**Appraising Metaphors for Argumentation**

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*Arrogance and Polarisation in Debate*

**1. Argumentation.**

A standard complaint about typical forms of argumentation in modern discursive cultures is that they are aggressive and combative in ways that are epistemically objectionable. Typical examples include the ‘take no prisoners’ attitude of many debaters, intimidating behaviours such as shouting over people and relentlessly advancing criticisms, and the privileging of the agonistically competitive mood that conceives of interpersonal epistemic agency within the categories of ‘victory’, ‘winning’, and other forms of discursive dominance. The analysis and correction of such attitudes, behaviours, and conceptions are a central concern of theorists of argumentation, virtue epistemologists, feminist methodologists, and social psychologists.

An important source of those forms of aggressive argumentative conduct is the role within our discursive cultures of the range of military or martial metaphors – ones that draw on attitudes, concepts, experiences, and values taken from the domain of battle, combat, or warfare and apply them to the ways that argumentation is conceptualised, experienced, and practiced. The classic account is George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s 1980 book, *Metaphors We Live By*, which opens with an analysis of the ARGUMENT-IS-WAR metaphor. They use many examples taken from the ways that philosophers discuss their practice:

Your claims are *indefensible.*He *attacked every weak point in* my argument. His criticisms were *right on target.*I *demolished* his argument.  
I've never *won* an argument with him.  
If *you* use that *strategy,* he'll *wipe you out.*

He *shot down* all *of my* arguments. (1980:4)

Lakoff and Johnson add three useful comments on martial metaphors. To start with, they are embedded throughout the culture of contemporary academic philosophy, rather than being the idiosyncratic norm of a few departments or disciplinary communities. The prominence of martial talk doubtlessly varies, of course, but one would have to travel far to find philosophers who did not talk of their ‘positions’, ‘strategies’, and so on.

A second useful comment is that martial metaphors and and do play a substantive role in philosophical practice. Lakoff and Johnson explain that they ‘structure the actions we perform in arguing’, shaping the ways arguments come to be experienced. I really do *decide* strategies, *defend* positions, and *win* arguments. This is why the study of metaphors can involve what David E. Cooper called the *social critique of metaphor*, a study of the ways that our metaphors and practices of metaphorising advance or obstruct our avowed goals and values (1986: 175).Finally, a widespread employment of martial metaphors is perfectly consistent with the availability and use of other metaphors for argumentation. I may start a talk by announcing that I will *defend* a position, or saying I plan to *explore* an issue, or *play around* with an idea. All of this would be perfectly intelligible to an audience of philosophers.

The availability of other metaphors for argumentation is important to critics of martial metaphors since rejecting them on the grounds of their epistemically objectionable effects is easier when more attractive alternatives are available. Consider the metaphor ARGUMENT-AS-DANCE. Arguing and dancing are forms of performance, sharing the goal of enacting a set of mutually responsive actions, guided by disciplined canons of conduct, each person fluidly and flexibly responding to the other. Lakoff and Johnson invite us to imagine a culture where this metaphor was central, rather than the martial ones more familiar to us, and suggest it would seem strange or alien:

In such a culture, people would view arguments differently, experience them differently, carry them out differently, and talk about them differently. But *we* would probably not view them as arguing at all: they would simply be doing something different. It would seem strange even to call what they were doing “arguing.” (1980: 6)

This seems too strong. Arguing and dancing do share many shared features, enough, at least, for us to make sense of a culture where argumentation involve disciplined performance of routines or movements enacted in response to the actions of a partner. Granted, dance metaphors might only capture certain aspects of experiences of argumentation, an obvious one being that when dancing with a partner the aim is not to ‘defeat’ one’s partner, which is better captured using martial metaphors. But argumentation does not always have that zero-sum character and any metaphor, however rich, can only capture certain aspects of the experience or activityin question. I might initiate an argument with a colleague in a spirit of playfulness, an enjoyable way of passing an hour for the sake, or as an aesthetically pleasing experience. We often *enjoy* arguments, without that necessarily meaning that we *won*.

I want to argue that even a very rich metaphor can only capture a certain range of the associations, resonances, sensibilities, and aims of argumentation. The partial character of metaphors for argumentation should motivate pluralism: I therefore think our discursive cultures ought to incorporate a variety of different metaphors, tempered by a reflective appreciation of their partiality. Arguments can be metaphorized in terms of combat, dance, play, and no doubt other activities, too, not least since those activities themselves are rich in associations (many games have opposing ‘sides’, while dancers and soldiers seek disciplined use of their bodies). But this pluralism runs counter to the assumption that use of martial metaphors is a main source of the aggressive behaviours within discursive cultures, such that replacement of those metaphors by their alternatives can offer the prospect of more productive practices of argumentation.

I want to challenge that assumption s by arguing that martial metaphors are not intrinsically objectionable since they do not necessarily encourage aggressive forms of interpersonal argumentative conduct. The real source of those problems lies with the wider social cultures that shape our practices of metaphorising – those practices by which the associations between what Lakoff and Johnson call the ‘source’ and ‘target’ domains of metaphors (WAR and ARGUMENT, say) are selected, explored, and deployed. If that is right, the critic should really target the cultures, not the martial metaphors. I develop this claim with specific reference to feminist social epistemology of argumentation and recent work on applied vice epistemology.

**2 Two critics of martial metaphors: Cohen and Rooney.**

I start with two influential critics who argue that martial metaphors encourage epistemically objectionable forms of argumentative practice. In his important paper, ‘Argument is War … and War is Hell’, the argumentation theorist, Dan Cohen, argues that use of martial metaphors ‘emphasises (or creates) … the adversarial aspect of argumentation’, which makes ARGUMENT-AS-WAR a ‘dangerous metaphor’, at least when it’s ‘allowed … to *deform* argumentation’ (1995: 184, 187). The remark about ‘deformity’ suggests that martial metaphors can have a role, just as long as they do not overemphasise the adversarial aspects of argumentation to ‘dangerous’ proportions. But this suggests that the ‘danger’ is potential rather than inevitable, as does the remark that martial metaphors only ‘deform’ argumentation when they are ‘allowed’ to, such as when they are used without due critical awareness of their ‘dangers’.

A similarly conditional criticism of the use of martial metaphors in adversarial practice is offered by the feminist argumentation theorist, Phyllis Rooney, whose concerns include the ways martial norms and attitudes can be socially as well as epistemically objectionable. Where martial metaphors are entrenched in a community, the ‘movement’ into aggressive forms of adversariality can be ‘rendered easy, perhaps inevitable’ (2010: 211). Building on the earlier work by Janice Moulton, Trudy Govier, and others, the double worry is that the entrenchment of martial metaphors within philosophical cultures constrains the forms of argumentation that are judged legitimate and, closely related, inscribes gendered biases into the epistemic norms of the discipline that distort its demographics (Govier 1999, Moulton 1989). Since these social and epistemic concerns cannot be disentangled, Rooney frames critique of martial metaphors in feminist terms, the upshot of which is that ‘we can and should attempt to pry loose this metaphor’ (2010: 211; see, further, Rooney 2012).

I take Cohen and Rooney to agree on the following: there is a plurality of metaphors that can help us conceptualise, experience, and practice argumentation within our discursive communities. For a set of contingent social and historical reasons, a set of martial metaphors have become entrenched that exploit associations between argumentation and combat, war, and their associated attitudes and values. Moreover, since those metaphors are gendered as masculine, their entrenchment contributes to the inscription of gendered inequalities into our discursive communities – for instance, by promoting the normative ideal that the good arguer has the martial attitudes and dispositions possessed, exclusively or typically, by men, such as combativeness or ruthlessness. Furthermore, each argue that the martial metaphors ought to be ‘pried loose’ from their entrenched place within our discursive communities, although not wholly abandoned. Crucially, use of martial metaphors should be critical, not unreflective, and informed by what Rooney calls ‘critical examinations of philosophy’s gender-inflected and limited understandings and practices of adversariality’ (2010:231).

Since I endorse this critical, pluralistic, and feminist stance on the use of metaphors of argumentation, the question emerges of what sorts of attitudes one ought to take toward the martial metaphors. I agree they can ‘deform’ practices of argumentation, as Cohen puts it, but also want further explication of just what that is being ‘deformed’. I also agree with Rooney that entrenched metaphors – martial or not – ought to be ‘pried loose’, although want criteria and procedures for knowing when a metaphor becomes sufficiently entrenched that ‘loosening’ is needed. Such issues need clarifying, for otherwise one cannot make practical decisions about how best to employ the plurality of metaphors available to us, nor can we properly understand and guard against the associated ‘dangers’.

We might, for instance, call for the abandonment of martial metaphors in the hope that doing so would reduce the aggressiveness characteristic of so many of our experiences of argumentation, within and beyond philosophy. I think that would be a mistake: the problem is not the martial metaphors themselves, but rather the wider cultures that shape the ways our usage of those metaphors. Criticising the metaphors, rather than the cultures, is therefore to criticise the wrong target – a point stressed by Rooney and other feminist theorists when they call attention to the highly gendered culture of ‘embattled reason’ that shapes the Western philosophical tradition, the privileged cultural and intellectual domain of the ‘the Man of Reason’ (Lloyd 1984).

As a first step in developing that claim, I need to show why it is mistaken to criticise martial metaphors themselves, rather than practices and cultures of metaphorising. To do this I draw on vice epistemology to explores the connections between metaphors, argumentation, and aggressive forms of interpersonal behaviour – from ‘hostility and combativeness in argumentation’ to ‘name-calling, put-downs’, and derogatory quips (see Rooney 2011:209). Such behaviour, I want to argue, expresses a set of *argumentative vices*, whose connection to martial metaphors will, however, turn out to be more complicated than is often supposed.

**3 Metaphors, virtues, and vices.**

Critics of objectionable styles of argumentation often naturally use a vocabulary of *vice*, taken in the philosophical sense of negative character traits, dispositions, or attitudes. Cohen refers to ‘argumentative arguers’, who are ‘proficient, pedantic, and petty’, focused on point-scoring and displays of cleverness, rather than mutually productive epistemic activity (1995: 181). Andrew Aberdein describes a range of argumentative vices, arguing that the badness of bad argumentation requires an appeal to the vices of bad arguers (2016). The feminist argumentation literature offers other vices, like aggressiveness, combativeness, and disrespectfulness, mentioned by Rooney (2011:209); the argumentation theorist, Trudy Govier, adds ‘rudeness, intolerance, and quarrelsomeness’ (1999:245). An appeal to vices also runs through ancient writings on argumentation, with Aristotle and the Buddhist monk, Nāgasena, castigating the ‘cantankerous’, ‘competitive’ character of those ‘ready to pounce’, and therefore ‘apt to spoil discussion’ (cited and discussed in Kidd 2016). Moreover, everyday talk about bad forms of argumentation naturally employs a vocabulary of vices – of the crass, dogmatic, relentless character of television political debates, talk radio, legislative assemblies, and the exchanges on social media, in workplaces, and at dinner parties.

The wealth of work in character epistemology and virtue argumentation theory offers us several ways of explaining what makes such traits as aggressiveness and dogmatism *vices*. I follow Heather Battaly’s pluralistic account, according to which a trait is vicious when it tends to cause a preponderance of bad effects, when it expresses or manifests bad motives, values, or desires, or when it does both (Battaly 2015: chs. 2-4). The trait of cruelty has morally bad effects, such as tending to inflict suffering onto others, and also manifests something bad about the person – an indifference to the suffering of others, for instance, or a desire to cause needless harm for its own sake. Battaly emphasises three points about traits, virtues, and vices that are particularly pertinent to my discussion: (i) the bad effects, motives, and values could be ethical or epistemic or perhaps belong to another domain of value, such as the aesthetic; (ii) the bearers of virtues and vices can include individual or collective agents, but also perhaps larger social entities, such as institutions or cultures; (iii) agents are not always responsible for the traits they have acquired, such that one is not always praiseworthy for being virtuous, nor blameworthy for being vicious. A virtue could be a native trait of a person, which took neither effort nor determination to master, while a vice can be acquired accidentally from one’s social environment (Battaly 2016).

Such traits as aggressiveness and competitiveness would class as argumentative vices if they tend to create a preponderance of bad effects, express bad motives or desires, or both. Aristotle complained that ‘cantankerous’ arguers ‘impede the common work’ of enquiry, since those behaviours diminish the incidence, quality, and duration of collective epistemic agency, while Nāgasena warned that ‘proud’, dogmatic arguers are ‘apt to spoil discussion’, since they lack the dialectical flexibility required by genuine argumentation. Such epistemic explanations of the badness of aggressiveness are echoed by more recent theorists, with Cohen mentioning argumentation as a way of ‘securing the truth’, acquiring instrumentally valuable skills, or – in pragmatist spirit – of contributing to ‘furtherance of inquiry’ (1995: 177, 179). Alongside these accounts, feminist theorists also argue that traits become vicious in relation to a set of socially and politically-toned concerns – as when Rooney criticises aggressive forms of argumentative behaviour for reflecting and sustaining the ‘epistemic subordination … of women’, their ‘cultural dismissal and denigration as reasoners, knowers, or credible authorities’ (2011:208).

I endorse the claims of these critics that there are argumentative vices, whose analysis ought to be pluralistic in the ways described by Battaly. Systematic analysis of the badness of argumentative traits such as aggressive and combativeness is a complex task. Those traits take many different forms and can be normatively evaluated as effects-vices, motives-vices, and as epistemic or ethico-epistemic failings, depending on one’s background conceptions of the aims and goals of argumentation and wider axiological commitments. It’s unclear, though, what the connection is between the use of martial metaphors and those argumentative vices. Some see an obvious, intuitive connection between talk of ‘winning’, ‘defeating opponents’, and so on and such traits as aggressive and mercilessness.

It is tempting to see those metaphors as a main source of those vicious behaviours – Cohen, recall, argued that ARGUMENT-AS- WAR either ‘emphasises’ or ‘creates’ the ‘adversarial’ tendencies that ‘deform’ argumentation. Clearly the martial metaphors are one among many causes of those vicious behaviours; there is also the social background, which includes entrenched conceptions of ‘gender, adversariality, and authority’, the complex entangling of competition, domination, and power familiar from the wider operative ‘cultural construction of masculinity’ (Rooney 2010: 209, 229). Such gendered conceptions of epistemic power and performance fed into the formation of the ARGUMENT-AS-WAR metaphor, which then recapitulates a set of argumentative attitudes and behaviours coded as male. If so, the martial metaphors are ‘dangerous’ and ought to be ‘prised loose’, since they will inevitably feed back into our discursive cultures those traits that, when manifested by agents as vices, will ‘deform’ argumentation.

I want to challenge the claim that use of martial metaphors is necessarily *corrupting* in the sense of promoting the exercise of argumentative vices, such as aggressiveness, pride, and mercilessness. In a sense, I am exploring a remark offered by Lakoff and Johnson, that ‘a metaphor in a political or economic system can lead to human degradation’ (1980: 234). The corruption of one’s character is one dimension of their ‘degradation’, a claim I have develop elsewhere with appeal to feminist work on character and oppression (Kidd 2020). The use of martial metaphors does not inevitably encourage argumentative vices, and, if used carefully and under the right conditions, can yield certain argumentative virtues – a claim reinforcing feminist critiques of the sexist historical and contemporary culture of philosophy by showing how it distorts our collective capacity to properly recognise and deploy the full resources of the metaphors through which our argumentative practices are conceived.

**4 Metaphorical density.**

The general form of my qualified defence of martial metaphors is as follows: the ARGUMENT-AS-WAR metaphor is ‘dense’, in the sense that it specifies a range of associations between the domains of argumentation and combative warfare. Such associations can enable transfer of normative traits from the source domain (WARFARE) to the target domain (ARGUMENTATION): the attitudes or traits of the excellent agent of one domain (WARRIOR) are transferred into the target domain (ARGUER)—we might call this *normative ismorphism*. I focus here on what Lakoff and Johnson call *structural metaphors*, where one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another, as with ARGUMENTATION and WARFARE (1980: ch.1).

Certain metaphors are distinctive because they have what Ronald Hepburn (1995: 184) has called *intentional density*, meaning they are rich in associations, parallels, and meanings, making them particularly apt at realising our expressive and communicative needs. Cohen argues that martial metaphors are intentionally dense, since they offer ‘an indefinitely large supply of abstractable similarities’ between the domains of ARGUMENT and WARFARE – each can be adversarial, competitive, require acute discipline, and so on (1995: 184). Such similarities also include a range of character traits taken to be constitutive of a good practitioner – a good combatant or a good arguer – such as aggressiveness, focus, and relentlessness. Both the good soldier and the good arguer are *aggressive* by nature, *focused* in their attacks, *merciless* when confronted with a struggling opponent, and so on. Such normative trait specifications are built into the density of the martial metaphors. If argumentation is like warfare, then a good arguer will share many of the same attitudes, traits, and dispositions as the good warrior.

The criticisms of the corrupting effects of martial metaphors are often targeting these tendencies to implicitly transfer normative character traits from the domain of combat to that of argumentation. Such normative isomorphism sets up associations between argumentation and combat that encourages a sense that the traits of a good warrior also belong in the domain of argumentation. One might say the martial metaphors bring with them a specification of the character of an ideal arguer - aggressive, combative, disciplined, focused, merciless, relentless, alert to the vulnerabilities of their opponents and clever in devising means of exploiting them, who desires and enjoys victory and achieving situational dominance. Moreover, both the use of martial metaphors and an acceptance of this normative specification will be supercharged by sexist philosophical and social cultures that construct masculinity in the terms of aggression and dominance. If so – argues the critic – the martial metaphors are ‘dangerous’, ‘deforming’, and corrupting because they implicitly specify a set of gendered martial traits that manifest as argumentative traits.

I think this account is right in certain cases. Imagine a philosopher professionally and epistemically socialised within a culture in which the dominant metaphor is ARGUMENT-AS-WAR, surrounded by exemplars whose elevated status owes to their combativeness. The late Mary Midgley quotes a recollection, by Colin McGinn, of one of his Oxford tutors:

Evans was a fierce debater, impatient and uncompromising … he skewered fools gladly (perhaps too gladly). The atmosphere in his class was intimidating and thrilling at the same time. as I was to learn later, this is fairly characteristic of philosophical debate. It is not the sonorous recitation of vague profundities, but a clashing of analytically honed intellects, with pulsing egos attached to them … a kind of intellectual blood-sport, in which egos get bruised and buckled, even impaled (2005: 162).

A set of vices of a martial character are described – cruelty, ferocity, ruthlessness – all of which have a martial character. As Midgley elsewhere speculates, the hypermasculine attitudes and behaviours of so many post-Second World War male Oxford philosophers reflected their deep fear of appearing ‘*weak* – vague, credulous, sentimental, superstitious or simply too wide in their own sympathies’ (2005: 155-156). It may have been driven by other factors, too – impatience, for instance. It’s easy to see how under these particular sorts of social conditions, use of martial metaphors can lead to a set of argumentative vices, of the sort exemplified by Evans. But these invidious uses of the martial metaphors only exploit some of its density of meanings and associations. There is more to combat and warfare than aggression, violence, and victory—think, for instance, of ‘rules of engagement’ or the ideal of a ‘fair fight’ or other martial qualities such as discipline and loyalty.

Confronted with dense metaphors, like ARGUMENT-AS-WAR, the worry arises that much of the richness of the associations established between the source and target domains is lost or occluded. The main problem here is *myopia*, a failure to perceive a suitably wide array of the meanings, associations, and parallels between the two domains. Some associations may not be recognised at all, while others might be noted but passed over prematurely, such that one’s sense of the metaphor becomes unduly narrow. ARGUMENT-AS-WAR is typically construed in terms of concepts such as aggression, combat, fighting, violence and the associated set of martial traits, such as combativeness and mercilessness. But this occludes other associations between argument and warfare, such as courageous response to danger, disciplined conduct, and such collective traits as comradeship and *esprit de corps*. By exploring those dimensions of the metaphor, a different set of traits comes into view, and these include martial and argumentative virtues like courage, discipline, and loyalty – ones with a different character to the vices of violence, such as aggressiveness, typically associated with ARGUMENT-AS-WAR.

Since the martial metaphors are intentionally dense, the idea that they can yield only attitudes and traits concerning aggression, dominance, and violence is therefore too narrow. Such masculine associations are generally those recognised and deployed, for sure, but they do not exhaust the richness of the metaphor. A different and perhaps more attractive set of associations between argument and warfare could be drawn out, involving disciplined self-restraint and courageous conduct. Unfortunately, such metaphorical density is occluded by a myopic focus on the attitudes and traits contingently coded as masculine, like aggression. To develop this idea, I now show how gendered myopia distorts the practice of transferring normative traits from the martial domain to that of argumentation.

**5 From martial virtues to argumentative vices.**

A sexist culture distorts practices of metaphorising – the activities by which the associations and meanings packed into dense metaphors are received, explored, and deployed. Certain of these associations will be frontloaded, while others will be occluded, creating the patterns of myopia described in the last section. The specific patterns of myopia will tend to recapitulate the specific sexist values and prejudices of that culture, as we saw with ARGUMENT-AS-WAR and entrenched gendered constructions of masculinity in terms of aggression, dominance, and violence. But such myopia manifests in a more specific way, too, by interfering with what I called *normative isomorphism*: the tendency of structural metaphors to enable (and often to encourage) a transfer of normative traits from the source domain to the target domain – such as the transfer of the martial traits of a good warrior into implicit conceptions of the traits of a good arguer, enabled by the metaphor ARGUMENT-AS-WAR.

Using that metaphor involves the inferential practice of normative isomorphism: *if argument is like war, in some relevant respects, then arguers ought to be like warriors, in some relevant respects.* Once underway, this process can yield a set of normative character traits which can then be transferred across domains:

A good WARRIOR / COMBATANT is characterised by:

* + An aggressive satisfaction in ‘victory’;
  + A determination to ‘defeat’ one’s opponent;
  + A cleverness that expresses itself in an ability to identify and to exploit weaknesses in their opponent’s position;
  + A willingness to continue to subject the opponent to challenge up to if not beyond the point they are able to continue.
  + An intolerance of displays of mercy towards one’s opponent, especially when they are in increasingly difficult situations.

The problem is that the normative status of a trait can be domain-dependent, such that a trait that classes as a martial virtue may be an argumentative vice, while a martial vice may be an argumentative virtue. Sensitivity to the normative domain-dependence of traits ought to be a feature of the inferential practices built into metaphorising but can be distorted by myopia. When this happens, there will be a mistaken transfer of traits from the domain of WAR to that of ARGUMENT:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Domain** | | |
|  | **Source** | **Target** | **Transfer** |
| **1.** | *t* = virtue | *t* =virtue | APPROVE |
| **2.** | *t* =virtue | *t* =vice | RESIST |
| **3.** | *t* =vice | *t* =virtue | APPROVE |
| **4.** | *t* =vice | *t* =vice | RESIST |

In option 1, a trait that functions as a martial virtue would also function as an argumentative virtue, meaning the trait-transfer should be approved. In that case, use of ARGUMENT-AS-WAR does good work. In option 2, a trait that is a martial virtue, when transferred, manifests as an argumentative vice, so the transfer ought to be resisted – a case where the normative status of a trait is domain-dependent. In option 3, a trait that is a martial vice changes normative status during transfer, becoming a martial virtue. In option 4, a trait is a vice in both the martial and argumentative domains. A properly functioning practices of metaphorising reliably blocks trait-transfer that yield argumentative vices, while reliably approving transfers that yield argumentative virtues.

Consider two specific traits, to make this more concrete, the first being a disposition to persist with an activity despite subjection to adversities, dangers, or threats to oneself. It seems obvious this is a martial virtue, since a good soldier will continue to perform actions – such as sentry duties or medical evacuation – despite their being subjected to enemy fire from snipers and other enemy combatants. Since exercise of this trait is constitutive of good or excellent soldiers, it manifests as the virtue of courage. But that disposition is also pertinent to argumentation, which often means one is subjected to criticisms or refutations, of a sort that can threaten one’s confidence, self-esteem, and commitments. Since an ability to persist with argumentation despite such adversities is an excellence, the disposition again manifests as a virtue – the virtue of epistemic courage (Kidd (2018). In this case, the trait functions in both domains as an excellence or virtue; that being so, it is useful to have metaphors which facilitate its transfer, of which ARGUMENT-AS-WAR is one.

A second example is a disposition to engage with other agents in the context of some specific activity in ways that aim to leave them in a state of permanent incapacity, to ‘crush’ or ‘destroy’ those one sees as one’s opponents or enemies, such that they could no longer participate in that activity. This disposition might manifest in various ways, depending on the type of activity—for instance, within physical combat, as a determination to cause injuries of a peculiarly severe sort, or, within argumentation, as a desire not just to refute an opponent but to extract apologies from them for the ‘insult’ of advancing the proposition. I suspect this disposition would be a martial virtue, since a willingness to permanently incapacitate enemy combatants is often necessary, for instance, as the only way to secure a lasting victory. But the same trait is an argumentative vice: a disposition to try to permanently incapacitate one’s dialectical opponents is neither necessary nor desirable. Even if one does achieve the immediate aim of ‘winning’, there are wider costs – a reduction in the ranks of those able to share what Aristotle called the ‘common work’ of enquiry, for instance, or the creation of aggressively adversarial conditions hostile to collaboration. The vice might be related to what Jason Baehr calls ‘epistemic malevolence’, which, in its ‘personal’ form, is an ‘opposition to the epistemic good’ of a specific ‘person or group of people’ (2010: 193). Such malevolence includes a desire to permanently damage the epistemic self-confidence, abilities, and agency of a person or group. The desire to win an argument does not require that others be subjected to such intensive, relentless epistemic attack that their willingness and ability to engage in debate is permanently destroyed.

A vivid instance of this trait is Sartre’s treatment of Simone de Beauvoir, as reported in her *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter:*

I outlined for him the pluralist ethics which I had cobbled together …: he took it apart [*il la mit en pièces*]. I clung to my system …; I struggled for three hours. In the end I had to admit I was beaten […] “I’m not longer sure what I think, nor whether I can be said to think at all”, I noted, disconcerted’ (quoted in Moi 2008: 37-38).

Sartre’s aggressiveness and relentlessness were vicious in their effects, since they went way beyond what was necessary to demonstrate the faults of de Beauvoir’s ideas, even to the point of risking doing severe damage to her epistemic self-confidence—leaving her unsure ‘whether [she could] be said to think at all.’ Had she not recovered her self-confidence, Sartre would have bought his victory at the cost of diminishing the existentialist project to describe and cope with the complexities of human agency and responsibility. Worse still, another loss and injustice would have been added to the long, ongoing history of systematic gendered oppression in philosophy.

**6 Metaphors, myopia, and masculinity.**

To gather these points together, my claim is that structural metaphors are *dense*, they set up a variety of associations between their source and target domains, which in the case of some metaphors – such as ARGUMENT-AS-WAR - can set up the possibility of transferring character traits from the one domain to the other. The martial metaphors do this by setting up parallels between the traits of a good warrior and a good arguer, and, very often, such transfers can occur implicitly and automatically. The problem is that the normative status of a trait as vice or as virtue is often domain-dependent, such that attitudes or dispositions that are virtuous in the source domain can become vicious in the target domain. Such mistransfers can happen for all sorts of reasons, of course, although they are more likely to occur when our practices of metaphorising start to degenerate—when, for instance, our myopia makes us oblivious to the actual richness and variety of the meanings and associations of certain metaphors.

A main source of this myopia within contemporary philosophical and social cultures is the deep entrenchment of sexist constructions of masculinity and epistemic authority which privilege aggression, dominance, and violence. Since warfare is gendered as masculine, use of martial metaphors to conceptualise argumentation tend to become myopic – narrowly focused on the agonistic and destructive aspects of combat and warfare, and those traits and dispositions associated with them, such as aggression and mercilessness.

Such metaphorising of warfare in terms of aggression and other hypermasculine traits is problematically myopic. Any serious attention to military practice and ethics shows quite clearly that aggressiveness, belligerence, and other violent traits are not actually judged to be martial virtues. Aggressiveness, for instance, tends to make people act in ways that pose a danger to themselves and others, which is why its removal is essential to the early stages of military training. The eight virtues of the Bushidō code, articulated by Nitobe Inazō, are mainly virtues of service and restraint – such as righteousness (*gi*), respect (*rei*), and loyalty (*chūgi*) each of which precludes excessive exercises of force while enjoining mindful attention to the status and abilities of others.

The result is that a wider set of martial attitudes and dispositions becomes occluded, such as the virtues of courage, discipline, and restraint and those Bushidō virtues. By looking only for aggressive, dominative, violent aspects of warfare, one finds only the vices of aggressive, dominative, violence. The martial metaphors therefore yield only what one seeks from them. Such sexist myopia therefore deforms practices of metaphorising by interfering with the transfer between domains of traits – vices of violence are transferred since they resonate with those constructions of masculinity, even though they fail to manifest as argumentative virtues, while a whole array of traits that do double duty as both martial and argumentative virtues are occluded, like camaraderie and self-restraint.

I therefore suggest that criticism should be directed not at the martial metaphors, but at the wider cultures that shape – and often ‘deform’ – our practices of metaphorising. Given the density of martial metaphors, they can yield various ethically, socially, and epistemically positive goods – one could conceptualise of a good arguer as highly disciplined, restrained in their use of power and force, committed to deploy their skills in the service of a community, and with a powerful sense of camaraderie that’s inconsistent with ruthless competitiveness, all of which sounds far more attractive than the egoistic, aggressive, ‘kill-or-be-killed', point-scoring, ‘zero-sum’ style and tone of too many modern experiences of argumentation. What is really the source of these problems are the distortions and myopia intrinsic to the deeply entrenched sexism that interferes with our use of our metaphorical resources, feeds a variety of argumentative vices, and – to quote Aristotle – spoils the ‘common work’ of inquiry.

**Acknowledgements**

I’m grateful to Alessandra Tanesini for the invitation to contribute and for her comments and encouragement. Also, to Andrew Aberdein and Catarina Dutilh-Novaes for inspiring my thinking about adversariality, and an audience at Cardiff for their thoughtful comments and warm encouragement.

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