

In defence of adversarial philosophy?

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Abstract. Adversarial philosophy is under attack (!), but I speculate that it is useful for working out the level of a philosopher and sometimes for increasing the respect awarded to some individuals and groups. There may be no alternative to it when you have an excess of philosophers of around the same level.

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Adversarial philosophy has been attacked (e.g., see Steenhagen 2016). But what exactly is it? I suppose it is this: you hold a position and I attack you, or vice versa. But in my experience it is nothing like this. There is furniture. And you'll never understand this furniture like I do and thus begins adversity! And a lot of people are involved.

Can anything be said in favour of adversarial philosophy? One thing is you sometimes develop a better understanding of how good a philosopher is in adversity. You thought he/she was this good and now you think differently. Adversarial philosophy can actually be beneficial for individuals or groups who are accorded low respect, in terms of being skilled academics, as one finds that they are a lot better than one thought.

Another “thing” is, if you have an excess of philosophers in your school or faculty and they are all about the same level, you need to work out who to keep. Let's assume that means working out who is best. How are you going to do that? When the gap is small, it is rational for all to claim to be the best. What is the alternative to some competition?

Reference. Steenhagen, M. 2016. Against Adversarial Discussion. *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies* 22 (1): 87-112.