

## REShare – Session 1 (Term 4, 2021)

### Creating a Culture of Discussion – A Philosophical Approach

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#### The purpose of dialogue and discussion in philosophy:

- (i) A communal effort to attain the truth;
- (ii) Skill in conceptual analysis (and definition)
- (iii) Skill in logical and critical thinking

#### The primary principles of dialogue:

- (i) Begin with experience (this connects us to the reality of what we are discussing)
- (ii) Recognise that all arguments – if based on genuinely held opinions - are at least partially true
- (iii) Suspension of assumptions or preconceptions is necessary for genuine dialogue, i.e., there is no point to dialogue if members of the discussion already think they know the answers and are not willing to consider alternative views
- (iv) The truth that we are after in dialogue and discussion is always universal truth, i.e., a truth that is common and unifying rather than partial and uncommon. The trick to dialogue and discussion is to work out how to move from a wide range of partial truths that appear to contradict each other to a common truth that unifies all of the partial truths. Communal truth = common truths.
- (v) Remember that a good dialogue or discussion needs to have a carefully crafted question that is limited in scope, can be answered in terms of truth or falsity, and in which the boundaries (and purpose) of the discussion can be clearly defined.

#### Three Examples of Dialogue\Discussion:

1. [Socratic Dialogue](#)
2. [Aristotelian Induction](#)
3. [Disputation](#)

#### Socratic Dialogue:

1. Focus on a common sense statement.
2. Find an exception to that statement.
3. Reject the statement if an exception is found.
4. The respondent reformulates the statement to account for the exception.
5. Keep repeating the process until a statement cannot be overturned.

**Example:** Q: "What is Justice?"

1. A: 'Justice is the equal distribution of goods.'
2. Find example of when everyone receiving the equal measure of something is harmful or obviously unfair, such as food distribution that does not account for medical/dietary needs of individuals. You can also use an example when an issue of justice has nothing to do with distribution.
3. Reject statement, ask again: "What is Justice?"
4. The respondent reformulates the statement to account for the exception.
5. Repeat until an exception cannot be found.

**Key things to remember about the Socratic method:**

1. Socrates is always after an essential definition of an idea
2. The initial attempt at definition is normally just examples or illustrations of the meaning of the idea
3. The initial definition provided is usually an ordinary everyday (wrong-headed) understanding of an idea (Example: justice is doing good to your friends and harming your enemies)
4. Each time the definition is refuted (by showing exceptions to the definition, or by showing that the definition is self-contradictory), a new more refined definition is produced.
5. Either that (4), or a completely new definition is provided when a new character enters the dialogue. For example, if you are asking a politician about justice, you might first refute a right wing view of justice (as rights) before then examining (via a new attempt at definition) the left wing definition of justice (as equality)
6. Finally, please remember that you do not need to provide a final definition. You might find a definition that you think works, but that is not the main point. The main point is to explore common definitions of ideas found in our society and to test whether they are reasonable.

## Aristotelian Induction:

- (i) Phenomena: start by asking students to examine their experience of a particular phenomenon, e.g., what are the core or common features of the experience, what is essential to the experience, etc...?
- (ii) Endoxa: Provide students with short texts that provide them with a variety of apparently contradictory accounts of the phenomenon
- (iii) Discussion: Ask students to work out in discussion with each other how: a) all of the various opinions can be unified together as a single account of the phenomenon (or which of the various opinions best incorporates the others); and b) in relation to their own experience of the phenomenon

## Disputation:

Disputations are the model of dialogical learning that emerged in the medieval university. They are very structured discussions that force students to consider a range of contradictory positions.

### **The basic structure of a disputation:**

- (i) A question that can be answered in the affirmative or negative
- (ii) Objections to answering the question to the affirmative
- (iii) On the contrary: at least one strong argument that supports answering the question to the affirmative
- (iv) I answer that...: where consideration of all of the arguments, both objections and 'on the contrary' is given, and an answer that integrates all of the arguments together to form an answer to the affirmative (or negative) to the question
- (v) Replies: where the objections are reconsidered and responded to – with a focus on showing how each of the objections is only partially true

### **I use disputations to encourage dialogue in two main ways:**

1. For a major cooperative project (that includes research) – I get students to do research to find the arguments required for all of the parts of the disputation
2. For a quicker cooperative discussion or debate, I will provide students with the Objections and 'On the Contrary' and then leave it to students to – via discussion – come up with their own "I answer that..." and their replies to the Objections