

“Certain combinations of theses might get ruled out – if you’ve got this view then you shouldn’t hold that view as well. Someone might argue against one version of a view, which rules out some area in philosophical space, but a lot of ground is still left. So it goes all over the map, so it goes for the dualist, the physicalist, the idealist – some versions of these views are ruled out and some versions are left open, kind of like a Swiss cheese map of philosophical space.”

## Philosophers disagree much more than mathematicians

This view of argument is deflating, so is the conception of the practice of philosophy that goes along with it, but it does ring true. I’ve listened to a very large number of philosophical talks and debates over the years, and on no occasion have I ever witnessed a dramatic philosophical conversion – I’ve never seen a dualist listen to an argument and promptly stagger sideways into physicalism. When it does happen – Frank Jackson’s rejection of his own knowledge argument comes to mind – it’s headline news.

Chalmers says that, biographically, he’s won more people around with talk of the extended mind than he has with arguments against physicalism, and he speculates that this has to do with prior commitments – no one thought much about extended minds, so his arguments stood a better chance of gaining traction there. You can maybe swing the odd agnostic with an argument, maybe nudge a grad student who hasn’t made up her mind, but the rest of the time, we’re doing little more than pushing one another into more

sophisticated sorts of disagreement. No one meaningfully budes.

If that’s right, then what exactly is the point of all the effort put into conferences and talks and publications? What are we doing when we present philosophical arguments, if, in fact, they’re not much good at pushing the philosophical community towards the truth?

“I guess I’m still naive enough to think of philosophy as a quest after the truth,” Chalmers says after a pause. “When I do philosophy my number one aim is to figure out the truth for myself. If I find an argument that’s good, that persuaded me, then I figure maybe if all goes well, I’m moving a little closer to the truth.”

“There is of course the social and dialectical aspect of philosophy, and when we do put forward arguments publically, I think we are trying to convince others. If you can bring around a few people in your audience or a few readers of an article, hey I feel like I’ve done pretty well. The article that suddenly convinces everybody of a conclusion, like Gettier’s article on justified true belief, is pretty rare. But somewhere in the back of all this is maybe the naive hope that someone might come up with the right argument that might show all of us the truth. After all it happens every now and then, once or twice in the history of philosophy there’s been a decisive argument. Maybe somewhere in the back of the mind there’s a thought, ‘Just keep trying’. Maybe it’s a little like Charlie Brown trying to kick the football. This year! This time I’m really going to do it! Finally it’s going to be the argument that persuades the world! Maybe it doesn’t happen, but at least we get some enlightenment from the process.”

It’s not just the method of argumentation that’s the problem. Chalmers identifies all sorts of other