For Arguments Sake

My name is Dan Cohen on oh yeah I'm an academic as you said and what that means is that I argue/ it's an important part of my life and I like to argue/ and I'm not just an academic I'm uh I'm a philosopher/ so I like to think that I'm actually pretty good at arguing/ but I also like to think a lot about arguing/ and in thinking about arguing/ I've come across some puzzles/ and one of the puzzles is that as I've been thinking about arguing over the years and it's been decades now/ I've gotten better at arguing/ but the more that I argue and the more and/ the better I get at arguing the more that I lose/ and that's a puzzle/ and the other puzzle is that I'm actually okay with that/ why is it that I'm okay with it/ why is it that I think that good arguers are actually better at losing/ well there's some other puzzles/ one is why do we argue/ benefits from arguments when I think about arguments/ now I'm talking about let's call them academic arguments or cognitive arguments/ where something cognitive is at stake/ is this proposition true/ is this theory a good theory/ is this an is this a viable interpretation of the data or the text/ and so on I'm not interested really arguments about whose turn it is to do the dishes/ or who's who has to take out the garbage/ yeah I we have those arguments - um I tend to win those arguments because I know the tricks/ but those aren't the important organs I'm interested in academic or academic arguments today and here the things that puzzle me/ first what a good arguers win when they win an argument/ what do I win if I convince you that utilitarianism isn't really the right framework for thinking about ethical theories/ so what do we win when we win an argument/ even before that what does it matter to me whether you have this this idea that uh consti rework sir or mills the right right emphasis to follow/ it's no skin off my back but whether you think functionalism is a viable theory of mind/ so why do we even try to argue why don't try to convince other people to believe things that they don't want to believe/ and is that even a nice thing to do/ is that a nice way to treat another human being try and make them think something they don't want to they/ don't want to think well my answer is gonna make reference to three models for arguments the first model let's call this the dialectical models that we think of arguments as war and you know what that's like there's a lot of screaming and shouting and winning and losing and that's not really a very helpful model for our group/ but it's a pretty common and entrenched model for arguing/ but there's a second model for arguing arguments as proofs think of a mathematicians argument/ here's my argument does it work/ is it any good/ are the premises warranted/ or there are the inferences valid/ does the conclusion follow from the premises/ no opposition no adversary Avi not necessarily any any any arguing in the adversarial sense/ but there's a third model to keep in mind that I think it's been very helpful and that is arguments as performances or/ admits in front of an audience we can think of a politician trying to present a position trying to convince the audience of something/ but there's another twist on this model and I that I really think is important/ namely that when we argue before an audience sometimes the audience has a more participatory role in the argument/ that is arguments are also audiences in front of juries who make a judgement decide the case/ let's call this the rhetorical model where you have to tailor your argument to the audience at hand/ you know presenting a sound you know well argued tight argument in English before a francophone what is just isn't going to work/ so we have these models argument is war/ argument is proof/ and argument as performance/ of those three the argument is war is the dominant one it dominates how we talk about arguments/ it dominates how we think about arguments/ and because of that it shapes how we argue our actual conduct and/ arguments now when we talk about arguments yeah we talk in a very militaristic language we want strong arguments arguments have a lot of punch organs/ that are right on target we want to have our defenses up and our strategies all on order/ we want killer arguments that's the kind of argument wart it/ is the dominant way of thinking about arguments when I said talking about arguments that's probably what you thought of the the adversarial model but the art of the war metaphor the war paradigm or model for thing Americans has I think deforming effects on how we argue/ first it elevates tactics over substance/ like you can take class and logic or mutation you learn all about the the subterfuges that people use the triangle organs the the four steps it magnifies the us-versus-them aspect of it it makes it adversarial/ it's polarizing/ and the only foreseeable outcomes is triumphs glorious triumph or object ignominy estefy/ I think those are deforming effects and worst of all it seems to prevent things like/ negotiation or/ deliberation or/ compromise or collaboration think about that way/ I have you ever entered an argument thing let's see if we can hash something out rather than find it/ out what can we work out together/ and I think the argument is war metaphor inhibits those other kinds of resolutions to argumentation and/ finally this is really the the worst thing apartments don't seem to get us anywhere they're dead ends they are what roundabouts are traffic jams or gridlock in conversation we don't get anywhere/ oh and one more thing and as an educator this is the one that that really bothers me if argument is war then there's an implicit equation of learning with losing and/ let me explain what I mean suppose you and I have an argument you believe a proposition P and I don't/ and say well why do you believe P and you give me a reasons and I object to say well what about and you answer my objection and I have a question/ well what do you mean how does it apply over here anyway my question now suppose at the end of the day I've objected I've questioned his authors of counter-current considerations and in every case you've responded to my satisfaction/ and so at the end of the day I say you know what I guess you're right P/ so I have a new belief/ and it's not just any belief but it's a it's all well-articulated examined/ it's a battle-tested belief great cognitive game/ okay who won that argument/ well the war metaphor seems to force us into saying you won/ even though I'm the only one who made any cognitive gain/ what did you gain cognitively from convinced convincing me/ sure you got some pleasure/ out of it maybe your ego stroked/ maybe get some professional statutes Addison in the field/ this guy's/ good arguer but cognitively now/ just hard to put who was the winner the war metaphor forces us into thinking that you're the winner/ and I lost even though I gained/ and that's there's something wrong with that picture/e and that's the picture I really want I want to change if we can/ so have we find ways to make arguments yield something positive/ what we need is new exit strategies for arguments/ but we're not gonna have a new exit strategy for arguments until we have new entry approaches to arguments/ we need to think of new kinds of arguments/ in order to do that/ well I don't know how to do that/ that's the bad news/ the argument is war metaphor is just it's a monster/ it's just taking up habitation in their mind/ in this there's no magic bullet that's gonna kill it/ there's no magical one that's gonna make it disappear/ I don't have an answer/ but I have some suggestions/ and here's the here's the sitch is my suggestion/ if we want to think of new kinds of arguments/ what we need to do is think of new kinds of argues so try this think of all the roles that people play in arguments/ there's the proponent/ and the opponent/ in an adversarial dialectical argument/ there's the audience in rhetorical arguments/ there's the reason they're in arguments as proofs/ all these different roles/ now can you imagine an argument in which you were the arguer/ but you're also in the audience watching yourself argue/ can you imagine yourself watching yourself/ are you losing the argument and yet still at the end of the or and say wow that was a good arguments/ can you do that/ I think they can/ and I think if you can imagine that kind of argument where the loser says to the winner and the oil and the audience and the jury today yeah that was a good argument/ then you have imagined a good argument and more than that I think you've imagined a good arguer/ an arguer that's worthy of the kind of argue you should try to be/ now I lose a lot of arguments/ it takes practice to become a good arguer/ in the sense of being able to benefit losing but you know fortunately I've had many many colleagues who've been willing to step up and provide that practice for me thank you