The Exclusion Argument

Yaron Senderowicz

Abstract In *Controversies and the Metaphysics of Mind,* I pointed out the epistemic merits of philosophical (metaphysical) controversies by examining a type of argument that is often used in philosophical controversies – the Relevant Controversial Alternative argument. Arguments belonging to this type aim to point out the relevance of the arguer's position to the content of the opponent's radically opposed position. An exchange that consists of Relevant Controversial Alternative arguments and responses to them is a cooperative intellectual project binding the representatives of competing positions together. Exclusion arguments are motivated by the opposite goal. These are arguments that aim to undermine the relevance of a radically opposed position to the content and goals of the position that one supports, that is, they aim to isolate one's position from the opposed one. In this chapter I examine the nature of Exclusion arguments and, in particular, the rational (epistemic) motivation to use them.

Keywords Controversies • Philosophical controversies • The pragmatics of controversies • Arguments • Rationality • Dascal • Kant

1 Introduction

Since antiquity, the practice of philosophy has involved polemical confrontations between representatives of opposed philosophical schools. The debates between philosophers seem to motivate the development of thought and to stimulate philosophy as a critical activity. Nevertheless, the idea that oppositions between

Y. Senderowicz (✉)
Department of Philosophy, Tel Aviv University, P.O.B. 39040, Ramat Aviv, Tel-Aviv 69978, Israel
e-mail: senderow@post.tau.ac.il

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philosophical schools and traditions and the confrontations they generate are in fact groundless reappears, time and again, in the history of philosophy. For example, in *Language, Truth, and Logic*, A.J. Ayer spells out one of the goals of his classical treatise as follows:

> One of the main objects of this treatise has been to show that there is nothing in the nature of philosophy to warrant the existence of conflicting philosophical parties or schools. For it is only when the available evidence is insufficient to determine the probability of a proposition that the difference of opinion concerning it is justifiable. But with regard to the propositions of philosophy this can never be the case. (1971: 176)

Many philosophers that disagree with Ayer's theory, nevertheless, make similar claims with regard to oppositions in philosophy. In their attempt to examine the possibility and nature of philosophical controversies, they likewise claim to know that nothing in the nature of philosophy "really" warrants the existence of conflicting philosophical parties or schools, even if their reasons differ from Ayer's reasons. This appears to be the case even when one does not think that oppositions between philosophical theories are groundless as Ayer does. Indeed, some philosophers that address the given polemical confrontations interpret them as confrontations that are caused by some real features of our philosophical scheme. Yet, what one claims to know is that these features are sources of natural mistakes and illusions that are ruled out on the basis of the interpreter's viewpoint. In the same vein, philosophers of the Hegelian school represent the philosophical oppositions and confrontations as a necessity of reason that is connected to the historical process of the self-realization of reason. Nevertheless, in this case too, one grasps the conflicts from a viewpoint on the basis of which one claims to know that they are, in fact, resolved.

It is interesting to note, however, that although this approach is prevalent, the main supposition that underlies it is not supported by the evidence provided by the history of philosophy or by the current state of philosophy. Our philosophical world is just as divided between opposed viewpoints as was the world of our predecessors, and the polemical confrontations that these opposed views stimulate are just as real today as they were in Plato, Kant, or Ayer's times. As far as the recognized public criteria of acceptability are concerned, no attempt to settle the philosophical oppositions and the disputes that they motivate "once and for all" has been successful.

The discrepancy between the common approach and the available evidence provides reason to search for a different methodology in attempting to respond to the question as to the role and the significance of conflicts and dialogical confrontations in philosophy. Given recurring failure to eliminate conflicts, one might wish to look for an account of the function and structure of polemical confrontations by attempting to examine their nature without attempting at the same time to construct a philosophical account that represents them as groundless. The attempt to examine the nature and the significance of polemical confrontations that is faithful to the evidence provided by the history of philosophy must, as a heuristic rule, begin by accepting the diversity of conflicting positions as a real feature of our intellectual climate.

Accepting the diversity of conflicting positions as a heuristic rule need not entail any sort of relativism. It is not equivalent to making any judgment regarding the nature of truth or the nature of any other philosophical concept. This heuristic rule does indeed require abandoning the sought-after, self-assured standpoint from which one "now" presumes to know the sources of oppositions in philosophy and how they can be resolved. But this requirement is motivated by a modest and reasonable supposition. As long as there are philosophers that provide good rational support for the contentions that conflict with one's own contentions, there is no reason to suppose that one's own claim to philosophical knowledge of the nature of our basic philosophical and metaphysical concepts is already secured.

The above heuristic rule enables one to uncover the features of real philosophical dialogues and the way in which these are involved in the rational process of constructing philosophical theories and forming philosophical positions. It requires us to grasp the conflicting positions and dialogical confrontations from the perspective of the dialogical process itself, that is, from a viewpoint that does not abstract them from their inherent pragmatic dimension of dialogical exchanges.

2 Controversies and Rationality

The claim that the study of polemical confrontations, not only in philosophy but also in science, theology, and politics, should presuppose the diversity of conflicting positions as a real feature of our intellectual situation and that it should address the conflicts from the perspective of the way in which they are expressed in real dialogical exchanges throughout history is probably one of the main features of Dascal's program in the study of controversies.[1] In a series of papers and books published in the last three decades, he underscored the significance of the pragmatic theory of controversies to the ongoing attempt to explain the nature of human rationality. In his view, there are no barriers separating radically opposed views that rule out the possibility of communication. There is no case of radical differences between positions in which a resolution is in principle not possible. Following Leibniz, he maintains that there are almost no limits to our ability to produce *rational arguments*, that is, to *persuade by means of reasons*, even in contexts in which contenders are separated by radical differences.[2]

However, Dascal's approach appears to be guided by an optimistic idea that – to the best of my knowledge – he does not attempt to justify. He seems to assume that entering a controversy with an opponent with whom one radically disagrees is generally *more rational* than avoiding it. My aim in the present context is to examine the cogency of this assumption.

[1] Dascal uses the term "controversy" in a quasi-technical sense. He distinguishes controversies from disputes and discussions. See in particular Dascal (1998a, b).

[2] See in particular Dascal (2008).

In *Controversies and the Metaphysics of Mind* (2010), I examined several chains of controversies in current metaphysics of mind. I tried to clarify the positive role of controversies in pursuing philosophical knowledge by spelling out the features of one type of dialectical argument that will be hereafter called the Relevant Controversial Alternative (RCA) argument. This is a kind of argument similar to the one that Kant used in the chapters dedicated to the antinomies of pure reason in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998). As I have shown, an effective use of arguments that have the features of RCA constitutes chains of controversies that manifest an interesting feature: even though they are separated by radical differences, the parties involved in these controversies are bound by a cooperative and communal process of investigation. Yet, since all of the chains of controversies examined in this book had this feature, one could have been misled to suppose that dialogical confrontations between radically opposed views are always dialogical exchanges that have the character of a cooperative process of investigation. This was not my view. Nevertheless, I thought that it is possible to examine controversies that manifest a cooperative process without needing to clarify the nature of responses to radically opposed views that are based on another type of argument which will hereafter be called the Exclusion argument (EA). As will be clarified in what follows, one of the main differences between RCA and EA consists in the fact that RCA renders the contentions of a given position relevant to the content and goals of the radically opposed position. An effective RCA argument initiates a controversy, if the addressee's response to the contender's challenge either directly or indirectly accepts the claim that the argument indeed reveals that the contender's contentions are relevant to the addressee's position, even if – before a resolution is suggested – they conflict with the addressee's position. By contrast, EA aims *to undermine the relevance* of a radically opposed position to the content and goals of the position that one supports. In the first type of polemical dialogues the participants join forces in the search for a rational resolution of the difficulties and paradoxes related to the gaps revealed by means of the RCA arguments used in the exchange in the presumed shared view. By contrast, the second type of argument rules out the fruitfulness of the confrontation. In fact, it aims to isolate one's position from the opposed one.

I no longer believe that it is possible to examine the function and structure of controversies that involve the use of RCA or similar types of arguments without spelling out the nature and role of EA. The use of EA is prevalent in philosophy, which, among other things, indicates that we do not have the natural tendency to opt for cooperative activities through confrontations with others with whom we radically disagree. But, can one rationally justify the prevalent appeal to EA? If the use of EA is supported by rational motives, Dascal's optimism regarding the rational role of polemical exchanges must be questioned.

My intention here will be to begin to spell out the reasons for adopting a rational strategy that recommends minimizing the use of EA and opting for cooperative dialogical confrontations. It seems to me that the appearance of rational support for using EA is at least partly explained by the misrepresentation of the epistemic status of the user's philosophical theory. The significance of the study of controversies does not merely consist in the quest for a correct account of the role of polemical

dialogues in human rationality. Rather, by producing such a theory and by clarifying the advantages of rational polemical dialogues, the results of this inquiry are bound to influence the investigated subject matter. In other words, I suggest that the grounds that motivate the prevalent use of EA are closely associated with some of the reasons that underlie the contention that one *knows* that "nothing in the nature of philosophy warrants the existence of conflicting philosophical parties or schools" (Ayer 1971: 176) which is refuted by the evidence that the history of philosophy provides.

In the next section, I will briefly present the features of RCA. I will then clarify the nature of EA and will conclude by presenting some reasons that support the preference to enter a cooperative polemical exchange as a rational strategy.

3 The Relevant Controversial Alternative Argument

In *Controversies and the Metaphysics of Mind* (2010), I suggested that Kant's arguments in the antinomies of pure reason in his *Critique of Pure Reason* could be viewed as the paradigm of a metaphysical argument. As I interpret it, the argument consists of two main steps. The first step establishes the antinomy itself. An antinomy is exposed by means of two lines of arguments, each of which aims to prove a given contention, thesis, and antithesis. Each of these contentions can be viewed as the symptomatic propositions of two conflicting philosophical positions that contain other propositions. The arguments used by Kant have two notable features. First, the arguments in favor of the thesis or the antithesis are effective only relative to what is believed to be true in the exact and the empirical sciences. The second point is that the arguments employ philosophical insights that are presumed to be shared by the proponent and the opponent, that is, insights the arguer presumes are obvious in the relevant community. Each line of argument can establish a contention assumed to be entailed by a proposition that expresses one of these insights. Hence, given the presumed shared knowledge, the overall argument of the first major step of the antinomy reveals an internal conflict of reason within itself. Before the argument is presented, these insights do not seem to conflict with one another.

The second major step of the argument consists of an attempt to identify the source of the conflict. That is, it points out another contention assumed to be shared by the conflicting parties, and yet, it is a contention that has an alternative. In Kant's case, the shared contention is the supposition that we know things as they are in themselves, and the alternative is the contention that we know things only as appearances and not as things in themselves. The argument aims to *persuade its addressees* that the conflict will disappear, in case one is willing to reject this supposition, that is, if one is willing to accept that we do not know things as they are in themselves. In this case, both contentions are either true together or false together. Hence, the goal of the overall argument establishes a metaphysical doctrine – Kant's transcendental idealism – by claiming that it is possible to resolve

the tension between the competing and incompatible contentions if one accepts this doctrine. Clearly, the ability to resolve these conflicts provides persuasive reasons to favor Kant's doctrine over competing doctrines.

Nevertheless, in contrast to what Kant seems to suppose, the rational power of these reasons is not an a-historical matter. It inherently depends on the presumed scientific knowledge that may change in ways that do not depend on what the arguer presumes. Kant's discussion in the chapters dedicated to the antinomies does not only leave out the historical dimension of the power of reasons. It also leaves out the pragmatic layers of the arguments. Interestingly, adding these layers to Kant's account does not weaken his insights, but rather renders them more intelligible.

The combination of Kant's original insights and the pragmatic dimensions of arguments constitute the following account of the type of arguments that he used: a metaphysical or a philosophical contention should be interpreted as a *presumption* that allocates *the burden of proof*, and accepting it as a presumption depends both on what is assumed to be known by all parties involved and on what seems to be unique to different research communities. For example, the contention that mental states and processes are physical states and processes is a strong presumption of current analytic philosophy of mind but not, I suspect, a presumption that Leibnizians share. But presumptions *can be challenged*. Arguments that have the features of RCA exemplify the way presumptions can be challenged. The premises of the argument are presumptions assumed to be accepted by the relevant addressees with whom one disagrees, and the conclusion drawn is the symptomatic contention of the arguer's position. For example, the premises of Kripke's argument in Chapter 3 of *Naming and Necessity* (1980) that are accepted by the physicalist entail the contention that the qualitative features of mental states are not identical to physical properties, which is a contention that dualists accept and physicalists dispute. Since the argument aims to establish the symptomatic proposition of the arguer's position by linking it to what the addressee presumes, a persuasive argument of this type makes the position that defends the disputed contention a *controversial relevant alternative* to the opponent's position.

Recognizing a position as a controversial relevant alternative on the basis of such arguments normally requires a response that goes beyond what was explicitly known before the controversy. More often than not, it requires the introduction of new concepts and the uncovering of new conceptual connections and can therefore be viewed as one of the sources of epistemic change in metaphysics and philosophy.

Controversies that evolve around arguments that have the features of RCA therefore clarify how communicative exchanges that involve radical differences between contenders can in fact be fruitful cooperative endeavors. The chain of controversies that evolved around Kripke's (1980) modal argument and Jackson's (1982) knowledge argument and the conceptual changes that it motivated exemplify the fruitfulness of controversial exchanges.[3] This chain of controversies also

[3]This chain of controversies is examined in Part Two of *Controversies and the Metaphysics of Mind* (2010).

clarifies the fact that there is more than one available response to an argument challenging a given contention. Moreover, the conflicting responses to the challenge are bound to later become the source of new controversies that may also involve RCA arguments.

4 The Exclusion Argument

An exchange that consists of RCA arguments and responses to them is a cooperative intellectual project binding the representatives of competing positions together. As I noted above, an EA is motivated by the opposite goal. An EA is used in order to undermine the relevance of the radically opposed position to one's own position. Yet, I suggest that the contexts that invite RCA arguments are similar to the contexts that invite EA. In both cases, the arguer believes that she has better support for her case, given the available evidence. But the arguer that uses RCA arguments or that responds to them views the task of persuading her opponent as part and parcel of the task of defending her own position, while the arguer of EA is not driven by a similar goal. She does not aspire to persuade her opponent who, in her view, fails to respond to the power of the reasons supporting her case. She does not regard it as part of the task of providing support for her own position.

This difference can be clarified by pointing out the roles that the argument to an illusion plays in the contexts in which RCA arguments are used and in the contexts in which EA are used. In both cases, arguers recognize the insights or philosophical intuitions related to the opposed position as sources of illusions. In both cases, they aim to block the power of these intuitions by exposing what motivates the contentions of their opponents. Yet, while the challenged party in contexts in which RCAs are employed recognizes the relevance and the significance of the opponent's argument, this is not the cases in contexts in which EAs are used. For example, the claim that the intuition of distinctness (i.e., the intuition that mental (qualitative) states and physical states are distinct states) involves a cognitive illusion is one of the physicalists' responses to the challenge posed by dualists.[4] However, in this case, the claim to an illusion usually involves the recognition of the importance of the argument to which one responds and the significance of the insights upon which the argument is based. The claim that we are apt to be victims of such illusions is usually backed by a cognitive theory that singles out the rational or natural sources of the illusion. By contrast, although users of EA may also contend that their opponents are victims of some sort of illusion, nevertheless, they do not grasp the arguments to which they respond or the insights upon which they are based as significant or important. In particular, they do not believe that they need to *explain* the fact that their opponents continue to hold to their positions in spite of what the arguer believes

[4]See in particular Tye (2000), Papineau (2002), and Jackson (2004). Their appeal to cognitive illusions in their attempt to defend physicalism exemplifies this type of response.

to be "the conclusive evidence" that supports her position. Normally, as Ayer (1971) and Carnap (1959) do, they tend to view the assertions that express these insights as groundless or even meaningless and tend to interpret as irrational the fact that the opponent continues to make them in the face of evidence.

The addressees of the public use of EA are usually not the representatives of the opposed position. Rather, they are the audience of researchers that consist either of allies or of neutral observers. It is commonplace in these contexts to emphasize the strength of the presumptions that support the arguer's case. Typical strategies may involve the search for demarcation principles (see, e.g., Carnap 1959 and Ayer 1971) and principles of significance that aim to exclude the meaningfulness of the other's contention. But they may be less extreme than these.

One important feature implicit in the EA is the following: EA can often be interpreted as simultaneously expressing two conflicting issues. On the one hand, they express the *failure to understand* how the opponent continues to be committed to her position "in the face of the available evidence," and moreover, they also dismiss as insignificant what the opponent says. This tension raises also the following question: why does the arguer bother to exclude a position that she believes she knows to be groundless and insignificant? A reasonable answer to this question is that the objective of EA is to convince a neutral audience that might be tempted by the misleading insights that underlie the opposed position. Yet, this kind of response is incomplete as it stands. Ruling out the relevance of what one fails to understand cannot be explained merely on the basis of the motivation to be the guardian of the minds of others. The question we need to address is therefore the following: assuming that a proponent of a given position is convinced that the available body of evidence provides better rational support for her position, is it more rational for her to enter a cooperative project of polemical exchange that inherently involves the intention to persuade the opponents, or should she avoid entering this type of confrontation? It does not require much speculation to contend that users of EA are prone to answer that one should avoid entering the polemical exchange. In other words, I suggest that one of the convictions that motivates one to use EA is the supposition that it is more rational to avoid a cooperative polemical exchange than to be involved in it.

Indeed, it seems that one could present rational support for using EA in the relevant contexts. Clearly, not all responses to challenges are bound to lead to intellectual progress. As I suggested above, there is indeed evidence that supports the supposition that responses to opposed views that aim to persuade by means of reasons are fruitful. But there is also massive evidence that supports the contrary view, that is, cases in which the polemical exchanges do not motivate intellectual progress. In addition, intellectual progress is not feasible only by means of responses to challenges posed by a radically opposed view. It can be also achieved by other means. Clearly, these are motives that refer to one's own intellectual progress.

5 Optimism Vindicated

In Sect. 3 of this chapter, I clarified how communicative exchanges in contexts of radical differences could be the basis for intellectual progress. I spelled out the rational grounds that may motivate one to enter such exchanges. Yet, attempting to avoid the exchange also seems to have rational support. We therefore seem to be torn between two opposed poles pulling us in conflicting directions. The problem we seem to face here is that we *do not know in advance whether it would be more beneficial to enter an exchange than to avoid it*, and therefore, we do not know which course of action one should prefer.

We may begin answering this question by noting that there are conceivable cases in which it would be reasonable to interpret the intentions that underlie the use of EA as anything but intentions related to the prospects for intellectual progress. These are cases in which one misuses EA, at least as far as one's own rational epistemic goals are concerned. Misuse can easily be explained. Intuitions or insights are the unavoidable grounds based on which one can determine whether or not to take part in the exchange. Nevertheless, intuitions are fragile and defeasible grounds. Irrelevant motives may be inseparably mixed with the relevant motives. There are obvious limits to acts of self-criticism, and it is not possible to avoid the mistakes and illusions related to one's intuitive and immediate responses merely by relying on what is available to the self-criticizing person.

Not all challenges posed by opposed positions are worthy of a response, but we cannot know which challenges are *before we have made a serious attempt*. Given that one's own goal is the rational epistemic goal and that the relevant contenders that hold a radically opposed position are competent and knowledgeable philosophers, it is *more rational* to enter a cooperative polemical exchange with them than to avoid it. We can effectively protect ourselves from being deceived by the mistakes and illusions inherent in our intuitions only by exposing ourselves to radically opposed views in polemical debates. A reflective examination of them cannot lead to the same result. Yet, in spite of its being more rational, we are not naturally disposed to adopt this approach. If we wish to be rational, we ought to follow this advice: we should educate ourselves and others not to avoid the difficulties and confusion involved in this type of communicative exchange.

Dascal's optimism can be therefore defended. But a defense requires one to surpass the constraints of a purely theoretical descriptive project. The project must also involve an ethical and educational dimension that cannot be entirely separated from the theoretical dimension. I suspect, however, that this fits well his original intentions.

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