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The Virtues of Virtue for Inquiry, Argumentation and Education – *Pace Paglieri*

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ABSTRACT: We argue that Paglieri's presentation, *Argumentative virtues: Back to basics* (ECA 2022), involved a misunderstanding both of the nature of virtue and of the nature and goals of critical thinking education. In contrast, we argue for the centrality of virtues in argumentation and for educating critical thinkers using the Inquiry Approach to teaching critical thinking.

KEYWORDS: argumentation, critical thinking education, inquiry approach, pedagogy, virtue argumentation theory, virtues

1. INTRODUCTION

In "Argumentative virtues: Back to basics" (ECA 2022), Paglieri poses challenges to the treatment of virtues in Aberdeen's and Cohen's Virtue Argumentation Theory (VAT) as well as in Bailin and Battersby's Inquiry Approach to critical thinking (IA). He challenges the link between virtues and argument quality, questioning what is added to understanding argument quality by positing virtues. Virtues, are, he maintains, neither necessary nor sufficient for argument quality. He further questions what useful role virtues play in thinking about and designing critical thinking education.

VAT and IA differ in significant ways. They arise in different contexts, have different goals, differ in conceptualization of some of the relevant concepts, and, most centrally, differ with respect to the role of virtues in argumentation and argument assessment. Nonetheless, they do share some common perspectives. These include a focus on argumentation and on the character and conduct of the participating agents rather than simply on individual arguments. Most important, the two views share their disagreement with the conception of virtues underlying Paglieri's critiques of both.

VAT and IA also have common cause in emphasizing the importance of virtues, both in thinking about critical thinking as conceptualized in IA, and in thinking about

argumentation as conceptualized in VAT, and argue for their centrality in educating critical thinkers and being good arguers. In this regard, we argue that Paglieri's criticism of the role of virtues in the inquiry approach to critical thinking education is unjustified. We further describe educational strategies which can guide pedagogy for fostering virtues of argumentation and inquiry.

Before addressing Paglieri's specific challenges to the role of virtues in VAT and in IA, it will be helpful to describe the main aspects of each of these views, highlighting the differences as well as the overlap between the two views and between the role played by virtues in each. This will provide a context for addressing Paglieri's challenges to the role of virtues in each of the views.

2. VIRTUE ARGUMENTATION THEORY

Virtue theories do not think of arguments as abstract reasons-conclusion complexes or even as the finished products of (individuals') reasoning, but rather as complex events constituted by the give-and-take of reasons between engaged arguers. Nonetheless, virtue argumentation theories (VATs) are not all alike. They differ with respect to their goals, what they emphasize, the role they see for argumentative virtues, their lists of argumentative virtues, as a virtue, and even what counts as an argument. However, there are twin themes that unite them. First, virtue theories recognize how important good arguers are for good argumentation, and second, they have a deep appreciation of how important good argumentation is for human flourishing (Aberdein, 2020; cf. Bailin, 2014).

The first insight is that the key to good argumentation – to a productive exchange of reasons – is the arguers themselves. Good reasoners are more important for successful argumentation than the reasons given. After all, good reasoners can be counted on to give appropriate responses to the reasons they are given, whether good or bad; but good reasons cannot be counted on to elicit appropriate responses from the reasoners to which they are given. Giving reasons is of no use if the recipient isn't reasons-receptive; arguing is futile when an interlocutor isn't reasons-responsive. The second insight is that the reason for reasoning is *reasoners*. The measure and value of argumentation is in the arguers. Its fruits can be found in individual cognitions, social relations, group deliberations, and occasionally even political negotiations. And, of course, education (Bailin, 2014).

Much of VAT can be summed up in the phrase: *For better arguments, get better arguers*. This formulation has, however, been subject to several common misperceptions. First, the relevant sense of "argument" obviously must include arguers, so it is closer to its dialectical sense and ordinary usage than to logico-mathematical uses that refer to abstract structures of propositions in premise-conclusion complexes. Without that concept of argument, the entire project could be dismissed as an exercise in *ad hominem* reasoning (See Aberdein, 2014, *contra* Howell & Kingsbury, 2013). Second, arguments are not the same as inferences, and the quality of an argument cannot be reduced to the quality of its inferences: no one denies that non-virtuous arguers can produce chains of inferences that are deductively unimpeachable (*contra* Adler, 2007). Third, argument quality includes but is not limited to the purely logical evaluation of its validity or invalidity; more nuanced gradations are needed which may include reference to epistemic, social, psychological, ethical, and other factors. Fourth, the plurality of relevant factors for argument evaluation

means that the quality of an argument also cannot be identified with rhetorical success, dialectical closure, or the goals of the individual participating arguers (Cohen, 2022). Fifth, ethical considerations are indeed relevant. Regardless of whatever logical acumen or dialectical dexterity they may exhibit, argumentation that is abusive or unjust is not *good* argumentation (Bondy, 2010; Cohen, 2022). But sixth, ethical considerations cannot be the whole story. Again, we are not denying that bad people can have good arguments; what we are acknowledging is that vicious *arguers* are inimical to successful, high-quality argumentative exchanges.

The overall *telos* of argumentation for virtue theories remains epistemological, but in a very broad sense that encompasses both individual and social epistemology and recognizes cognitive gains beyond just the addition and subtraction of proposition-sized beliefs. We can *learn* from arguments, and what we learn includes appreciation, understanding, and skills, as well as propositional beliefs; and we can achieve more through argumentation than persuasion and resolution of difference, including *mutual* understanding, appreciation, and respect.

There are differences among VAT theorists that are more problematic. There is, for example, the foundational question about which of the main concepts — an argumentative virtue or a virtuous argument — is more fundamental. If the virtues precede the notion of a good argument, then there seems no way to identify the virtues or classify them as argumentative; if the latter, the virtues are derivative and theoretically eliminable, even if they retain practical value for pedagogical, heuristic, and evaluative purposes (Godden, 2016; Goddu, 2016; Paglieri, 2022). Similarly, there is considerable room for debate as to how the virtues determine specific moves in specific contexts (Gascón, 2015). Finally, there are differences as to how VAT stands in relation to the traditional agenda of argumentation theory: Can it answer questions about inference validity or argument cogency? Should it even try? Despite these differences, there is agreement that since the responsibility for the success or failure of argumentation falls on the arguers themselves, they need to take center stage.

3. INQUIRY APPROACH TO CRITICAL THINKING

In contrast to VAT, the Inquiry Approach is not a theory of argumentation but rather an approach to critical thinking education (Bailin & Battersby, 2016). Unlike traditional approaches to critical thinking education which focus on individual arguments (in the product sense), the focus of IA is on argumentation, that is, on the entire dialectical exchange of such arguments on an issue, including arguments on various sides of the issue, objections to the arguments, and responses to the objections. The focus, thus, is not so much on individual acts of face-to-face arguing, as it is in VAT, but on the entire back-and-forth argumentative exchange taking place over time and in various media and contexts, including in print, in individual inquiry, and in group deliberation (Bailin & Battersby, 2009).

In our view, a primary goal of critical thinking education is teaching students to make reasoned judgments, and IA seeks to achieve this through engaging students in inquiry. This involves critically investigating issues of significance, actively seeking and identifying credible information, and making judgments based on a comparative evaluation

of reasons and arguments on various sides of the issue (Bailin & Battersby, 2016). Although we recognize that people argue for a variety of reasons and with various goals, our interest is in argumentation which leads to reasoned judgment, i.e., the epistemic goal of argumentation.

The inquiry approach aims to develop students who have the capacities and understandings that enable them to make such reasoned judgments in the various contexts in which they find themselves. Its aim, that is, is to develop critical thinkers. Being a critical thinker involves having the ability to make reasoned judgments, but it also involves more than this. A critical thinker is someone who is disposed to actually engage in critical thinking when encountering issues in their lives and to do so in a manner which instantiates certain virtues. The overarching virtue is a commitment to making judgments on the basis of reasons and evidence - what we have termed the spirit of inquiry – what Siegel (1988) calls the "critical spirit" and Hamby (2014) calls a "willingness to inquire" – and to acting in accordance with the norms of reason. A critical thinker also displays certain sub-virtues which are included in that commitment, for example, being fair-minded, open-minded, willing to revise their judgments when warranted. For IA, virtues are not related to the quality of an argument as they are for VAT, but are, rather inherent in the practice of inquiry and defining qualities of a critical thinker.

4. PAGLIERI'S CHALLENGES

It is important to make clear at the outset that Paglieri frames his comments as challenges to claims regarding the role of virtues in argumentation, highlighting aspects that he views as problematic and requiring further work, rather than as a fundamental critique of the project as a whole.

Although there are several areas which Paglieri probes in his presentation, the one that is particularly relevant to both Cohen's version of VAT and to the Inquiry Approach to critical thinking relates to the relationship between virtues and argument quality. A second area probed by Paglieri which is particularly relevant to IA relates to the role virtues play in thinking about and designing critical thinking education.

The question Paglieri poses with respect to the first issue is whether argumentative virtues are causally tied to the quality of an argument. He challenges Cohen's view that argumentative virtues are constitutive of argument quality, arguing that the claim that a good argument is one in which the arguers have argued virtuously risks vicious circularity. To avoid this problem, one would require evidence of a relationship between an argumentative virtue and some intuitive mark of argument quality. As virtues are neither necessary nor sufficient for good arguments to occur, he claims that one would need to look for empirical evidence that particular virtues are causally connected with the quality of the resulting argument ("however argument is conceived").

This request for evidence of a causal relationship between particular virtues and the quality of an argument also enters into Paglieri's challenges regarding the role of virtues in critical thinking education. He is critical of critical thinking theorists for not offering a well-ordered list of virtues, ranked in terms of their importance to the quality of the argument in order to train students for improving their contribution to arguments.

His view of virtues as a means for getting students to produce better arguments is particularly apparent in his criticisms of IA. The role he understands virtues to play in IA is as "a positive consequence or happy side effect of the inquiry approach" rather than as a means for making students better at arguing. Thus, according to Paglieri, virtues for IA are valuable as an end and not a means and are thus "of limited use for instructional design" and for planning educational interventions. Further, he argues that because virtues are intangible, they can only be assessed indirectly and thus are of limited use for educational assessment. Paglieri's final challenge to critical thinking educators is to provide more insight on how to leverage virtues for critical thinking education in concrete terms, offering something usable to teachers, as well as a clearer elucidation of "why doing so should matter."

5. PAGLIERI'S PROBLEMATIC CONCEPTION OF VIRTUES

Our primary issue with Paglieri's challenges relates to the conception of virtue which underlies his critiques. His request for evidence of a causal link between particular virtues and argument quality frames the discussion in the (implicitly physicalist) vocabulary of cause and effect, resting on a view of a virtue as some type of internal mental entity that can cause certain behaviours or ways of acting. This framing commits the fallacy of reification and rests on a misconception of the nature of virtues. We view virtues, in contrast, as aspects of character *constituted* by consistent ways of acting (tendencies to behave in certain ways). It is not that critical virtues make our students better at arguing. Rather, arguing virtuously is part of what it means to argue well. Inquiring virtuously is part of what it means to be a critical thinker. Thus, it would be better not to reify the virtues at all and speak of *being virtuous* rather than *having virtues*. The relationship between *being* virtuous and *acting* virtuously is conceptual rather than empirical. Virtues are conceptually tied to the goals and norms of inquiry and argumentation.

This problem of treating virtues as *things we have* instead of *ways we are* is also evident in Bondy's framing of the value of virtues in argumentation. He states, "What makes it [open-mindedness] a virtue is the fact that people with open minds *are better situated to be able to fairly consider arguments against their own views* [emphasis added]; when the arguments against their views are strong ones, they will be able to change their beliefs to fit with what their new evidence bases support" (Bondy, 2015, p. 464). It is not, however, that people who are open-minded *are better situated to be able to fairly consider arguments against their own views*. Rather, fairly considering arguments against one's own view is part of what it *means* to be open-minded. A criterion for a judgment being reasoned is that one has considered opposing arguments. Thus, it would be contradictory to say that someone is open-minded but never seriously considers opposing arguments. Similarly, it would be odd to say that someone is open-minded but that we would need empirical evidence to establish that this virtue contributed to the quality of their argumentation since fairly considering opposing arguments is one of the criteria of argumentation quality.

6. THE ROLE OF VIRTUES IN IA

Paglieri's criticisms regarding the necessity and usefulness of virtues in IA is problematic on several fronts. His claim that if virtues are only a happy side effect of inquiry, then they are educationally unhelpful and not useful for designing "educational interventions" displays a number of misunderstandings.

6.1 The goals of critical thinking education

Paglieri appears to see the goal of critical thinking education as training students to produce better arguments. In contrast, we view the goal of critical thinking education as educating critical thinkers (cf. Siegel, 1988). And we would argue that virtues are central to this goal. It is not that virtues make students better at arguing, i.e., at producing and recognizing valid arguments. It is, rather, that arguing virtuously is part of what it means to argue well. And inquiring virtuously is part of what it means to be a critical thinker. If our goal is simply to produce students who can identify a fallacy, but we are not concerned with whether they may knowingly use a fallacy to win an argument, then virtues do not matter. If our goal is simply to produce students who are able to evaluate the cogency of an argument, but we are not concerned with whether they are likely to resist cogent arguments against their views, then virtues do not matter. If our goal is to train students to produce better arguments but we are not concerned with whether they exercise critical thinking in their lives outside our classroom, then virtues do not matter. But surely what we want is to produce critical thinkers, people who are "appropriately moved by reasons" (Siegel, 1988), who are committed to rational judgment and action, who are intellectually honest, who will revise their judgments when faced with compelling evidence, etc. This is neither causal to arguing well nor a happy side effect of inquiring. It is, rather, part and parcel of inquiry and of argumentation in the broader sense, part of what it means to be a critical thinker/competent inquirer/good arguer.

Contrary to Paglieri's claim that ends or goals are of limited use for instructional design, we would argue that they are vital for guiding educational practice. If our goal is to produce critical thinkers, that should affect the content and pedagogy of our courses, determining "what we should teach, how we should teach, how we should organize educational activities, what the points of many of those activities are, how we should treat students and others in the educational setting, and so on" (Siegel, 1988, p. 46). We cannot assume that a critical thinking course that simply focuses on 'educational interventions' to teach students the proper procedures for reasoning will achieve this goal. Rather, we have proposed a curriculum centred on the practice of inquiry, in which students not only learn to critically investigate issues and make reasoned judgments, but also to understand, appreciate, and practice the virtues of inquiry (Bailin & Battersby, 2015b).

6.2 The nature of education

Paglieri's reference to pedagogy in terms of planning behavioural interventions reveals an excessively narrow and technical view of education which does not take into account the goals of critical thinking education. Our primary focus is not simply the improvement of

individual acts of thinking, but rather the development of critical thinkers. And the virtues which are central to this aim "are traits of persons, not acts of thinking" (Siegel, 1988, p. 41). The notion of designing behavioural interventions is totally inappropriate to fostering these virtues. The aim is to educate students, and in addition to developing capacities for reasoned judgment, it also involves developing an understanding of the nature of inquiry, an appreciation and respect for reasons based on this understanding, and a commitment to act in accord with the demands of reason (Bailin and Battersby, 2007). Someone who appreciates reason respects its normative demands, values its inherent virtues, and is appropriately motivated to accept its practices (Bailin & Battersby, 2007, 2015b). Educating critical thinkers is not, then, simply a matter of improving certain acts of thinking. It has a much broader aim - developing character. As Siegel (1988) points out: "When we take it upon ourselves to educate students so as to foster critical thinking, we are committing ourselves to nothing less than the development of a certain sort of person" (p. 41).

We are not suggesting that fostering virtues is simply a matter of "engaging in the right practices to acquire virtuous inclinations through habit formation" as Paglieri indicates. We are suggesting that engaging in practices of inquiry in appropriate educational contexts with appropriate pedagogy can foster in students the virtues of inquiry, with virtues acquired not through mindless habituation but as involving 'choice, understanding and knowledge' (which it does even for Aristotle). Burbules (1995) makes the point thus: "A virtue ... is not a mere expression of habit, but an expression of judgment and choice" (p. 86). The aspects of knowledge, understanding and appreciation are conspicuously absent from Paglieri's framing in terms of behavioural interventions.

Paliglieri's criticism of critical thinking theorists for not offering a well-ordered list of virtues prioritized by importance in order to train students to produce better arguments betrays similar misunderstandings regarding educating for critical thinking virtues. Developing virtues is not a matter of having a prioritized list of virtues, with behavioural interventions to teach open-mindedness one day and fair-mindedness the next. Rather, virtues are fostered through a multi-faceted approach involving curriculum, pedagogical practices, settings, and classroom interactions. (Particular strategies are described in Section 6.3 below.)

Critical thinking theorists have, in fact, offered lists of virtues, as Paglieri himself admits, and although a variety of additional virtues have been added by various theorists, there is, actually, considerable agreement as to principal virtues to be fostered, e.g., open-mindedness, fair-mindedness, mutual respect, intellectual honesty (e.g., Siegel, 1988; Paul, 1990; Ennis, 1996). It is, indeed, the case, as Paglieri argues, that virtues may sometimes conflict and that different, sometimes even opposing virtues are required in different situations. For example, judgment revision may require intellectual humility in some circumstances and confidence in others. Rather than demonstrating the need for a prioritized list, what this shows is the opposite - that a variety of different virtues may be relevant, and that which virtues are most relevant depends on the context. Thus, what is needed is the development of judgment based on an understanding of the inquiry project and of the specific situation. This is not very different from what happens in the case of a conflict between moral virtues. Whether truth telling or not hurting others takes priority may be different in the case of whether to tell your grandmother your true feelings about her hat versus whether to tell your partner that some action of theirs is causing you

significant distress. In both kinds of cases, you discuss with students the conflict, how each of the virtues relates to the point of the practice, and how each applies in the particular situation.

Paglieri's claim that virtues are of limited use for educational assessment because they can only be assessed indirectly based on observed behaviour is another example of the fallacy of reification. It is true that virtuous behaviour can only be assessed by observing behaviour, but virtuous behaviour is not the basis for inferring some mental entity. It is precisely the virtuous behaviour that we are interested in assessing.

6.3 Fostering virtues

There are many ways in which the goal of fostering critical thinking virtues can be instantiated in a classroom focused on inquiry. Educators can engage students in discussion regarding the nature and aims of inquiry, with students generating what would be appropriate expectations for students of other students, for students of the instructor, and for the instructor of students in a classroom devoted to inquiry (Bailin & Battersby, 2017).

Such a discussion can include highlighting obstacles to the spirit of inquiry (e.g., myside bias, the desire for certainty, defensiveness) and offering suggestions for countering these obstacles, (e.g., being aware of one's initial views and biases, monitoring one's process of inquiry and dialogue, and evaluating one's own view (Bailin & Battersby, 2016, pp. 267-276).

Certain virtues can be highlighted in contexts where they arise, for example highlighting intellectual honesty via a discussion of plagiarism, highlighting fairly representing other views through a discussion of the principle of charity, or focusing on how to deal with conflicting virtues in cases in which such conflicts arise.

Authentic assessment practices, that is, assessment tasks which reflect real world critical thinking contexts, can be helpful in fostering virtues of inquiry. In particular, formative assessment, that is, assessment that is ongoing and includes instructor and peer feedback and revision can promote critical reflection on one's thinking and a willingness to revise one's judgments (Bailin & Battersby, 2015b).

Certain classroom activities can help foster virtues of inquiry when introduced in the context of the aims of inquiry. For example, having students lay out and evaluate pro and con arguments on an issue in a dialectical argument table (e.g., Bailin & Battersby, 2016, p. 194) can demonstrate the importance of considering arguments on various sides of issues and of fairly evaluating competing arguments in order to reach a reasoned judgment.

Having students specify the level of confidence justified by their judgment in an inquiry can help them to understand the tentativeness of judgments and to develop appropriate intellectual humility (Bailin & Battersby, 2015a). Activities such as having students give arguments for points of view opposite to their own, or structured controversy, in which students alternate in defending different sides of an issue, then collectively come to a reasoned judgment (Johnson & Johnson, 1988, 2009) can contribute to the development of open-mindedness and fair-mindedness.

The nature of teacher-student interaction is also crucial for the fostering of critical thinking virtues. To this end, Siegel (1988) advocates "the critical manner of teaching" (p. 46) which involves modelling by the teachers of critical thinking dispositions and

interacting with students in ways which reinforce the critical spirit, for example, recognizing students' right to demand reasons, and the obligation to provide genuine reasons, to honestly appraise the power of the reasons, and to submit their own reasons to scrutiny of the students.

The creation of a community of inquiry in the critical thinking class has an important role to play in fostering the virtues of inquiry (Lipman, 2003). This is a community which instantiates the norms of critical inquiry, promoting rigorous but respectful critique, including of one's own views, open-minded and fair-minded exchanges, and revising one's judgments when justified by the evidence and arguments. It is also a community committed to respectful treatment, meaningful participation, and productive interaction (Bailin & Battersby, 2017). Virtuous argumentation is encouraged, valued, and practiced both in the class as a whole and in small group inquiry and deliberation.

7. CONCLUSION

The critique offered by Paglieri has provided us with the opportunity to clarify our views regarding the nature and role of virtues in argumentation and in critical thinking. His challenges have allowed us to correct a common misconception about the nature of virtue, arguing that the connection between virtues and good argumentation (for Cohen) and between virtues and critical thinking (for Bailin and Battersby) is not causal, as Paglieri suggests, but rather, conceptual. Virtues do not cause good arguments. Rather, arguing virtuously is part of what it means to argue well. And inquiring virtuously is part of what it means to be a critical thinker.

We have also highlighted a misunderstanding regarding the nature and goals of critical thinking education inherent in his position, arguing that the goal of critical thinking education is not to produce better arguments but rather to educate critical thinkers. Responding to his question about why virtues matter, we have argued for the importance of virtues, both in thinking about argumentation as conceptualized in VAT and in thinking about critical thinking as conceptualized in IA and argued for their centrality in educating critical thinkers and being good arguers. Finally, we have described educational strategies which can guide pedagogy for fostering virtues of argumentation and inquiry.

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