning an interaction with few argumentative values.

However, such satisfaction is only possible when the audience is detached both from interlocutors and from the arguments and positions they are advocating. It is more likely that the interaction will produce, instead, the effect of confirmation biases and the polarising dynamics typical of the so-called echo chambers (Quattrociochi 2016). The bystanders, already lined up on one side or the other of the contenders, interpret the explosion of the quarrel as a signal that their similar interlocutor is imposing his line on the other. In Italy, especially in journalistic language, the term ‘asphalting’ is often used (Di Valvasone 2019) to indicate the action of winning in a confrontation by humiliating and reducing the other to silence with one’s answers. The image is that of the steamroller, which smooths out any roughness of the asphalt, making it smooth with its weight. This figurative use expresses the satisfaction of being part of a team and of seeing one’s ‘champion’ dominate the opponent; this happens thanks to the aggressiveness of the expressions (D’Errico and Poggi 2010; 2014) or to the identification with one’s partisan opinion, rather than because of the argumentative content of one’s statement (Baldi 2021).

These two types of satisfaction can be traced back to what Aristotle defines as *deplorable* or *distracting pleasures* (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1175b, 1173b), which do not lead to the good of the action in question (in this case a discussion) but distract from it.

The point is that in participating in this spectacle that causes distracting or deplorable pleasure, one pays a very high price, which is the loss of trust (Mastroianni 2020, 27-9). The effects of shifting the focus from the discussion to the questioning of the disputants first produce a loss of confidence in the debate itself. By dint of losing the issues along the way, one gets the feeling that one cannot discuss. However, there is also a loss of trust towards *people* (who are perceived as being in constant difficulty with regard to discussing) and their *ability to discuss*: different opinions seem forced to remain such and irreconcilable, as if it were useless to try to compare them.

The case reported adds a further load on this triple mistrust because the dynamic is generated precisely between experts: authoritative, titled, and prepared characters, with a consolidated public following. The ordinary citizens who attend will feel, by their status as non-experts, even more weakened in the possibility of having meaningful discussions. In the case considered, the discussion is online, written, persistent, and capable of reaching many more people over time than those reached at the time of failure, and its adverse effects can extend much longer than what happens at the time of its occurrence (Cohen 2017; Mastroianni 2018).

In short, we notice how in this exchange what is lacking in the arguers is the dedication to the theme (i.e., continuing to argue on the merits) and the detachment from oneself (not ending up on a personal and *ad hominem* level). On closer inspection, the flaw is what we could define as a lack of «virtuous sensitivity to the situation» (Gascón 2016, 11). The two interlocutors, in fact, not only

carry out argumentative improprieties, but it is as if they forget the real stakes of their discussion: the possible good that could derive from it, both for them as contenders (although in this phase of the exchange they are no longer obtaining benefits in terms of better knowledge and focus on the topic), and for the broad audience that attends to their discussion.

In other words, this example, which is only one among many possible, introduces us to a fundamental question about the evaluation of the discussion and its criteria. A discussion does not fail only on the argument level which got lost along the way and entered a purely *ad hominem* terrain. It does not fail even only on the level of argumentation which has become a denunciation of the other's alleged incorrect moves. The fullness of the failure can be understood only if it is judged from the point of view of the good at stake for the actors involved, who are the two arguers as well as all the supporting actors, i.e., those who, without intervening, have an active role in the discussion (Cohen 2013, 481).

An interesting debate has recently arisen about the possibility and opportunity of judging argumentation according to an argument-centered or agent-centered perspective (see, for example, Howell and Kingsbury 2013; Aberdein 2014; Paglieri 2015; Godden 2016). We will return to this topic later, in section 5, but among these authors, the proponents of the Virtue Argumentation Theory (VAT) argue that the agent-centered approach based on virtues is the most suitable for focusing on aspects of the argumentation that would otherwise be missed by the classical evaluation schemes.

As Gascón argues, informal logic and pragma-dialectics provide essential elements of evaluation from their respective points of view in judging the cogency and validity of the argument, and the compliance with the rules of argumentation for a reasonable discussion; but the point is that these approaches «do not reveal the whole story» (Gascón 2016, 10).

3. A response in competition with the effects of a quarrel

An educational debate model, which leads to some results in real discussions that are deliberative, must consider the good (or the bad) of the people involved, helping to intervene precisely on the natural tendency to failure that brings with it any dialectical exchange. In short, we must devise something that does not remain only on the level of argumentation theory but can compete with the effects of the quarrel we have observed and can correct them.

The challenge is not only to teach to conduct debates that are formally flawless, well regulated, and capable of training the rationality of argumentation, but also to train real and versatile arguers, capable of adapting their behaviour based on imperfect and failure-prone exchanges in everyday life.

Such a model of the regulated debate should aim to compete with the three effects of the quarrel:

1. *Dedication to the theme*: if one of the quarrel's effects is the loss of the topic, knowing how to stay on it and return to it continuously will be one of the main ways to rebuild trust in the possibility of discussion.

2. Mastery of the *transparency* effect: the arguer's ability to present himself to the public in the discussion in a certain way will be a central (and not collateral) aspect of the discussion itself.
3. A 'virtuous' *spectacle*: carrying out disputes that produce not a deplorable or distracting pleasure in the audience, but the pleasure generated in conducting an activity by pursuing the good that it brings in itself.

Challenge number 1, which focuses on the argument's centrality, apparently contradicts what is mentioned about virtues in the previous paragraph. One of the criticisms against VAT has been levelled precisely at its being unbalanced on the agent rather than the argument. *Bowell and Kingsbury (2013)* point out that the validity aspects of the arguments cannot be eliminated. Therefore, the theory of virtues, focusing on the arguer, does not seem to be able to act as a real alternative to the more classical approach centred on the argument. On a similar line, *Godden (2016)* has raised a priority issue. An arguer-centered perspective needs a foundation in a particular conception of rationality, to recognise a good argument that is the virtuous behaviour's final aim. In short, the value of the virtuous arguer's action would be secondary and subordinated to the argument's sound quality.

Fabio Paglieri has responded quite effectively to some of these findings, showing how the truly beneficial aspect of VAT is precisely that of not having the validity and cogency of the arguments at the center, that is, of not needing such a foundation for its subject of study (*Paglieri 2015, 69-71*). This perspective is taken up by *Gascón (2016)* by observing that precisely what goes beyond mere validity and cogency is essential to evaluate the argumentation in a truly complete way.

Following Paglieri and Gascón's line, we need to consider the reality of interactions in flesh and blood. The centrality of the argument, mentioned by Godden, *Bowell*, and *Kingsbury*, is a theoretical issue that, when translated in a real discussion, is always subordinated to arguers' capacity and motivation to stay in it and not to deviate from it. In short, the behaviour of the arguer is the only thing that can place the argument at the center, keeping its validity and cogency as the evaluative fulcrum of the discussion.

It is a sort of paradox that we could formulate as follows. To keep the argument at the center and not end up on the personal, you need a personal motivation to put the argument at the center. Without this motivation, the argument's priority from a theoretical and logical point of view is lost in practice, as in the example seen in section 2: from the content of the discussion, we move to the relationship and (negative) judgment on people. The validity and cogency of the argument will never sustain alone the success of a real discussion. If we want to be realistically argument-centered and give validity and cogency a relevant weight, we cannot ignore that centrality will depend on how much the arguer will commit to it. And this is a matter of virtues.

Let us try to explain this through an example. A trainer is giving a lesson in digital education to a group of parents. At one point, one of the participants raising his hand says: «Do you have children?». It happens that the trainer has no

offspring. Therefore, the statement has a very effective enthymematic formulation (Paglieri 2011), which implicitly and indirectly supports an argument against the trainer's reliability and credibility on the subject. It is an *ad hominem* attack that cannot be considered entirely fallacious. Its legitimacy lies in the fact that the trainer's condition could constitute an element that weakens his ability to pass on experiences to those struggling with their children's education. This is one of those *ad hominem* arguments that Aberdein (2014) defines *adhominemU*, that is, based on the fact that a personal characteristic of the interlocutor undercuts his argument. Aberdein argues that this *ad hominem* is legitimate, distinguishing it from the fallacious *adhominemR*, used to rebut the other's argument. In short, this is not an attack that can be dismissed as a mere distraction from the issue, because the question of credibility raised is pertinent to the topic under discussion (Mastroianni 2020, 95-6).

In this situation, the arguer could respond from a pragmatic or pure informal-logic perspective by denouncing the *ad hominem*: «Are you perhaps questioning my competence?» and relaunching with a counter-argument: «I have several years of study on the subject behind me». The effect of this statement would run a risk similar to the example we saw in section 2, with the three effects of the quarrel:

1. *loss of topic*: they will stop talking about digital education and instead discuss the preparation of the trainer or the prejudicial way the participant is expressing her dissent;
2. *transparency*: the two will show that they are not in a good relationship because one accuses and the other defends his good name;
3. *spectacularity*: some parents will line up with the criticism of the participant; others will be on the side of the trainer.

Now let us think of a different answer, which could be at the height of the dedication to the theme and the detachment from oneself required to a virtuous disputant: «It is just because I have no children that I have a more independent point of view on digital education, and that I could be helpful». Giving such an answer, the trainer would have three effects: that of returning to the merits of the question because he shows he is competent and at the same time he is saying «let's not talk about me, let's go back to talking about digital education»; that of reinforcing the relationship in the moment of dissent (he was not offended by the alleged accusation, but accepted it as a valid argument to reply to); finally, making the exchange pleasant and spectacular thanks to a subversion (Mastroianni 2017, 105-08) that turns an alleged weakness (not having children = not having experience) into a strength (not having children = having an independent point of view).

What can be observed in these two different possible reactions of the trainer is that, to put the argument at the center of a discussion and keep it that way, there is a need for motivations beyond the argument itself, such as: detachment from oneself to not take offence; motivation to cooperate even in case of dissent; sensitivity to the good of the listener; and maintaining the peace of the discussion.

The return to the topic took place thanks to virtue in action, in this case, intellectual humility (Kidd 2016), which allowed the trainer to have the confidence to accept the questioning of his preparation. It is what elsewhere I have called «the move of the kitten» (Mastroianni 2019). Instead of counterattacking by denouncing the opponent's incorrect action and expanding the scope of your own competences (like a proud lion defending himself), you reduce your perimeter of competences (the kitten) and show that such an apparent limit is actually a useful resource for addressing the subject and thus returning to it.

Beyond the case itself, for which it is difficult to give a real estimate of how it would end, there is an element to consider: the argument-centered perspective (and its validity) is fully realised in the presence of an arguer who follows the perspective of virtues. The arguer's virtuous behaviour can only encourage putting the argument at the center, thus avoiding that you end up getting distracted by going personal.

This introduces and connects to challenge number 2, on the *transparency effect* and the consequent self-control an agent should have in a debate. Here we come to the more pragmatic aspects of the interaction (i.e., arguing in a more or less correct way), whose weight is fully grasped thanks to the broader gaze provided by virtues or vices.

In fact, what can lead the trainer not to give a quarrelsome answer, but to be patient and willing to discuss even in the face of an *ad hominem* attack? It is not arguing itself, nor even the argument, but something more. It is the recognition of what is happening in this discussion: the trainer is challenged in front of the public. On closer inspection, what is really at stakes in the *ad hominem* «Do you have children?» is not fully recognisable if understood only in terms of informal logic, and not even in a purely pragmatic interpretative key. That sentence «Do you have children?», uttered by a 'parent among parents' in the position of receiving specific training, and addressed to a 'teacher' in the position of giving that training, represents a challenge to an entire system of values and meanings linked to the relationship in which the interlocutors find themselves.

In short, the stake is not limited to expressing a set of more or less reasonable ideas about training. Instead, it concerns the recognition or disavowal of the goodness of a relationship, developing in a specific and real moment, recognising or not the other person as a competent expert adequate for the purpose. Among other things, there is also the affirmation of a vision of the world (the pre-eminence of personal experience over knowledge), combined with a moral call to the union of like-minded people (parents subjected to the difficulties of education), against someone 'different', a theorist-trainer who can have the privilege of discussing this issue without having fingers in the pie.

Probably my exploration of what is in the enthymematic question «Do you have children?» has gone too far, but the emphasis serves to consider how high and wide the stakes are. It is a conflict of values that will affect the meaning of the trainer-parent relationship in the context in which they find themselves and the possibility of cooperation among those who participate in that communicative situation. This will also affect the reputation of the trainer and of his opponent

in the future after this exchange. Note how a discussion can never be limited to purely argumentative elements understood in the classical sense. This is the «rest of the story» that the VAT perspective can reveal.

The trainer's taking into account the participant's dissent turns out to be not only a virtuous action, but also a dialectically significant move to return to gain credibility and transmit knowledge effectively in that real discussion. In short, the perspective of virtue and knowing how to keep the argument central is also significant from a pragmatic point of view.

Adelino Cattani, in his reflection on the debate, speaks of two opposing models of discussion with the useful images of the *duel* and the *duet* (Cattani 2019, 19). In the first, there is a competition in which a winner and a loser are declared. In the second, the quality of the confrontation is evaluated based on the two interlocutors' ability to stand in the difference of opinion in a certain way.

To this image, we can add Stefano Bartezzaghi's reflection (Bartezzaghi 2017). He points out how competition in which one of the parties wins without any resistance by the other is much less satisfactory than the one in which the two challengers demonstrate to give their best. This clarifies how in every challenge what is at stake is not only winning, but also playing itself as a dimension in which the two contenders' abilities emerge in front of those who observe them challenge each other.

In the second answer, the trainer has the opportunity to generate this kind of satisfaction because he is like a tennis player who does not give up in front of the ball thrown by the opponent in a tricky corner of the field. Instead, he throws himself to retrieve it where it arrived. The exchange will be spectacular, and the spectators will appreciate the move independently of whoever finally scores the point.

The satisfaction associated with a particular way of arguing has been distinguished by Cohen in two possible meanings. You can be satisfied *by* an argument or satisfied *in* the argument (Cohen 2018). The first type of satisfaction is more emotional and alludes to a specific type of effect felt because of the argument: for example, seeing one's opinion predominate over that of the interlocutor.

On the other hand, being satisfied in the argument is different. It stems, as Cohen explains, from feeling that you have had the opportunity to express yourself fully, have received the best listening, have seen your objections and criticisms taken into account and recognised. This second type characterises a good argument in a broader sense: 'good' indicates not only having satisfied the logical, rhetorical, and dialectical requirements, but also being wholly satisfying for the people who participated.

In a later reflection Cohen claims that the ideal effect of a discussion is *cognitive compathy*: something that leads the participants in a debate, despite the dissent, to perceive themselves in a sort of organic unity beyond the statements, positions, and behaviors of each; something that makes you feel that you share a significant experience in the unfolding of the dispute itself. The interesting thing Cohen notes is that compathy is an authentic experience that can be had even when a satisfactory formula for resolving the dispute is not found (Cohen

2016, 459). The author regards this experience as something ideal that does not depend only on the arguers' behaviour; therefore, the factors that generate it go even beyond the scope of the perspective of argumentation virtues.

In our example, the trainer with the first answer could have silenced his opponent with valid and compelling arguments such as his competence or the inappropriateness of questioning his knowledge based on personal characteristics. However, by doing so, he would not have responded to the emergence of a dissident thought concerning his authority in speaking of digital education to parents. He would have created a negative show suitable for invoking the consensus of those already in agreement with him. However, he would not have given sympathetic space to the silent resistances present in the audience he is addressing.

4. Skills or virtues?

A model of a school of debate that limits itself to the ability to argue, or at most judges the validity and cogency of the arguments, would paradoxically lose sight of the central protagonist from whom the educational activity starts and to whom it must return: the arguer, understood in a broad sense as any person actively or passively involved, contextually or deferred, in an argumentation activity.

We have seen that this model could find in the perspective of the VAT a particularly good approach for pedagogical purposes (Gascón 2016), because it can hold together in the argumentative activity all the salient elements that make it fully satisfying, without falling into intellectualisms or reductionisms more suited to theory than to concrete life (to which education must aim).

Daniel Cohen provides this definition in this regard:

The core idea of VAT can be summed up in a simple and elegant little principle:

A good argument is one in which the arguers have argued virtuously.

Like any formula that tries to encapsulate complex and important ideas, it needs a fair bit of qualification. The principle makes two changes in the primary target of argument evaluation. First, the adjective good is replaced by the adverb virtuously, but that is much more than just a grammatical change! It shifts the focus from the product of argumentation to the process of argumentation, as in dialectical approaches to argumentation. The second change, from arguments to arguers, broadens that focus from the actions that constitute an argument to encompass the agents that perform them. Properly speaking, the central concept is neither virtuous actions nor virtuous agents but agents-acting-virtuously, complete with its oblique reference to standing properties of the character (Cohen 2008).

Moving from the argumentation as a product to arguing as a process, and from the argument as an action to the arguer as an agent, has a notable pedagogical effect. In fact, Cohen continues:

The first move has profound implications for pedagogy. Identifying such virtues of arguers as careful listening, open-mindedness, and charitable interpreting is sure to improve how we teach argumentation and critical thinking. These are habits of mind to be inculcated and nurtured; they are not static lists of fallacies, patterns of formal inference, or rules for argumentative engagement to be memorized. Training and practice have to supplant traditional lecturing and studying. Listening carefully and sympathetically, anticipating objections and questions, and judiciously considering both the pros and cons are behavioural habits that can be acquired, and they are well worth acquiring because they will have a long-lasting effect on how our students argue beyond the limits of any particular class (Cohen 2008).

In short, what we are talking about is an educational perspective that goes beyond the maturation of simple argumentative skills, in order to address the broader level of virtues.

Aberdein (2010) takes up the distinction between skills and virtues from Philippa Foot (1978, 7) on the concept of intentional error present in Aristotle's and Thomas Aquinas' account of virtues. Whereas in the field of skills (and the arts) intentional errors can be an excuse for the lack of ability, in the case of virtues an intentional omission does not excuse but aggravates the position of those who perform it. Aberdein gives an useful example in this regard: the boy who falls off the skateboard saying «I did it on purpose», may try to apologise for an apparent lack of skill. The same could not be done by a person who did not go to pick up a guest at the airport while it is raining; if he said «I did it on purpose», it would make the lapse even more evident. As Aberdein states:

The explanation for this contrast would seem to be that while it is consistent with skilfulness to choose not to exercise one's skills voluntarily, it is inconsistent with virtue to voluntarily choose not to exercise one's virtues. (Aberdein 2010, 184-85)

Aberdein points out that the difference between skill and virtue is fully appreciated when one thinks about manipulative speeches and fallacious arguments that end up being persuasive because of a reasoning error. A fallacy can be affirmed in a discussion both in a skillful and non-skillful way. In the first case, we are faced with conscious manipulation, artfully implemented by an interlocutor to deceive others. In the second, we face a simple error or misunderstanding due to a lack of ability to argue. Aberdein observes: «when we confuse ourselves, we have been let down by our argumentation skills; when we (deliberately or otherwise) confuse others, we display a lack of argumentational virtue» (Aberdein 2010, 185).

This perspective reveals in an effective way how there can be a skillful arguer – that is, very capable in using his inferential, dialectical, and rhetorical abilities in argumentation – but at the same time vicious (this is the case of the manipulator). On this, Gascón (2016) provides an illuminating example from the movie *Thank you for smoking* (2005), in which the tobacco industry representative, Nick Naylor, has a discussion with a child that goes like this:

Child: My Mommy says, smoking kills.

Nick Naylor: Oh, is your Mommy a doctor?

Child: No.

Nick Naylor: A scientific researcher of some kind?

Child: No.

Nick Naylor: Well, then she's hardly a credible expert, is she?

Naylor's manner of weakening the child's argument is skillful: he asks pertinent critical questions about the source of a specific argument (it is the *adhominem*U form that we saw earlier). Later in the dialogue, Naylor will declare that he does not want to argue that smoking is not bad, but to invite children to think for themselves: «My point is that you have to think for yourself». As Gascón points out, from an informal logic or pragma-dialectical point of view, Naylor's way of arguing must be recognised as skillful. The point is that this perspective does not fully recognise what is happening in this interaction. Instead, if we take the perspective of virtues, Naylor's arguments can be judged based on their greater or lesser contribution to achieving the good of the argument, which, as several authors claim, is to propagate truth (Aberdein 2010; Cohen 2013; Cattani 2001, 15-24). From this perspective and only from this one, we can fully evaluate the quality of what Naylor is doing towards the kids.

Here is the fundamental point of the virtue-skill relationship that interests our reflection. It is Aberdein himself who brings it into focus (Aberdein 2010): while vicious arguments can be skillful (the manipulator) or not skillful (the confused arguer), it is almost impossible to have the opposite, that is a virtuous arguer who is not skillful. Virtue to be such requires in itself the appropriate skills to conduct the action excellently. If what Cohen says (2013: 487) is true, that «Not every skill is a virtue; skillful arguers can be quite vicious!», the reverse is not valid: a virtuous arguer ought to be skillful.

We, therefore, seem to be able to conclude: education for a debate that moves in the perspective of virtues will include in itself and will bring to the maximum degree the development of argumentative skills, while on the contrary a training based only on argumentative skills will not ensure that excellent discussions can come from them.

As Adelino Cattani (2018, 28-9) says, it is not a question of training new sophists capable of supporting any position, but skillful arguers who can also evaluate what is good or bad in propagating the truth. You should not train people like Nick Naylor who can manipulate, but children who can understand how to react and respond to Naylor's skillful but vicious moves which they will have to deal with.

5. Competition and cooperation

At this point, all that remains is to consider how the relationship between competition and cooperation in a regulated debate becomes central to establishing its educational value and its applicability to the challenges of real life.

Before doing so, however, we still need to consider a central element concerning virtue. It essentially consists of acting from an Aristotelian perspective, looking for the intrinsic value of the excellence of the action. Virtuous acting is sought as valuable in itself and does not need to find its motivation elsewhere (Berti 2000, 259). Alasdair McIntyre gives the example of the child who is stimulated to play chess through the promise of a prize: «If you win this game, you will receive these candies». In this manner, the suggested action has this form: playing chess well will lead you to get candy. This invitation motivates the action through an extrinsic value (candy). The kid will play not for the sake of playing chess, but because he will get something else from it (McIntyre 1993, 226).

Virtue resembles playing chess well because the chess action itself produces a value and a desirable good even without other external rewards (Cohen's idea of being fully satisfying, as we have seen).

If we then return to the theme of section 2, we can say that in a certain sense the pleasure produced by the quarrel resembles the candies of the example of chess: a value and satisfaction that are external to the action of arguing in itself, with the aggravating factor that this extrinsic remunerative element also has a distracting or deplorable effect. In other words, a quarrel leads to an action that seems apparently to have something to do with arguing but departs from it: the values it obtains (consensus, strengthening of ties among homogeneous persons, feeling superior, etc.) do not concern the good of argumentation (to propagate truth).

This means that a competitive model of regulated debate, which has victory as its principal value, according to the image of a battle and a duel, could prove to be educationally counter-productive. In fact, in it, the search for a pure competition based on argumentation skills would often lead to lapse into a manipulation for victory rather than to promote the propagation of truth.

At the same time, we have to admit that cooperation alone cannot be enough. Finding points of collaboration in a discussion, avoiding ruptures, is not enough as a criterion for what we have said about «what is at stake»: it is necessary that there is an exchange, that the dispute is celebrated, and that there is dissent to arrive at a fully satisfying discussion. Among other things, the pure cooperative perspective fails to help in many real situations in which the other has no intention of cooperating. For example, in the case of the «Do you have children?» example we saw in section 3, a purely cooperative perspective in which the answer did not know how to compete with the challenge raised, would again be vicious and not virtuous because it would not solve the crisis of authority generated.

In short, for the reflection carried out so far, it seems that competition and cooperation certainly cannot be regarded as alternatives, but neither can they be juxtaposed in a sort of equal balance. We need a more articulated model.

Competition must emerge at the level of the skills and of the merit of the arguments, maintaining the criteria of validity, cogency, and relevance of the arguments as a guide. However, this level should be continuously corrected and completed by virtue, capable of opening up to the dimension of cooperation. In other words, if the skills will push you to put all your efforts to go all the way with the maximum argumentative ability to test your ideas and those of the

other, the virtues will ensure that in that open competition the focus stays on the good for the real people involved.

Virtues will motivate us to keep the argument at the center even in the difference of views; to cultivate detachment from oneself even in the face of disorderly attacks; to be willing to move against adverse and imperfect conditions of discussion; etc. These elements would be missed or would not be sufficiently taken into account by the simple perspective of competition and skill.

Therefore, the reflection here carried out leads us to focus on some evaluative elements which the regulated debate should consider to favour the combination of the competitive and cooperative dimensions. Debates should be judged based on the two elements already mentioned:

1. Can the disputant stay on the subject and return to it, continuing to argue on the merits, instead of moving away?
2. How much self-detachment does she appear to have?

Moreover, we can add other criteria:

3. How capable is the disputant of recognising the correct and relevant parts of the arguments of others, even in the context of a difference of opinions, and of giving them the right place in the discussion?
4. Faced with a valid or cogent objection or a counter-argument, has the disputant managed to take it into account, in order to revise her thinking based on it?
5. Faced with invalid, spurious, and fallacious objections, did she manage to not accept the provocation and to drop them without aggravating the argument's viciousness?

On closer inspection, 3 and 4 are complementary to each other, and somehow they better specify criterion 1. We are dealing with the perspective of judging the dedication to the theme, a primary virtue for being able to carry out genuinely deliberative debates. Criterion 5 is, in turn, a derivation of 2. It alludes to the virtue of detachment of oneself required for an arguer in order to be able to conduct a debate that is truly capable of entering into comparison with another perspective.

One could continue in this direction, finding elements for evaluating a regulated debate that have to do not only with the inferential and pragmatic aspects of the argument, but also with the virtues and the signs that show what one is really looking for in the discussion.

The goal should be to determine whether the exchange is merely skillful and aims at an external prize (winning the tournament, impressing the jury, showing dialectical skills), or aims to bring out the good of propagating truth thanks to that confrontation. From a VAT perspective, the prize should be given, paradoxically, to those who show that they are not looking for the prize.

6. Conclusion: the contemplation of difference

The perspective of Virtue Argumentation Theory focuses on a fundamental question: 'being right' is not everything in a discussion. What matters much

more is the happiness that people can achieve by pursuing the good inherent in a confrontation.

This is shown by an example from the road: a pedestrian in a crosswalk has the right of way, but is hit by a car. From a logical point of view, that pedestrian 'was right' in crossing. Moreover, from a legal perspective, he will receive the payment of damages by those who wrongly hit him. However, from the point of view of happiness, he has suffered more harm than good; he has injuries, and despite being right, he has not managed to cross the road unharmed.

Arguing in front of others is very similar to walking in a crosswalk: one cannot think only of being right, but it is necessary to evaluate how much the context and the free actions of others allow us to achieve a good and in what way.

Combining the perspectives considered so far, we could say that what is at stake in a discussion ultimately has to do with the participants' happiness; that is, the search for a fully satisfying argument conducted not to win or to dominate the other, but fundamentally to know and recognise oneself by aiming at the ideal of cognitive compathy.

This apparently might seem a form of argumentative stalemate that generates a suspension of judgment, but in reality it is the opposite. It is going beyond agreement and approval of the other's ideas and behaviour, so that we can discuss with her. It is open-mindedness, understood as a virtue that builds the sense of a relationship on recognising the other in her difference (Song 2017). This is a perspective that is applicable to each debate in real conditions.

Aristotle spoke of perfect human happiness in terms of contemplation (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b, 20-25). In argumentation, this kind of happiness can be called the «contemplation of difference»: recognising that precisely in the action of arguing the difference of opinion, there is the opportunity to better see a truth that propagates itself and that concerns the arguers.

It is this recognition of difference not as an obstacle but as an intrinsic value of the discussion, that opens up the possibility of accepting the arguers' imperfections, taking care of them, and configuring disputes suitable for producing shared outcomes and thus being truly deliberative.

Only this recognition of the intrinsic value of the good of the argumentation (and therefore of the happiness deriving from the truth that is propagated in the arguers' real lives) can compete with the distracting pleasures produced by clashes that do not lead far.

Getting inspired by VAT in education means ultimately putting the pursuit of happiness of the dispute in competition with the ephemeral promises of the quarrel.

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