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Book review

Traditions of Controversy

Marcelo Dascal and Han-liang Chang (Eds.), John Benjamins, Amsterdam, 2007, 310 pages, ISBN 9789027218841, €110.00

Traditions of Controversy contains fifteen studies on a range of subjects, time spans, and levels of cultural specificity or cross-cultural aspects concerning the '*Ancient Traditions: East and West*' (Part 1), '*Medieval and Early Modern Traditions: Logic, Dialectic, and Rhetoric in Controversy*' (Part 2), and '*Modern Traditions: The Rise of Scientific Disciplines*' (Part 3). From a historical point of view, these studies reveal the social values and the linguistic, epistemological and ontological frameworks of the analyzed controversies, as well as their participants and aims, procedures, contextual features, and the contribution of controversies to the structure of our practical and intellectual lives. From a systematic point of view, they concentrate on special features of controversies and suggest analytical tools for refining distinctions, asking meta-level questions, and examining the possibility of a general theory of controversy. They provide both rich material for analyzing controversies as pragmatic phenomena, and for broadening the disciplinary horizons of pragmatics and its interactions with various other fields.

Part I begins with Geoffrey Lloyd's cross-cultural analysis of Greek and Chinese patterns of controversies (chapter 1). These patterns are under the influence of different social values, ways of developing science, and ways of answering to some structural questions. These questions include topics such as the nature and aims of contenders, context, closure, rules, target, audience, and final arbiter. According to Lloyd, even within a single culture, the nature and style of debate may vary, as can be seen in the Greek tradition. Lloyd shows how the Greeks experienced polemics in every sphere of their lives and on every subject. Adelino Cattani (chapter 6) analyzes how the Greeks were masters at exploring the rhetorical, epistemological, and ethical dimensions of debating. He sees debating in Western culture as marked by the 'pleasure of debating' in Ancient Greece, the 'right of debating' in Renaissance and Enlightenment, and the contemporary 'duty of debating', which often excludes 'polemics'. Speaking against this exclusion, Cattani observes that the dialogue form does not exclude polemics, and that its absence is not a guarantee of agreement. Polemics may serve to encourage discussion and to reach consensus as well. Controversy is not opposed to dialogue, but to authoritarianism.

Chinese debates were less flexible in relation to subjects, procedures, contenders, and final arbitration. Lloyd observes that these debates took often place in writing, and disagreements with past masters were more explicit than with living contemporaries. Han-liang Chang's analysis (chapter 4) of the Great Debate on *ming* (name) and *shi* (substance or *actuality*) illustrates how epistemological, ontological, and pragmatic issues were involved in the famous debate which Zhuangzi engaged in on the function of language and the language–world relationship (semiotic and logical–semantic relations, and the transformation of semantic differentiation into pragmatic disputation). In chapter 5, Peng Yi analyzes Xunzi's polemics on 'form' as related to the debate on 'human nature', which involves moral, linguistic, and ontological issues. Yi sees Xunzi's theory of the inherent 'evil' of human nature as aiming at properly understanding the seminal emptiness of its 'form' and its transcendence through 'ritual deeds', and, as a rhetorical appeal, at bringing other philosophers into the debate on the modularity of human nature.

Simonetta Ponchia (chapter 3) and Hanina Ben-Menahem (chapter 2) examine other facets of the Eastern tradition of controversies. Ponchia analyzes the metaphors, analogies, argumentative strategies, and the entertaining aspect of controversies found in the Sumerian poem-debates written on stone tablets, which are the oldest examples of the genre of controversy. She supports her analyses by examining co-texts related to various fields and contextual factors, such as the educational function of dialogical confrontation in Sumerian culture. The structure of a controversy is essentially

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pragmatic, and its full comprehension requires interpretation, the crucial role of which appears in Ben-Menahem's deconstruction of Talmudic primary-texts and co-texts (chapter 8). Ben-Menahem focuses on the dispute between the Houses of Shammai and Hillel. Each House asserted that the Law was in accordance with its own view. Then a Heavenly voice announced, ''Both are the words of the living God, but the law is in accordance with the view of the House of Hillel'' (bEruvin 13b). The Sages' pragmatic wisdom inspired all segments of the learned community to express their interpretations of the controversy instead of denying its reality. Attributing controversy to the heavenly sphere rather than to human limitations shows its positive scope in Talmudic literature.

Part 2 analyzes different forms of medieval and early modern 'disputation'. Olga Weijers (chapter 7) focuses on 'scholastic *disputatio*'. As a teaching method, this disputation consisted of a 'yes/no' *quaestio*, two opposing answers and arguments, the master's choice of one of these as the solution, the explanation of its underlying arguments, and his refutation of the arguments of the opposing answer. Weijers considers every disputed *quaestio* as a hypothetical controversy. As a research method, scholastic *disputatio* consisted of a collective work on a difficult problem whose solution was not always definitive. Christopher J. Martin (chapter 8) examines the medieval dispute over *positio*, a procedure for reasoning based on acknowledged impossibilities. 'Natural' ('formal', 'necessary') consequences (those held when the antecedent contained the consequent) should be accepted, but not 'accidental' ones, where the antecedent–consequent connection was guaranteed by an 'extrinsic' *locus* or general proposition. Duns Scotus applied the natural–accidental distinction to the ways in which contradictory claims might follow from the same impossible *positum*. William of Ockam undermined this distinction by redefining 'formal' consequence in purely logical terms as an instance of a general rule (with no reference to particular antecedent and consequent terms), dividing all the consequences into 'formal' and 'material', with the latter holding whenever it was not possible for the antecedent to be true and the consequent false at the same time. The *positum* could not *evidently* entail contradictories. Martin claims that Ockam's metaphysics succeeded in reshaping logic.

The early modern age demanded a redefinition of rhetoric in the dialectics and language of science. Cristina Marras (chapter 9) emphasizes the cognitive role of 'metaphors' in describing and analyzing controversies. She examines the controversy between the (Aristotelian) Conti di Maioragio and the (anti-Aristotelian and pro-Cicero) Mario Nizoli (1543–1555). Their use of metaphors showed how they perceived each other and the nature of their debate procedures. Leibniz analyzed their controversy by using his 'scales' metaphor: both arguments are defensible (despite his slight 'inclination' towards Maioragio) and seek a new and comprehensive philosophy which requires complementary contributions from rhetoric and dialectics, and from practice and theory.

Merio Scattola (chapter 10) explores the structuring and didactic roles of dialectics, topology, and practical philosophy in organizing 16th and 17th century disciplinary fields according to their principles or 'commonplaces' into alphabetical lists of topics, and of questions and answers, or into a formal scheme for academic teaching based on a kind of platonic *diaresis* and appropriate 'commonplaces'. In the late 17th century, however, scientific knowledge required a more precise view of 'principle' as a condensed 'system', and a 'system' as an expanded 'principle' based on a 'deductive method'.

The controversies that Part 3 focuses on reflect contemporary concerns with science, cultural phenomena, methodological issues, and conflict resolution. João Lopes Alves (chapter 11) examines legal *vs.* philosophical and scientific controversies, and asks if a general theory of controversy is possible. Scientific and philosophical rationality can learn from legal rationality that an almighty and omniscient truth is an illusion. However, while truth-values can conflict with other values in legal controversies, the search for these moves scientific controversies towards their ends. A 'judge of controversies' is a desideratum in Science but an obligation in Law. To what extent does a general theory of controversy demand abstraction? According to Alves, the difficulty is that we know *that* (but not *how*) institutional constraints influence the internal framework of controversies. Amos Morris-Rech (chapter 12) examines a particular case, that of the Simmel/Durkheim controversy over the foundation of Sociology. Based on 'primary texts', 'co-texts' and 'non-discursive context', Morris-Rech shows that Simmel and Durkheim shared political views and experiences as Jews facing anti-Semitism in France, but their differing views of society, 'scientific' investigation, and its object led them to adopt irreconcilable positions. Their controversy began when direct communication between them ended after Durkheim had modified and published, against Simmel's express wishes, an article he had invited Simmel to write for *Aneé Sociologique*. Morris-Rech sees this episode as Durkheim's rhetorical move to discredit Simmel's logic. Their controversy was exclusively addressed to a third party (the scientific community).

Chaoqun Xie (chapter 13) studies the case of a cultural phenomenon, namely, politeness whose evaluative nature (argumentative, subjective, and undetermined) has recently been emphasized. He questions the oversimplifications of the social-norm view, statistical methods and discourse completion tests, which assume universality is a mode of social