

**THE RULES OF MATERIAL INFERENCE THEORY OF DEEP  
DISAGREEMENTS**

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## Abstract

Robert Fogelin's problem of deep disagreements is the existence of certain disagreements in which arriving at an agreement by way of argumentation can appear impossible, even if the disagreeing parties are mutually committed to achieving a resolution through earnest argumentation. The essential feature of a deep disagreement is a clash of "underlying principles" which leads the interlocutors to an impasse with respect to deciding upon a means of resolving their disagreement. How we answer the question of whether there is room for effective argumentation in deep disagreements turns upon our understanding of the aforementioned underlying principles. I offer one possible theory of deep disagreements wherein the underlying principles at issue are construed as Wilfrid Sellars's *rules of material inference*. My claim is that this Sellarsian take on deep disagreements effectively captures Fogelin's problem while leaving room for optimism about the various roles that argumentation might play in a deep disagreement.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**FEP** Fundamental Epistemic Principle

**FNP** Fundamental Normative Principle

**RMI** Rule(s) of Material Inference

**WHC** Wittgensteinian Hinge Commitment

## Introduction

What I want to do is look at the following question against the backdrop of a pragmatism informed by Sellarsian inferentialism

What role, if any, is there for argumentation<sup>1</sup> in deep disagreements?

This question (which is really two questions) is a point of contention amongst argumentation theorists. The question of *whether* there is a role for argumentation is debated by optimists (who say “yes there is”)<sup>2</sup> and pessimists (who say “no there isn’t”).<sup>3</sup> The question of *just what that role might be*, meanwhile, is the source of disagreement amongst the optimists. I will ultimately claim that the Sellarsian inferentialist is among the optimists and endorse a number of possible roles various optimists have suggested argumentation might play in a deep disagreement.

The argumentative problem of deep disagreement is first raised in Robert Fogelin’s 1985 “The Logic of Deep Disagreements.” To say that two people have a deep disagreement is to say that they are faced with a clash between their respective *systems of underlying principles* which can (at least appear to) preclude any hope of rational resolution. Fogelin provides the examples of debates over abortion and affirmative action

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1. Argumentation will be understood as a linguistic (verbal or written) exchange of ideas. I will include as argumentation any linguistic exchange which occurs in what Sellars has called “the space of reasons” and which involves “justifying and being able to justify what one says.” (Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), §36, p. 76). This is taken to be in line with Finocchiaro’s description of argumentation as “essentially ‘reasoning-together,’ that is, reason-giving and reason-assessing.” (Maurice Finocchiaro and David Godden, “‘Deep Disagreements: A Meta-Argumentation Approach,” *OSSA Conference Archive*, no. 31 (2011), p. 7). The sense of argumentation with which I am concerned will be called *earnest* argumentation and its *telos* is truth.

2. Some optimists whose positions will be explored in this thesis include Andrew Lugg, David Adams, David Godden and William Brenner.

3. Some pessimists whose positions will be explored in this thesis include Jeremy Barris, Chris Campolo, and Fogelin himself.

as cases of deep disagreements. His point is that our failure to resolve these debates through argumentation is, at least sometimes, better understood as the manifestation of a deeper disagreement which has to do with the underlying principles related to the interlocutors' respective understandings of personhood (in the context of the abortion debate) or fairness (in the context of the affirmative action debate).<sup>4</sup> Fogelin's claim is that, since argumentation relies on a certain minimum of unstated agreement (or common ground) between interlocutors, when two interlocutors are faced with sufficiently incompatible systems of underlying principles, argumentation between them will become impossible because the very "conditions for argument do not exist."<sup>5</sup> It should be clear at this point that how one understands deep disagreements turns upon how one understands the nature of the differing underlying principles to which each interlocutor is committed, and this is by no means settled amongst writers on the subject.

It is not uncommon in the literature on deep disagreements to offer some account of how the underlying principles at issue in a deep disagreement ought to be understood and I will not stray from the herd here. My contribution in this regard will involve considering the underlying principles at issue in a deep disagreement through the lens of *Sellarsian inferentialism* (very roughly, the view that any meaning some statement may have is had only in virtue of the inferential role that that statement plays in a rule governed language),<sup>6</sup> and the centrally-related idea of *material inference*. In his

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4. One need not accept these descriptions of these disagreements in order to appreciate the idea of deep disagreements. For example, in his "On the Pragmatics of Deep Disagreements" Matthew Shields makes the claim that the debate surrounding affirmative action is better understood in terms of oppression and equality rather than fairness (Matthew Shields, "On the Pragmatics of Deep Disagreement," *Topoi*, 2018, §1.1. f. 2).

5. Robert Fogelin, "The Logic of Deep Disagreements," *Informal Logic* 7, no. 1 (1985): p. 5.

6. Robert Brandom, *From Empiricism to Expressivism: Brandom Reads Sellars* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 39-48.

“Inference and Meaning,” Sellars describes the idea of *rules of material inference* with reference to Carnap’s distinction, in *The Logical Syntax of Language*, between formal rules of logic (L-rules) and rules which govern the use of concepts (P-rules). The rules of material inference are the latter sort.<sup>7</sup> The rules of material inference are invoked to provide a non-formal justification for good inferences along the lines of “Its mass is 1 kg therefore its mass is neither 10 kg nor 100 kg” without invoking some unstated premise (in this case, “If its mass is 1 kg, then its mass is neither 10 kg nor 100kg”).<sup>8</sup> My claim is that the underlying principles at issue in a deep disagreement can be fruitfully understood as Sellars’s *rules of material inference*. I will argue that such an understanding of deep disagreements not only captures Fogelin’s problem, but also leaves ample room for the interlocutors to argue productively.

My claim is that pragmatists informed by Sellarsian inferentialism have reason to believe that certain similarities in our environment and biology yield sufficient common ground for those caught up in a deep disagreement to consistently place each other’s cognitive commitments within the space of reasons.<sup>9</sup> There is thus no practical possibility

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7. Wilfrid Sellars, “Inference and Meaning,” in *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds: The Early Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, ed. Jeffrey F. Sicha (Atascadero, California: Ridgeview, 2005), §10-19, pp. 333-38.

8. Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, p. 69. It is worth noting that Fogelin introduces the notion of deep disagreements by first mounting an attack on *deductivism* for its failure to provide a satisfying account of these ordinary inferences (Fogelin, pp. 1-3).

9. I have in mind the kinds of things Dewey mention in chapter 1 of *Reconstruction in Philosophy*:

Although it is surprising how little check the environment puts upon the formation of ideas, since no notions are too absurd not to have been accepted by some people, yet the environment does enforce a certain minimum of correctness under penalty of extinction. That certain things are foods, that they are to be found in certain places, that water drowns, fire burns, that sharp points penetrate and cut, that heavy things fall unless supported, that there is a certain regularity in the changes of day and night and the alternation of hot and cold, wet and dry. (John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 2004), p. 6).

This can be expanded when we bear humanity’s social nature in mind. This too is captured in another of Dewey’s works, *Experience and Education*,

The more we know about customs in different parts of the world at different times in the history of mankind, the more we learn how much manners differ from place to place and time to time. This fact proves that there is a large conventional factor involved. But there is no group at any time or place which does not have some code of manners as, for example, with respect to proper ways of

of what Scott Aikin has called an “*absolutely* deep disagreement”<sup>10</sup> and so we, as pragmatically oriented inferentialists, are able to confidently embrace optimism about deep disagreements, at least when it comes to humans. My examination will leave open the question of whether or not an absolutely deep disagreement could exist between, for example, humans and a species of intelligent beings made up entirely of non-interacting matter, or between two species with no overlap in sensory abilities whatsoever.

In order to make my case, then, I owe the reader answers to the following questions:

- 1) What is the problem of deep disagreements?
- 2) What is my understanding of pragmatism?
- 3) What is Sellarsian inferentialism?
- 4) How does Sellarsian inferentialism provide a useful understanding of deep disagreements?
- 5) What are the more commonly accepted views on the nature of underlying principles?
- 6) What differentiates the inferentialist’s conception of underlying principles from the more commonly accepted views?
- 7) How does the inferentialist’s conception of underlying principles motivate optimism about deep disagreements?

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greeting other persons. The particular form a convention takes has nothing fixed and absolute about it. But the existence of some form of convention is not itself a convention. (John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2015), p. 59).

10. Scott F. Aikin, “Deep Disagreement, the Dark Enlightenment, and the Rhetoric of the Red Pill,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 36, no. 3 (April 2018): pp. 420-435, <https://doi.org/10.1111/japp.12331>, p. 2.

- 8) Given that we have embraced optimism, what argumentative approaches should one take when faced with deep disagreements?

The first chapter aims to answer the first, second and third questions. The second chapter aims to answer the fourth, fifth and sixth questions. The third chapter aims to answer the seventh and eighth questions.

## Chapter 1: Deep Disagreements, Pragmatism and Sellars

In this chapter, I will provide the necessary background for the second and third chapters of this thesis. This chapter is broken into three subsections, each aiming to answer one of the following questions

- 1) What is the problem of deep disagreements?
- 2) What is my understanding of pragmatism?
- 3) What is Sellarsian inferentialism?

Very roughly, my answers will be

- 1) The problem of deep disagreements is the existence of certain disagreements which can appear to preclude fruitful argumentation even when the interlocutors are “unbiased, free of prejudice, consistent, coherent, precise and rigorous.”<sup>11</sup>
- 2) Pragmatism is a philosophical temperament (rather than an ideology or doctrine), marked by
  - a) an understanding of concepts as being essentially related to actions
  - b) a view of concept formation as an essentially social endeavour
  - c) fallibilism
- 3) The view that any meaning some statement may have is had only in virtue of the inferential connections that that statement has within the rule governed language of which it is a part.

These answers will serve as the basis upon which I will argue in the following chapters that a pragmatic inferentialism supports optimism about the role that argumentation can play in a deep disagreement.

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11. Fogelin, p. 5.

## 1.1 What is the problem of deep disagreements?

In this section, I will introduce the problem of deep disagreements and provide an overview of some of the surrounding literature. Deep disagreements are disagreements over which there can appear to be no possibility of rational resolution—not because either of the disagreeing parties are irrational, but because of a clash between the systems of “underlying principles” to which each party is committed. While I will offer an overview of the manner in which these clashes of underlying principles manifest as deep disagreements, this section will sidestep the question of how exactly we are to understand the nature of the underlying principles at issue in a deep disagreement. This is not an oversight—fleshing out an answer will be my primary focus for the remainder of the paper.<sup>12</sup> But for now, the following from Fogelin will have to do

Now when I speak about underlying principles, I am thinking about what others (Putnam) have called framework propositions or what Wittgenstein was inclined to call rules. We get a deep disagreement when the argument is generated by a clash of framework propositions.<sup>13</sup>

Fogelin gives us two examples of deep disagreements: the debate surrounding the moral status of abortion and the debate surrounding the moral status of affirmative action. In the case of the abortion debate, the idea is that the disagreement might turn upon a network of deep-seated beliefs regarding the moral status of the fetus.<sup>14</sup> In the case of the affirmative action debate, the disagreement might turn upon a network of similarly deep-seated beliefs related to the moral status of groups. Fogelin’s point is that disagreements over these topics have to do with one’s “moral standing” and that one’s moral standing is

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12. Underlying principles are most frequently described as Wittgensteinian Hinge Commitments. Fundamental epistemic principles have been suggested as well. An overview of both of these views is included in section 2.1 of this thesis.

13. Fogelin, p. 5.

14. The term ‘fetus’ is here used as a catch-all for various developmental stages (germinal, embryonic and fetal).

determined by a system of underlying principles which make up either interlocutor's conceptual framework.<sup>15</sup>

In his 2018 "On the Pragmatics of Deep Disagreements," Matthew Shields provides what I take to be a helpful clarification regarding the disparity between conceptual frameworks which marks a deep disagreement. Shields makes the case that deep disagreements emerge out of an accumulation of divergent *concepts* that recur throughout what Fogelin calls one's system of underlying principles. Shields views this understanding as implicit in Fogelin's article,<sup>16</sup> and I am inclined to agree. On Shields's reading, in the case of the abortion debate, the idea is that the disagreement might turn upon a network of deep-seated beliefs related to the idea of *personhood* (which in turn determines how we answer questions regarding the moral status of the fetus). In the case of the affirmative action debate, the disagreement might turn upon a network of similarly deep-seated beliefs related to one's conception of *fairness* (Fogelin himself states that the arguments offered in the affirmative action debate are fairness arguments).<sup>17</sup> Of course, not all conceptual differences yield deep disagreements. To this end, Shields turns to Michael Friedman's neo-Kantian idea of concepts that play a constitutive role in a person's conceptual apparatus and highlights the crucial point that "unlike for Kant, Friedman's principles are dynamic, changing over time."<sup>18</sup> This dynamic nature is key for

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15. Fogelin, p. 6-7.

16. Shields, §1.2. Shields also cites David M. Godden and William H. Brenner, "Wittgenstein and the Logic of Deep Disagreement," *Cogency* 2, no. 2 (May 2010): pp. 41-80 as taking a similar conceptual approach to understanding deep disagreements.

17. Fogelin, pp. 6-7.

18. Shields, §3. Elsewhere, Shields writes

A concept that plays a "constitutive" role, as I will understand it, helps to define how other key concepts or terms of that inquiry are to be understood and how further, less fundamental concepts or terms implicated in that inquiry are therefore also to be understood. With these constitutive concepts defining the inquiry's key vocabulary, first-order empirical claims become felicitous and intelligible. These claims count as "first-order" because they utilize, but do not define the key concepts or terms at stake in the claim, as opposed to the "higher-order" function of concepts that

my general account in this thesis. I will describe how I account for constitutive concepts in the theory of deep disagreements I advance when discussing the constitution question in chapter 2.

Now, one may rightly raise concerns here to the effect that the characterization of these disagreements as disagreements over personhood or fairness is not quite right. That, for example, concerns about the fetus's *personhood* are simply irrelevant in the abortion debate.<sup>19</sup> Another example is from Shields himself, who disagrees with the description of affirmative action as a disagreement over fairness and thinks that we are much better off construing the issue in terms of oppression or equality.<sup>20</sup> These are legitimate replies to the specific examples discussed above and I think they warrant some disclaimer to the effect that these are only intended to serve as examples of what *could* cause a deep disagreement. Neither Shields nor Fogelin state anywhere that personhood or fairness *must* be the source of deep disagreements over abortion and affirmative action. Thus, legitimate though they may be, these concerns do little to diminish the general idea of deep disagreements as clashing systems of underlying principles which involve some constitutive concept(s).

But there is a more direct reply to the above concerns available to Fogelin. Such a response is that the appeal of, for example, the Thomson argument will ultimately rest on what we *already* think a person is. In Fogelin's example, the disagreement arises because

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play a constitutive role. For example, in the context of aesthetic judgments, the concept of art can be said to play a constitutive role. If I understand the concept of art as referring to objects that are beautiful and aim to represent the world accurately, then this will affect how I make sense of further downstream concepts, such as good and bad art or different genres of art. Given this constitutive understanding of art, I will also be able to make first-order judgments about what does or does not count as a work of art. (Shields, §1.3).

19. E.g., Judith Jarvis Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1, no. 1 (1971): 47-66. Accessed March 10, 2020. [www.jstor.org/stable/2265091](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265091).

20. Shields, f. 2.

one party thinks that personhood involves a cell being imbued with a supernatural, sacred soul/spirit at conception. While the secular-minded might be inclined to accept Thomson's argument as sound, someone who lives in what Charles Taylor has called an "enchanted world"<sup>21</sup> might be inclined to reject the argument as completely missing the point. In this way, debates/discussions over abortion, affirmative action, or similar disagreements, which have to do with what Fogelin calls one's "moral standing,"<sup>22</sup> are often entirely fruitless. So much so that either interlocutor might be pushed to conclude that the other is being unreasonable, uncooperative or simply pigheaded.

I think that the merit of the notion of deep disagreements is that it allows for a more charitable understanding of one's interlocutor. More specifically, the notion that seemingly intractable disagreements might result from genuinely disparate conceptual schemes provides reason to *not* write the other person off as being completely irrational, uncooperative or pigheaded. In a deep disagreement, we are faced with disagreements over "a whole system of mutually supporting propositions (and paradigms, models, styles of acting and thinking) that constitute, if I may use the phrase, a form of life."<sup>23</sup> Coming to understand disagreements over abortion, affirmative action, and other similarly heated topics as disagreements which emerge from a clash of *systems* of beliefs can help account for the frustration one might associate with arguments about abortion (and similarly difficult topics) without pushing us towards the conclusion that the other party is to be

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21. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 323-25. Taylor describes an enchanted world, *cosmos*, wherein supernatural spirits and forces animate and influence material objects, which stands in contrast to a disenchanted one, *universe*, wherein the world is understood as being fully intelligible without deference to these supernatural forces.

22. Fogelin, p. 7.

23. Fogelin, p. 6.

written off as simply unreasonable (which is not to be confused with the claim that people engaged in these debates are always reasonable).

For those who believe in a supernatural conception of the spirit, or soul, bringing any kind of biological argument into the abortion debate might seem completely out of place, and the biologist might be equally perplexed with supernatural arguments. Of course, this example might be a bit misleading, because there is (arguably) an asymmetry between biological (i.e., natural) and *supernatural* claims which some take as grounds to advance what is called the “separate domains” view.<sup>24</sup> The asymmetry in question is that biological claims are empirically testable in a laboratory while supernatural claims are not. It is important to note that clashes of framework principles, which are the essential feature of deep disagreements, are not necessarily marked by this sort of asymmetry. To that end, I’d like to note that deep disagreements have elsewhere been likened to a clash of Kuhnian paradigms,<sup>25</sup> so the idea of wholly scientific deep disagreements (or deep disagreement between scientists about science) is very much on the table.

While there needn’t be an asymmetry with respect to the domains of interest of either party involved in a deep disagreement, the interlocutors’ failure to communicate needs to be construed as symmetrical. In a deep disagreement, the failure to communicate is an effect of a lack of a shared public meaning between the interlocutors (although both

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24. Stephen Jay Gould, “Two Separate Domains,” in *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, ed. Michael Peterson et al., Fourth edition (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 515-522. Gould invokes the separate domains view in order to claim that there is in fact no conflict between religious and scientific claims, since they concern different subject matter and therefore cannot contradict each other. With respect to the claim that there is no conflict between these two sets of claims, I am not convinced. Indeed, the very fact that disagreements over abortion (or the age of the earth) often invoke considerations from either domain seems to speak against the claim that there is no conflict between science and religion.

25. Shields, §1.2, Finocchiaro, p. 3. Duncan Pritchard makes a similar point about political and ethical disagreements as not marked by the asymmetry that exists between supernatural and scientific explanations of the world. Pritchard borrows Kuhnian language to describes deep disagreements as cases of “epistemic incommensurability” (Duncan Pritchard, “Wittgensteinian Hinge Epistemology and Deep Disagreement,” *Topoi*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-018-9612-y>).

are using the shared public meaning that the term is given within their respective groups). Jeremy Barris describes how, in a deep disagreement, the interlocutors will often fail to recognize that the other is operating with a competing framework which includes radically different meanings for terms which appear in the home framework.

[In a deep disagreement] each [system of beliefs] is unintelligible to the other, and the sense they typically do appear to each other to have is instead necessarily a misconstrual resulting from assimilating the other's statements to the inapplicable criteria of the home framework.<sup>26</sup>

The misconstrual that Barris mentions is the source of the often-frustrating character of deep disagreements. By taking for granted that one's interlocutor understands a proposition in the same way (or against a shared background of beliefs) when discussing, for example, the nuances of morality, one stacks the deck in favour of confusion and befuddlement.

One key feature of normal disagreements which is not present in the case of deep disagreements is that the interlocutors are able to "agree on the method for resolving their disagreement."<sup>27</sup> I will interpret Fogelin's use of the word "method" here broadly enough to mean any agreement on the sorts of things that would count as good evidence (let alone proof) one way or the other. Deep disagreements are cases where what would count as a means of arriving at a resolution can't be agreed upon. Fogelin puts it by saying that a deep disagreement is not to be understood as a case where there is no solution available, or even possible. Instead "it is the stronger claim that the *conditions* for argument do not exist."<sup>28</sup>

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26. Jeremy Barris, "Deep Disagreement and the Virtues of Argumentative and Epistemic Incapacity," *Informal Logic* 38, no. 3 (2018): p. 370.

27. Fogelin, p. 3.

28. Fogelin, p. 5.

Scott Aikin captures this feature of deep disagreements in his 2018 “Deep Disagreement and the Problem of the Criterion.” Aikin describes deep disagreements with reference to Sextus’s problem, wherein two interlocutors are faced with a regress of justifications for their claims. Aikin writes

In the same way that the problem of the criterion has mutually-cancelling necessary conditions, so does the argumentative problem of deep disagreement.

(1) S has resolved a disagreement (about the acceptability of P) with H only if S has provided dialectically satisfying arguments for H that P.

(2) S has provided dialectically satisfying arguments for H that P only if S has resolved a disagreement with H (about the acceptability of C, as a criterion for the acceptable resolution of P).<sup>29</sup>

The disagreement over P cannot be resolved unless S and H can agree to some means of testing their claims (C). But C cannot be agreed to because, in a deep disagreement, S and H mutually misconstrue what the other means by P and so cannot agree to C. This feature of deep disagreements is accounted for on Shields’ pragmatic reading of deep disagreements.

There is a close link between normative reasons—reasons in favor of holding a belief or carrying out an action—and the concepts we have. One can only have a normative reason to  $\Phi$  or a normative reason to believe p if one also has the relevant concepts implicated in the act of  $\Phi$ -ing or in the proposition p.<sup>30</sup>

One could provide many examples which demonstrate this key point, but I think one will suffice. If I understand the word ‘left’ to have the exact same sense that most people attribute to the word ‘right,’ then not only will I consistently offer very poor directions to tourists, but I will come to believe that other people do not know how to give directions.

The idea that there might be incommensurable systems of underlying principles might initially appear to lead directly to pessimism, but this need not be the case and can

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29. Scott F. Aikin, "Deep Disagreement and the Problem of the Criterion," *Topoi*, 2018, §3.

30. Shields, §1.2.

be partially addressed before providing a more rigorous description of underlying principles. In order to do so, it is helpful to distinguish between an absolutely (or infinitely) deep disagreement and a finitely deep disagreement. An absolutely deep disagreement is one in which there is *no* common ground between conceptual frameworks (i.e., systems of underlying principles) whatsoever, whereas a finitely deep disagreement is the result of a clash between *some* underlying principles which are relevant in the context of the disagreement at hand. A finitely deep disagreement leaves open the possibility that some shared principle(s) might be recognized and argued about (given time, effort and favourable circumstances). Infinitely deep disagreements might be understood as ideal deep disagreements and, I think, it can be taken for granted that there would be no place for productive argumentation in such cases. Of course, it should be admitted right away that infinitely deep disagreements (which I still want to admit as an actual possibility) are uninteresting because they are not *really* disagreements at all. Indeed, as Godden and Brenner have written, “it would seem that disagreement is only possible where agreement is also possible”<sup>31</sup> and so “it is no failure of rational argumentation that it cannot resolve differences between parties incapable of communicating with each other.”<sup>32</sup> The more interesting question is: How deep (or *at which depth*) does a disagreement need to be in order for argumentation to completely break down? We should thus be concerned with the question of *critical* rather than *infinite* depth, a question which cannot be settled without an adequate theory of deep disagreement. For now, the important point is that it is not analytically true that all deep

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31. Godden and Brenner, p. 46.

32. Godden and Brenner, p. 47.

disagreements must be absolutely (or even critically) deep, which leaves open the possibility that there might be a role for argumentation in a deep disagreement.

In order to make my case for optimism about deep disagreements, I will argue for the *matter of fact* impossibility of infinitely deep disagreements, at least between humans, but I do not think that this renders the idealized definition utterly meaningless. I think that an idealized understanding of deep disagreements will help us pick out actual deep disagreements in the same way that a platonic understanding of circularity helps us pick out actual circles. The notion of an infinitely deep disagreement remains useful because it draws our attention to the essential characteristic of deep disagreements, the incommensurability of competing systems of underlying principles. Focusing on this essential feature allows us to appreciate why actual deep disagreements might *appear* to be completely intractable but does not ground the conclusion that they *actually are* intractable. Indeed, as Chris Ranalli has rightly pointed out, we are not entitled to make any determination about the potential role (or lack thereof) of argumentation in a deep disagreement until we have provided a satisfactory theory of deep disagreement which describes what the underlying principles at issue are and how they result in a deep disagreement.<sup>33</sup> Providing a (not *the*) answer to that question will be the focus of the second chapter of this thesis.<sup>34</sup> The theory of deep disagreements which is put forward in the second chapter will serve as the basis for my argument, in the third chapter, that there are *in fact* no infinitely deep disagreements between humans and that there is therefore a role for argumentation in the face of a deep disagreement.

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33. Chris Ranalli, "What Is Deep Disagreement?," *Topoi*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-018-9600-2>, §1.

34. My claim is that the pragmatic inferentialist is able to provide a *good* account of deep disagreements, rather than the stronger claim that it is the definitive account of deep disagreements.

## 1.2 What is my understanding of pragmatism?

Writings on pragmatism often include the following disclaimer—pragmatism is better described as a temperament or orientation than a particular ideology or set of doctrines.<sup>35</sup> For example, in most introductory material on pragmatism, it is portrayed as having three founders, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey,<sup>36</sup> but each of these thinkers has a different understanding of what pragmatism is.<sup>37</sup> This internal disagreement has remained a mark of pragmatism. Putnam, for example, famously rejects the claim that he should be counted amongst the pragmatists, despite the connections between his ideas and pragmatism which have been highlighted by other writers.<sup>38</sup> So, what follows is to be understood as an attempt to stipulate a well-founded working definition of pragmatism which will inform the remainder of the paper rather than a comprehensive definition/history of the movement.

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35. E.g., Alan Malachowski, "Introduction: The Pragmatist Orientation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pragmatism*, ed. Alan Malachowski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1-3, 9, Carol Nicholson, "Education and the Pragmatic Temperament," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pragmatism*, p. 249), Harald Wohlrapp, *The Concept of Argument: A Philosophical Foundation*, trans. Tim Personn and Michael Weh (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), p. 4), and, of course, near the outset of William James, "Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking" (1907), in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn (New York, New York: Penguin, 2000), James writes:

On all hands we find the 'pragmatic movement' spoken of, sometimes with respect, sometimes with contumely, seldom with clear understanding. It is evident that the term applies itself conveniently to a number of tendencies that hitherto have lacked a collective name, and that it has 'come to stay.' (p. 27).

36. See, for example, the table of contents in the *Cambridge Companion to Pragmatism*. There is, nevertheless, some level of disagreement about this. For example, Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), makes a strong case that Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. might be counted among the ranks of the earliest pragmatist. Wohlrapp includes Mead (Wohlrapp, p. 4). Meanwhile, Catherine Legg and Christopher Hookway, "Pragmatism," ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2019), describe Dewey as part of a second-generation of pragmatists.

37. One early result of this internal disagreement is from 1905 in Charles Sanders Peirce, "The Essentials of Pragmatism," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1955), pp. 251-68), where Peirce, lamenting various competing understandings of pragmatism by other writers, decided "to serve the precise purpose of expressing the original definition, [by announcing] the birth of the word 'pragmaticism,' which is ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers." (p. 255).

38. See, e.g., David Macarthur, "Putnam, Pragmatism and the Fate of Metaphysics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pragmatism*, p.189.

With the above stated, I will move on to establishing my working definition of pragmatism as an orientation. In setting out this definition, I will attempt to draw the reader's attention to what I will treat as the defining marks of pragmatism. None of these features are to be understood as uniquely pragmatic.<sup>39</sup> The features of the pragmatic temperament to which I wish to draw the reader's attention are **1) the pragmatic understanding of the nature of concepts or beliefs or ideas as being fundamentally related to action, 2) the pragmatic emphasis on the social nature of belief acquisition and 3) fallibilism.** There is much more which has been associated with pragmatism, but these features will serve my purpose here. I shall endeavor to establish here that these features come with the added benefit of being fairly uncontroversial in the pragmatic tradition.<sup>40</sup> To that end, though I will consider these markers individually, each of them will be treated in the same manner. I will begin by noting the presence of the marker in question in a series of essays written for *Popular Science Monthly* by Charles Sanders Peirce in 1877-1878 before turning to its appearance in more recent writings on

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39. Indeed, James' *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* is named intentionally.

40. Some more controversial ideas associated with pragmatism include the pragmatic notions of truth and verification, along with a tendency towards what has been described as "science worship." (Malachowski, pp. 6-7 or Legg and Hookway, §3.1). Worth noting here is that Brandom acknowledges that Sellars, too, can be accused of scientism for his rendering of the Kantian phenomena/noumena in terms of the manifest and scientific images, paired with the *scientia mensura* which characterizes right-wing Sellarsianism. While a thorough exploration of this accusation is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth highlighting that Brandom argues Sellarsian naturalism ought to be construed with respect to the Sellarsian notion of "pure pragmatics" in order to avoid this sort of accusation (Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, pp. 81-94). In Wilfrid Sellars, "Language, Rules and Behavior," in *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds: The Early Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, ed. Jeffrey F. Sicha (Atascadero, California: Ridgeview, 2005), pp. 211-31), Sellars himself acknowledges that some pragmatists tend towards what he calls *descriptivism* ("the claim that all meaningful concepts and problems belong to the empirical or descriptive sciences, including the sciences of human behavior" (LRB, §1, p. 211)). Sellars is clear that "my contention in this paper [is] that a sound pragmatism must reject descriptivism in all areas of philosophy, and that it can do so without giving one jot or tittle of comfort to what has so aptly been called the new Failure of the Nerve" (LRB, §5, pp. 213).

pragmatism. Although I will treat these markers independently, they are nevertheless deeply intertwined.

Throughout this section, keeping my intention to propose a theory of deep disagreements informed by the Sellarsian notion of *material inference* in mind, I will briefly highlight how I think these marks can be seen on Sellars's sleeve. Nevertheless, the three marks of the pragmatic temperament that I wish to introduce here, though I think they are compatible with the Sellarsian story, are intended to serve as independent premises in my overall argument.

### **1.2.1 Concepts as Fundamentally Related to Actions**

The first mark of my working definition of pragmatism, an understanding of concepts or beliefs as fundamentally related to action, is the core to the rule for achieving maximal "clarity of apprehension"<sup>41</sup> which Peirce first provides in the second article in a series published by *Popular Science Monthly* in 1877-78, entitled "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," (note that Peirce continued to use this rule throughout his career)<sup>42</sup> to encapsulate the pragmatic method:

Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.<sup>43</sup>

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41. Charles Sanders Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1955), pp. 23-41, p.31. Peirce describes three cumulative levels of clarity of apprehension. The first is the ability to correctly use the term. The second level of clarity is the ability to make the concept distinct by way of analyzing the concept in order to provide a definition. The final grade of clarity is the ability to specify the circumstances in which the term is correctly used. (Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," pp. 23-31, and helpfully summarized in Legg and Hookway, §2).

42. For example, in an article entitled "Issues of Pragmaticism" for *The Monist* in 1905, Peirce wrote that "Pragmaticism was originally enounced [sic] in the form of a maxim" before restating the quotation to which I am drawing the reader's attention. (Charles Sanders Peirce, "Critical Common-Sensism," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1955), pp. 290-301, p.290).

43. Peirce, "How to Make our Ideas Clear," p. 31.

Peirce provides several examples which demonstrate the use of his rule; *hardness* is described as the resistance to scratching,<sup>44</sup> *weight* is the tendency to fall when unsupported,<sup>45</sup> and *force* is a means of accounting for change in motion.<sup>46</sup>

Peirce claims that the merit of his rule is that it will prevent one from falling into various philosophical perplexities which result from the mistaken view that there must be some *discovery* to be made regarding the *nature* of the object of our conceptions. Peirce's rule, the core of his brand of pragmatism, provides ample ground upon which to reject statements reflective of such a view as overtly self-contradictory. To this end, Peirce writes: "In a recent admired work on *Analytic Mechanics* it is stated that we understand precisely the effect of force, but what force itself is we do not understand!"<sup>47</sup> The pragmatic approach to assuaging the confusion which is reflected by this and similar statements begins with the elimination of the mistaken belief that developing a conceptual understanding of X and developing an understanding of the practical effects associated with X are distinct endeavours.<sup>48</sup>

The second chapter of William James's 1907 *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* is a lecture entitled "What Pragmatism Means." Therein, James calls Peirce's rule "the principle of pragmatism" and describes pragmatism as a *method* which can be used to settle metaphysical disagreements (James says "disputes") by

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44. Peirce, "How to Make our Ideas Clear," pp. 31-32.

45. Peirce, "How to Make our Ideas Clear," p. 33.

46. Peirce, "How to Make our Ideas Clear," p. 33-35.

47. Peirce, "How to Make out Ideas Clear," p. 35.

48. An appreciation of this is essential for an appreciation of pragmatism as a method of inquiry. Peirce considered doubt to be a sort of mental irritation which we actively attempt to avoid. Doubt, for Peirce, is a state into which we are thrown when events defy our expectations and force us to inquire. (Charles Sanders Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1955), pp. 5-22, p.10.11). Wohlrapp's notion of research, the goal of which is to develop new orientations, is closely related to this pragmatic notion of inquiry, which he describes as a "striking achievement" of pragmatism (Wohlrapp, pp. 6).

describing the *practical effects* that the disputants' conflicting conceptions involve. For the pragmatist, genuine disagreements will be marked by some discernable difference in these practical effects, while what might be called an illusory disagreement will involve no such distinction.<sup>49</sup> The upshot of the pragmatic method, then, appears to be that genuine disagreements should always be resolvable by means of some *experimentum crucis*, at least in principle.<sup>50</sup> As a brief aside, I should state here that this last point (that any genuine disagreement seems to entail an *experimentum crucis*) will be the focus of a possible objection to the theory of deep disagreements that I am promoting in this thesis. This objection will be presented and addressed in the second chapter by distancing the notion of practical effects from that of an *experimentum crucis* when I discuss how my theory of deep disagreement satisfies Chris Ranalli's "disagreement" desideratum.

The emphasis on the intimate relation between concepts and actions is not restricted to the originators of pragmatism and is indeed present in several current works which invoke pragmatism towards various ends. Marjorie Miller, for instance, writes that "Both feminism and pragmatism reject the traditionally radical separations between thought and action, between theory and practice, between projects and objectivity."<sup>51</sup>

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49. James, *Pragmatism*, pp. 25. It is worth noting here that Peirce introduces his pragmatic rule as following from the observation that the dispute over the nature of the eucharist between Protestants and Catholics is not a genuine dispute precisely because it has no practical significance whatsoever for the sensible effects of the wine and bread. Peirce's rule leads to the conclusion that "to talk of something as having all the sensible characters of wine, yet being in reality blood, is senseless jargon." (Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" p. 31). To be clear, pragmatists need not be construed as being opposed to religious belief, as is clearly demonstrated in William James, "The Will to Believe" (1897), in *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. Giles Gunn (New York, New York: Penguin, 2000). Later in this thesis, I will argue that the understanding of the nature of beliefs that is afforded on an inferentialist account can be invoked to account for the fact that people do indeed take these disputes that Peirce might call meaningless very seriously.

50. There are real practical concerns involved with conducting such an experiment. For example, genuinely distinct conceptions of gravity, such as those involved in Newtonian and relativistic mechanics might yield, in suitable settings, predictions which are practically indistinguishable, in so far as each prediction will fall within the other's margin of error.

51. Marjorie C. Miller, "Pragmatism and Feminism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pragmatism*, ed. Alan Malachowski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 231-48, p. 232.

Meanwhile, Harald Wohlrapp builds his “pragmatic concept of theory” around the fundamental link between concepts, propositions and rules (theory), and actions (practice).<sup>52</sup>

I think that this first mark of pragmatism, the close link between concept formation and action, can be non-controversially understood as playing a key role in Sellars’s general philosophical outlook and his philosophy of language specifically. First, it must be made clear that Sellars never loses sight of the nature of language as an observable phenomenon, something that actually occurs in the world.<sup>53</sup> The distinction between language proper and mere word-like-sounds elicited by certain stimuli (e.g., a parrot making a “red” sound in the presence of some red object) is the application of concepts. “The sapient being responsively classifies the stimuli as falling under concepts, as being of some conceptually articulated kind.”<sup>54</sup> For Sellars, understanding of a concept is mastering the use of a word.<sup>55</sup> To be sure, the *use* of the word is always the role that it plays *in the language*.<sup>56</sup> People use language to talk about (and justify) other claims about the world. Talking about (and justifying claims about) the world is an action.<sup>57</sup> And, in

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52. Wohlrapp, Chapter 1.

53. Willem A. deVries, *Wilfrid Sellars* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University, 2005), p. 38.

54. Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, p. 102. See also, Sellars, LRB, §15-16, §20-21, pp. 217-21.

55. Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, p. 55.

56. Sellars understands the meaning of terms with respect to ternary *real relations* between language, language users and the world (as opposed to the more frequently described binary correspondence relations between words and the world). “Real relations are relations between items in the spatiotemporal, causal nexus. Real relations need not themselves be spatiotemporal or causal relations; for instance, one rose may be more red than another or more odorous. But at least the *relata* are real items in space-time and there is some network of spatiotemporal or causal relations that underlie the “more red” relation” (deVries, p. 37). With respect to language, deVries describes real relations as “uniformities between the production of language users in certain situations of certain tokens and objects or events in space-time.” (deVries, p. 39). Regarding the possibility of real relations for non-existents, like Sherlock Holmes, real relations are understood as existing between language, language users and other physical tokens of these non-existents (see deVries, p. 37 and, p. 287, f. 21).

57. “Clearly, it is proper to speak of justifying assertions, which are, in a suitably broad sense, actions. It is equally proper to speak of justifying beliefs, which are, at least in part, dispositions relating to assertions.” (Sellars, LRB, section 12, p. 215). Note the similarity of the description of beliefs as dispositions relating to assertions to the Peircean conception of beliefs as rules which determine habits. “Belief does not make us

line with Peirce's principle, part of learning to use particular words in particular circumstances is becoming familiar with at least some of the *practical effects* associated with the concept at issue (of particular relevance here is the hearer's response to the speaker's utterance). Indeed, Brandom describes even the ability to make simple observation claims, along the lines of "this object I see before me is green" as a particular kind of know-*how* which has to do with applying the concept correctly, namely, in a manner compatible with the various inferences one is entitled to make based on the (normative)<sup>58</sup> linguistic rules which govern the use of concept in question (this inferential nature of concepts will be discussed in more detail in the following section).<sup>59</sup> Thus, there is, I think, a close similarity to this Sellarsian notion of understanding a concept in terms of mastering its use and the maximal clarity of apprehension the principle of Peirce is intended to afford the language user.

### 1.2.2 The Social Nature of Belief Acquisition

The second of the marks upon which I wish to focus, the pragmatic emphasis on the social nature of belief acquisition, plays a key role in Peirce's breakdown of methods of belief acquisition in the first paper in the series for *Popular Science Monthly*, entitled "The Fixation of Belief." Peirce writes that a direct result of "the social impulse" is that: "Unless we make ourselves hermits, we shall necessarily influence each other's opinions;

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act at once, but puts us into such a condition that we shall behave in some certain way, when the occasion arises." (Peirce, "Fixation of Belief," p. 10). See also, deVries p. 126

58. Peregrin emphasizes the importance of the distinction between *normative* and *causal* inferentialism by stating "an item's being a conjunction does not mean that its users always infer A from A^B and do not infer A^B from A; it simply means that they take these inferences to be correct. This provides for an all important distinction between what can be called *normative* and *causal* inferentialism the former is the Brandomian kind I invoke here, while what used to be called 'inferential role semantics' in the nineties by Boghossian (1993), Peacocke (1992) and others is arguably of the latter kind." (Jaroslav Peregrin, "Is Inferentialism Circular?," *Analysis* 78, no. 3 (October 2017): pp. 450-54, <https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/anx130>, p. 453). I shall take this distinction at face value and specify that the picture I wish to draw is of a *normative* inferentialism.

59. Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, pp. 41-42, 103. See also, Sellars, *LRB*, §37. p. 228.

so that the problem becomes how to fix belief, not in the individual, but in the community.”<sup>60</sup> For the sake of clarity, I should state that Peirce is indeed discussing beliefs about any topic in the previous quotation. For the sake of brevity, my overview of the pragmatic emphasis on the social nature of concept formation will focus on beliefs related to the sciences, for the sciences are often taken to have a sort of objectivity which we might not find in other disciplines. So my focus on the sciences is intended to show how the pragmatist views *even* these (rather than only these) concepts as the product of social practice.<sup>61</sup>

The emphasis on the social nature of belief acquisition is closely related to the rejection of Cartesianism which characterizes early pragmatism and, as Legg and Hookway explain,<sup>62</sup> can be traced back to an even earlier essay by Peirce from 1868 entitled “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities.”<sup>63</sup> Therein, the notion that the ultimate judge of truth is the individual is rejected on the ground that *the individual cannot exist without the community*. To this end, Peirce writes that “The individual man, since his existence is manifested only by ignorance and error, so far as he is anything

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60. Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief” in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, pp. 13.

61. I do not think that this should be taken as an attack on the sciences or the scientific method in general. Rather, the value of the pragmatic emphasis on the social nature of concept formation is that it provides ground upon which to construct an understanding of scientific progress which does not assume that scientific knowledge is qualitatively distinct from knowledge in other disciplines, such as when we distinguish between facts and opinions.

62. Legg and Hookway, §4.

63. The four incapacities are:

1. We have no power of Introspection, but all knowledge of the internal world is derived by hypothetical reasoning from our knowledge of external facts.
2. We have no power of Intuition, but every cognition is determined logically by previous cognitions.
3. We have no power of thinking without signs.
4. We have no conception of the absolutely incognizable. (Charles Sanders Peirce, “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,” in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1955), pp. 228-50, p. 230).

apart from his fellows, and from what he and they are to be, is only a negation.”<sup>64</sup> For Peirce, it is essential to note that the Cartesian tradition involves a view of the individual which ignores humanity’s fundamentally social nature. When such a view is adopted by empiricists, the sciences are understood as grounded in sense impressions. When the same view is adopted by rationalists, the sciences are understood as grounded in *innate* ideas. In contrast, Peirce, a chemist by trade<sup>65</sup> who describes the scientific method of belief fixation<sup>66</sup> as the only way that humans are able to test their beliefs against something wholly external to themselves,<sup>67</sup> stresses that the reason the sciences have been so successful is that the method is such that scientific facts are those claims which have been so convincingly established (*amongst scientists!*) that there is simply no longer any significant disagreement within the community.<sup>68</sup>

The pragmatic idea that even the sciences should be construed as essentially social activities is not unique to Peirce. For Rorty’s pragmatist, the distinction between science and non-science is not to be construed as having to do with the subject matter or the manner in which the knowledge is attained, so much as the amount of internal agreement amongst those in the know. The central claim in Rorty’s “Science as Solidarity” is that

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64. Peirce, “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities” in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, pp. 250. Marjorie Miller endorses the notion “without the community we human beings lack secure individuality” which she finds in Dewey’s writings (Miller, pp. 234).

65. Charles Sanders Peirce, “Concerning the Author,” in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1955), pp. 1-4, p. 1.

66. Peirce introduces four methods of belief fixation. “Tenacity” is the method whereby one holds a belief despite evidence of any sort, rejecting all evidence which conflicts with the belief in question. Peirce believes that tenacity is in conflict with the generally social nature of humanity. “Authority” is associated with religious and political institutions and is invoked to create orthodoxy. This is how Peirce believes most beliefs are fixed. “A priori” is the typical grounds upon which philosophical or metaphysical discourse is conducted and rests on sentiment and coherence with other beliefs. “Scientific” is associated primarily with an interest in learning the truth about the world. For Peirce, this is the method of belief acquisition *par excellence*. (Peirce, “How to Make our Ideas Clear,” pp. 12-19).

67. Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief” *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, pp. 18-19.

68. Peirce, “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,” in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, pp. 229

the notion that objectivity somehow grounds solidarity is a mistaken presupposition which requires drawing a hard line between the world (the out-there) and the rational/mental (the in-here).<sup>69</sup> A distinction of this sort has marked western philosophy since Descartes and its *rejection* has marked pragmatic philosophy since Peirce.<sup>70</sup>

Though written with reference not to the *sciences* but to the role that pragmatism can play in clarifying *political* concepts, Miller's description of the pragmatic temperament invokes the social nature of concept formation in a manner amenable to the above description, "Community as the source and the arena for testing theories and beliefs is crucial to the creation of more enduring truths. Not final truths. Fallible truths. But more reliable truths!"<sup>71</sup> Miller's statement here is especially useful with respect to the description of pragmatism that I wish to offer because it ties the previous two marks (the fundamental relation between concepts and actions and the social nature of belief acquisition) to fallibilism, the final mark of the description of the pragmatic temperament which will colour the remainder of this paper.

The social nature of belief acquisition is a fundamental mark of a Sellarsian understanding of language learning. DeVries writes that, for Sellars, in order to "[locate] some episode or state in the logical space of reasons [one must] thereby [situate] it in an ambience of social practices, and that episode is simply impossible without those

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69. Richard Rorty, "Science as Solidarity," in *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences*, ed. John S. Nelson, Allan Megill, and Donald N. McCloskey (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 38-52, p. 46.

70. Not only is this blurring of the distinction between the mental and physical made explicit in the aforementioned rejection of Cartesianism in "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities" but it colours the pragmatic understanding of concepts as fundamentally related to action, as said understanding ties the mental inextricably to the world.

71. Miller, p. 241.

practices.”<sup>72</sup> Sellars’ conception of language as an occurrent phenomenon involving a ternary relation between language (i.e., tokenings of linguistic expressions), language-users and the world is especially relevant here. Language exists as a shared practice of language users in the world. Without the community, there is no language. Without language, there are no concepts. Without concepts, there are no beliefs.

### **1.2.3 Fallibilism**

The third mark of pragmatism to which I would like to draw the reader’s attention is fallibilism. Fallibilism is the idea that any of our beliefs might turn out to be false and so can never be correctly described as indubitable. This epistemic position has marked pragmatism since the outset. Indeed, even the introduction of the term ‘fallibilism’ as a name for a particular epistemic position is credited to Peirce.<sup>73</sup> So it might cause little shock to hear that, although the word fallibilism itself does not appear therein, the idea of fallibilism can be clearly pointed to in Peirce’s “The Fixation of Belief” wherein Peirce states that coming to doubt one’s own beliefs is the inevitable and involuntary consequence of what he calls the *a priori* method of belief fixation.<sup>74</sup> Adopting the *a priori* method leads to the recognition that one’s own beliefs are not privileged with respect to the truth. In order to reason according to the *a priori* method, individuals must come to recognize that “[i]t is the mere accident of their having been taught as they have, that has caused them to believe as they do and not far differently”<sup>75</sup> and that “there is no reason to rate their own views at a higher value than those of other nations and other

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72. DeVries, p. 127. The quote continues: “These practices are normatively constituted: they are defined by the norms or rules with regard to which our acts, whether actions or not, are right or wrong, correct or incorrect, and the practices themselves are subject to ongoing assessment in terms of higher ideals.”

73. Stephen Hetherington, “Fallibilism,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (ISSN 2161-0002 ), §1.

74. See note 66 of this thesis.

75. Peirce, “How to Make our Ideas Clear,” in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, pp. 14.

centuries: thus giving rise to doubts in their minds.”<sup>76</sup> The *a priori* method thus entails fallibilism. But so too does Peirce’s preferred *scientific* method of belief fixation. Peirce’s description of the *scientific* method of belief fixation demands fallibilism because it finds the ultimate source of justification for belief in the *world* (as opposed to the *a priori* method, which relies on reason to justify beliefs).<sup>77</sup> The idea that beliefs must be put to the test in order to be justified makes sense only if we acknowledge that we *might* have gotten it wrong—otherwise the scientific method of belief fixation would not involve *testing hypotheses* so much as *demonstrating what is known*.

More recently, Carol Nicholson has described the willingness to accept new ideas and a sort of intellectual humility as key to the pragmatic temperament. Nicholson traces this feature to not only the writings of Peirce, James, and Dewey, but a multitude of other contemporary thinkers outside of America, including Papini and Poincaré.<sup>78</sup> Nicholson writes that “we can specify three main characteristics of [the pragmatic] habit of mind: willingness to accept doubt and uncertainty, openness to change, and recognition of a wide plurality of perspectives.”<sup>79</sup> While these are certainly distinct criteria, I think it is not a stretch to claim that these three marks might together serve as a serviceable definition of fallibilism.

For Sellars, fallibilism runs deep, as can be clearly seen with respect to his understanding of the Kantian categories,<sup>80</sup> for while they are traditionally understood as

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76. Peirce, “How to Make our Ideas Clear,” p. 14.

77. Peirce, “How to Make our Ideas Clear,” pp. 19-20.

78. Nicholson, pp. 251-253.

79. Nicholson, p. 258.

80. A quick disclaimer: a comprehensive treatment of the Kantian categories as they are presented in the Transcendental Analytic is beyond the scope of this paper, so what follows can be no more than the most basic introduction to them. For his part, Sellars describes the role the categories play for Kant in a lecture in the summer of 1976: “[T]o the question of the transcendental deduction, “How do categories apply to our representation of thises?”, Kant’s answer is, of course, they apply to them because they are principles in

immutable, necessary conditions of any cognition whatsoever, Sellars denies the claim that they are *fixed*. The Kantian categories can be understood as the most general kinds of concepts, which “are conditions of the possibility of any experience whatever.”<sup>81</sup> The categories are divided into four types, each made up of three concepts.<sup>82</sup> For Kant, the categories are understood as being 1) fixed for all time and 2) knowable completely *a priori* because any experience must necessarily conform to them. Indeed, the associated concepts are called pure concepts of the understanding—because they serve as the *structure* of any human cognition, any human cognition *must* include them. While Sellars adopts, in his own way, the second feature,<sup>83</sup> he denies the first.

Where Sellars diverges from Kant with respect to the categories is in Kant’s notion that they are fixed. DeVries writes:

Unlike Kant, Sellars believes that although there will necessarily be synthetic *a priori* propositions in each linguistic-conceptual framework, there need not be a single synthetic *a priori* proposition that is an element of all possible languages or conceptual frameworks. Kant thinks there is only one conceptual framework incumbent upon all humanity; Sellars sharply disagrees.<sup>84</sup>

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terms of which we construct our representation of those objects. And he said, that is because we must distinguish between a sheer manifold of intuition and the intuition of a manifold as being a structured whole. So that is a very abstract formulation of the *Deduction*.” (Wilfrid Sellars, *Kant and Pre-Kantian Themes: Lectures by Wilfrid Sellars*, ed. Pedro V Amaral, 2 ed (Atascadero, California: Ridgeview Publishing, 2017), §199, p. 74)

81. Guyer, Paul, and Allen W. Wood, “Introduction,” in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1-72, p. 8.

82. Quantity includes the concepts of unity, plurality, and totality. Quality includes reality, negation and limitation. Relation includes inherence and subsistence; causality and dependence; and community. Modality includes possibility/impossibility, existence/nonexistence and necessity/contingency. (Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), A80/B106, p. 212).

83. This lineage is made clear when Brandom describes his own successor theory to the Sellarsian successor theory to Kantian categories

My idea for a successor-concept to what Sellars (with hints from Carnap) made of Kant’s metaconception of pure concepts of the Understanding is that they play *both* of [the following] expressive roles, stand in *both* sorts of pragmatically mediated semantic relations to another vocabulary. It must be possible to elaborate their use from the use of the index vocabulary, and they must *explicate* the use of the index vocabulary. Speaking more loosely, we can say that such concepts are both *elaborated from* and *explicative of* the use of other concepts [. . .] for every autonomous discursive practice.” (Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, pp. 52)

84. deVries, p. 63.

Sellars thinks that linguistic activity carries with it a creative element that is not captured in the idea of fixed categories. This is a radical departure from Kant as it leaves open the possibility of not only mutable categories, but entirely new systems of categories.<sup>85</sup> The notion that the categories are mutable brings with it at least two effects of immediate relevance to the discussion here. First, mutable categories provide reason to do away with the illusion that some conceptual framework is of necessity privileged with respect to truth, which, as mentioned above, is precisely the sort of fallibilism Peirce prescribes with reference to the *a priori* and *scientific* methods of belief fixation, and which I wish to associate with pragmatism. We might say that fallibilism is a requirement of dialectic.

Secondly, the notion of mutable categories leaves open the possibility that there are infinitely deep disagreements, as there is the possibility that two legitimate frameworks might be completely incommensurable. Of course, part of my motivation in this project is to show that this second effect is somewhat dubious because we couldn't even recognize the disagreement to begin with. Fortunately for me, then, Sellars appears to agree. DeVries writes that, on the Sellarsian understanding

To be a language at all, the putative linguistic activities [of some linguistic community with a completely distinct set of categories from our own] would have to play a role in the lives of the (putative) speakers analogous to the role our language plays in our lives (e.g. permit communication, mutual adjustment of plans, representations of the world, etc.) *and yet* those putative linguistic activities would be able to share *nothing* in common with the functions played by our language. This just seems incoherent.<sup>86</sup>

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85. deVries, pp. 60-61.

86. deVries, p. 65.

I wish to seize upon this seeming incoherence in order to bolster my rejection of the claim that any deep disagreement could be **both** 1) properly called a disagreement at all and 2) infinitely deep.

### 1.3 What is Sellarsian Inferentialism?

In the account of deep disagreements that I am promoting here, the underlying principles which are understood as the source of the disagreement will be taken to be what Sellars calls the *rules of material inference* which govern the use of particular words in some natural language. This section is intended to provide the reader with an introduction to the notion of *material inference* by exploring some of its philosophical foundations.

The roadmap for this section is as follows. First, I will provide a brief overview of the Kant-Sellars modal thesis and the inferentialism which follows from it. Then, I will argue that the adoption of this kind of inferentialism is warranted for how it effectively addresses a problem arising from the familiar enthymematic interpretation of perfectly good ordinary inferences, such as “The cat is at the door, therefore I should let her in.” The enthymematic interpretation involves the postulation of some unstated premise which formally justifies the inference (namely, “If the cat is at the door, then I should let her in”). The problem is that, although the enthymematic interpretation salvages the *formal validity* of the such inferences, it ignores the conceptual content of the propositions at issue which seems to be the real reason for the *goodness* of the argument. I will explore Sellars’s (and Brandom’s) arguments against the enthymematic interpretation of these inferences with reference to the distinction (explained below) between *modally insulated* and *modally involved* predicates. I will adopt the Sellarsian position that *all* predicates/properties are modally involved. The modally involved nature of

predicates/properties is the basis for the Kant-Sellars modal thesis, the upshot of which is that an essential feature of any concept is that its *use is governed by rules of material inference*. The rules of material inference are part of the language in so far as they govern its correct use. The introduction of Sellarsian *rules of material inference* leads naturally to Sellarsian inferentialism, the idea that any given concept can only be understood with respect to “its role in reasoning” as part of a whole language.<sup>87</sup>

The anti-atomistic core of Sellarsian inferentialism is what Robert Brandom calls the “Kant-Sellars modal thesis” which Brandom claims is captured in the title of Sellars’ 1948 “Concepts as Involving Laws and Inconceivable Without Them.”<sup>88</sup> Brandom’s more precise formulation of the Kant-Sellars modal thesis is

**The ability to use ordinary empirical descriptive terms such ‘green’, ‘rigid’, and ‘mass’ already presupposes grasp of the kinds of properties and relations made explicit by modal vocabulary.**<sup>89</sup>

The ability to say (rather than make noises which sound like such a saying) that some object is green requires the ability to say something about what *must* be the case about that object (for example, it must not be red, it must be extended, etc.). Brandom also provides the Kant-Sellars modal thesis in the following formulation:

1. In using ordinary empirical vocabulary, one already knows how to do everything one needs to know how to do in order to introduce and deploy *modal* vocabulary.
2. The expressive role characteristic of alethic modal vocabulary is to *make explicit* semantic, conceptual connections and commitments that are already *implicit* in the use of ordinary empirical vocabulary.<sup>90</sup>

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87. Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, pp. 23. See also, Sellars, LRB §22, p. 221.

88. See, for example, Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, p.67.

89. Robert Brandom, *Between Saying and Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), pp.96-97.

90. Brandom, *Between Saying and Doing*, p. 102.

Thus, the meaning of a word is not to be understood in terms of ostension, but by the role that the word plays in reasoning, and the word cannot be said to be meaningful at all if it does not have inferential connections to the rest of the language. By locating the meaning of a word in the inferential connections between it and the remainder of the language, the Kant-Sellars modal thesis denies that a concept can exist in isolation, a view characteristic of the empiricist tradition to which Sellars was reacting.

The Kant-Sellars modal thesis does not allow for basic *knowings* which are characteristic of the empiricist tradition from Locke through to the logical positivists' "protocol sentences."<sup>91</sup> From the perspective of the logical positivists, a red sensory experience is taken to serve as indubitable grounds upon which we might have noninferential knowings along the lines of "I see red here now." The inferentialism which follows from the Kant-Sellars modal thesis explicitly rejects this sort of propositional atomism so central to the logical atomism of Russell,<sup>92</sup> the logical empiricists and the Tractarian Wittgenstein. For his part, Sellars describes logical atomism as the position that "every basic piece of empirical knowledge is logically independent of every other. Notice that this independence concerns not only *what* is known, but the *knowing of it*."<sup>93</sup> For the logical atomist, then, knowing that X is a red object is completely independent from the knowledge that X is not a green object and so

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91. See Otto Neurath, "Protocol Sentences," in *Logical Positivism* ed. A. J. Ayer, (New York, NY: Free Press, 1959), pp. 199-208. Neurath himself advances a physicalist (fallible) take on protocol sentences in opposition to what was then the more prominent phenomenalist (indubitable) interpretation.

92. Bertrand Russell, "Logical Atomism," in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A. J. Ayer (New York, NY: Free Press, 1959), pp. 31-50.

93. Wilfrid Sellars, "Towards a Theory of the Categories," in *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics: Sellars' Cassirer Lectures Notes and Other Essays*, ed. Jeffrey E. Sicha (Atascadero, California: Ridgeview Publishing, 2002), pp. 378-400, §16, p. 384.

the latter cannot be inferred from the former without adding certain other premises in order to justify the inference (such as “If X is red, then X cannot be green”).

Brandom describes just how radically Sellars departs from logical atomism and, in so doing, presents us with a working definition of Sellarsian inferentialism.

[For Sellars,] *no* beliefs, judgements, reports, or claims—in general, no application of concepts—are noninferential in the sense that their content can be understood apart from their role in reasoning as potential premises and conclusions of inferences. Any response that does not at least potentially have an inferential significance—which cannot, for instance, serve as a premise in reasoning to further conclusions—is cognitively idle, a wheel on which nothing else turns.<sup>94</sup>

The ability to draw inferences from some statement results from the fact that the statement exists as part of a shared communal language. Taken on their own, the following symbols, “Calgary is north of Lethbridge,” are meaningless. Of course, in practice, the above symbols are not meaningless (at least not to everyone), but this is so only by virtue of the role that English speakers recognize that they play in the English language. So the symbols in the above sentence demand that the speakers recognize some publicly shared meaning, some specific role that they play in the language. Sellarsian inferentialism is the idea that any cognitively significant statement is so only by virtue of the role that it plays in the whole language.

Having provided a basic primer on Sellarsian inferentialism, I will now turn my attention towards providing some justification for adopting it by describing how it avoids the following problem: the role that the semantic contents of concepts play in good reasoning is typically ignored (or given an ad hoc treatment) in formal logic. Keeping in mind my overall project of providing a Sellarsian description of the Fogelian problem of

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94. Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, p. 104.

deep disagreements, I should note here that it is against the backdrop of just this problem that Fogelin introduced the problem of deep disagreements in his 1985 “The Logic of Deep Disagreements.”<sup>95</sup>

Both Fogelin and Sellars introduce their respective ideas of deep disagreements and *material inference* with respect to the idea that enthymematic accounts of ordinary inferences like, per Sellars “It is raining, therefore the streets will be wet”<sup>96</sup> and, per Fogelin (here paraphrased) “I don’t want the ice cream to melt, therefore I should take this particular route home.”<sup>97</sup> The enthymematic approach is characteristic of the (mistaken) view, which Fogelin calls *deductivism*, that the only good inference is a formally valid deductive inference.<sup>98</sup> The enthymematic approach is to reconfigure the inference in question as a formally valid deductive argument by positing the existence of some unstated premise which is then used to produce the appropriate formally valid deductive argument. So, in the case of Sellars’s

It is raining, therefore the streets will be wet

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95. While they share the same subject matter, Fogelin is primarily interested in these sorts of inferences with respect to disagreements as the impetus for a trend towards informal logic, while Sellars is more interested in these inferences with respect to problems with empiricist metaphysics and Carnap’s *The Logical Syntax of Language*.

96. Sellars, IM §1, p. 329.

97. Fogelin, p. 3.

98. Fogelin’s worries about *deductivism* are summed up

But I think that the chief danger of adopting a deductive model for all reasoning—even as an ideal—is that it yields skeptical consequences. The demand that in an acceptable argument the conclusion must be entailed by exceptionless premises yields the consequence that virtually all of those everyday arguments which seem perfectly adequate are, in fact, no good. In the short run, students find this discovery of almost universal irrationality arresting. Debunking has its charms. The long run effect is less salutary. If students become convinced that they can always find something wrong with any (non-trivial) argument presented to them, then the distinction between good arguments and bad arguments is subverted, and the whole enterprise of arguing seems to lose its point.

Indeed, a persistent problem in teaching logic is that we will turn our students into radical, if short-termed, skeptics. (Fogelin, pp. 2).

we introduce

If it is raining, then the streets will be wet

and the *formal validity* of the argument is established. There is no dispute as to whether this procedure works with respect to transforming a formally invalid argument into a formally valid one. The problem is that the *formal validity* of the modified argument does not appear do justice to the *goodness* of the original argument because this procedure works just as well for bad arguments.

The enthymematic approach to ordinary arguments, it can be seen, involves the construal of the goodness of arguments as a strictly *formal* matter. This has the effect of relegating the role of whatever concepts are at play in the inference to one which is merely incidental.<sup>99</sup> The problem, of course, is that this solution appears to completely miss the real reason that the argument is acceptable to begin with, namely, that the concept of ‘raining’ seems to *carry with it* the notion that the things rained upon will get wet, and that *streets* are usually not sheltered from the rain (recall the previously established pragmatic emphasis on the deep connection between developing a conceptual understanding of X and developing an understanding of the practical effects associated

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99. Carnap’s scheme involves dividing natural languages into two sorts of rules. The L-rules (logical rules) are the formal rules of inference, while the P-rules govern the use of concepts and are the same as Sellars’s rules of material inference. Carnap’s position is that the P-rules are completely dispensable, and that the L-rules are *the* measure of good reasoning and a meaningful language. Sellars, of course, disagrees. (Sellars, IM, §10-16, pp. 333-36).

with X). In making this move, Fogelin's nemesis, the *deductivist*, seems to go far too far afield in her insistence on a formal deductive model for all reasoning.

The enthymematic explanation of the goodness of ordinary inferences is characteristic of a view of predicates/properties known as *extensionalism*, which is the idea that the meaning of a predicate is exactly the collection of objects to which that predicate is applied. Thus, the meaning of "red" is the collection of all red things. The meaning of "circular" is the collection of all circular things. As I will explain below, on an *extensionalist* understanding of the meaning of predicate terms, the property associated with some predicate term is treated as though it is wholly distinct from the object(s) of which it is predicated.

To the extensionalist, change in the meaning of predicate terms is accounted for by the fact that the term in question is simply being applied to different objects than before. Predicates, in this sense, are assigned arbitrarily—the predicate in question is incidental. There is some truth in this, in so far as there is nothing *about* redness (or, being red) which demands we use the sign design 'redness' when we talk (or write) about it. However, popular understanding of the predicate term is not accounted for if we admit strict *extensionalism* about the nature of predicates. For example, it is a well-known fact that, for much of American history, only white, property owning men have been (legally) considered persons.<sup>100</sup> But the women's and civil rights movements have resulted in a changed meaning for the predicate "is a person." The extensionalist would say that the *extension* of the predicate "is a person" has been extended to be roughly *co-extensive* with

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100. See Mary Midgley. "Is a Dolphin a Person." In *Utopias, Dolphins and Computers: Problems of Philosophical Plumbing*. Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2000.

the set of things which fall under the predicate “is a human being” whereas it was previously co-extensive with the predicate “is a white, property-owning male.” But that is *all* the *extensionalist* can say about the change in meaning. This example serves to highlight why the *extensionalist* story of change in meaning, at best, cannot be the *entire* story of how predicate terms are used. The change in the use of the predicate “is a person” is not *merely* a syntactic shift because the terms cannot be simply switched back by *fiat*, as the extensionalist story allows. There is an inclination to say that the new use of the term ‘person’ gets something right about how we understand personhood. But the extensionalist story is unable to account for this something because her understanding of the use of predicate terms places crippling restrictions on the inferences authorized by the assertion of a given statement. The extensionalist offers no objection to arbitrarily choosing to assign the predicate “is-a-person” to white, property owning males, because the morally significant inferential connections the *concept* of personhood carries with it (having to do with rights and privileges) are ignored on a strictly formal reading.

A purely extensional understanding of predicate terms places limits on the kinds of inferences which can be made with respect to statements which attach some predicate term to some object. Specifically, modal statements, which describe what *would necessarily* be the case if things *were* different (i.e., in some possible world), are *not* entailed by statements describing some object as having some property (e.g., statements of the form “*Fa*”). In this sense, the extensionalist treatment of the statement “*Fa*” is inferentially impoverished—statements regarding the F-ness of *a* only consider whether *a* falls under the extension of F in one particular model of how things might be. This feature of being logically independent of all other models concerning *a* seems to be a consequence of the arbitrary nature of the extensionalist story about predicates. Since F-

ness is *nothing other* than being in the group of F things, nothing follows from the description of *a* as an F except for statements which can be formally deduced from *Fa*. In order to demonstrate how radically Sellars departs from the extensionalist story, I will turn to Brandom's distinction between modally *insulated* and modally *involved* predicates.

A predicate is modally *insulated* if there is a possible world in which we might speak of some specified bearer-of-that-predicate-in-this-world as not bearing that predicate in the possible world in question.<sup>101</sup> Thus, those who insist on a modally *insulated* interpretation of circularity nod approvingly at the statement

There is a possible world in which that circular object is a square object.

That is to say, if a predicate is modally *insulated*, then statements which assign that property to some object are understood as describing only one possible world, one particular semantic model. When considering an object with respect to some modally *insulated* predicate, one can focus solely on the model she is considering and needn't concern herself with what *would* be the case if things *were* other than they are.

A modally *involved* predicate, on the other hand, is understood as being predicated of the same object in every possible world.<sup>102</sup> To assume an interpretation of circularity as modally *involved* would be to commit to the truth of following statement

That circular object is circular in any possible world in which it exists.

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101. Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, pp. 64-65.

102. Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, p. 65.

That is to say, if a predicate is modally *involved*, then statements which assign that property to some object are understood as taking every possible world into consideration. When considering an object with respect to some modally involved predicate, one must concern herself with what *would* be the case if things *were* other than they are.

Unsurprisingly, the extensionalist view of identity claims is concerned only with modally *insulated* properties. For the extensionalist, the truth of identity or coreference claims depends only on what is true in the possible world (i.e., the particular model) being considered.<sup>103</sup> At this point in the extensionalist story, the tendency to embrace *deductivism* rears its ugly head. That is to say, the tendency to adopt *deductivism* seems to be closely related to the willingness to embrace *extensionalism* despite its flaws. Since the extensionalist claims that *all* there is to redness or greenness is to be included in the extension of ‘red’ or ‘green’ respectively, patently self-contradictory statements to the effect of “X is all red and all green” are not, in and of themselves, seen as problematic by the extensionalist. This is a consequence of the inferential impoverishment which characterizes an extensional understanding of predicates. That is to say, on an extensional understanding of predicates, statements of the form “Fa” authorize only analytically deducible inferences. So, from

*a* is a green object,

the extensionalist allows that we might rightly infer

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103. Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, p. 64.

Something is a green object,

or even

*a* is a green object or the moon is made of pineapple,

but not

*a* is a coloured object,<sup>104</sup>

and certainly not

*a* is not a red object,

unless the inference is legitimized by the enthymematic strategy described earlier.

By now, the reader has surely noticed how an extensionalist understanding of predicates runs headlong into Peirce's principle. Modally *insulated* predicates do not entitle us to make inferences about what *would* happen if things *were* different. ***But Peirce's principle claims that the practical effects are the whole of our conception of the object.*** The rock *would* fall if it *were* dropped. The litmus paper *would* turn red *were* it

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104. To claim that this inference is analytically true would be to claim that the concept of being coloured is "contained" in the concept of being red in the same way that the concept of being a "featherless biped" is contained in the concept of being human. But neither of these inferences are analytic in the sense of being true *salva veritas* which is part of the *extensionalist/deductivist* story.

to be dipped in acid.<sup>105</sup> Our pragmatist is thus sufficiently motivated to move away from *extensionalism* and *deductivism* and towards Sellarsian inferentialism, where the notion of modally involved predicates plays a central role.

*Sellars's position is that all empirical descriptive properties are modally involved.*<sup>106</sup> The idea is summed up concisely by stating that “universals [i.e., predicates] and laws [i.e., rules of material inference] are correlative: same universals, same laws; different universals, different laws.”<sup>107</sup> The claim “X is red” materially implies the truth of the counterfactual claim “X would look black under a blue light.” The inference is good not because it can be reconstructed as a formal deduction, but because the manner in which the involved terms are used in the language necessitate the truth of the inference (namely, •red•, •looks•, •blue light•, •black• and •under•).<sup>108</sup> That is to say, understanding redness involves recognizing the inference as valid. On the Sellarsian picture of language, all predicate terms are understood to work in the same manner.<sup>109</sup>

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105. Sellars IM, §2, pp. 329-30 is Sellars's description of the rules of material inference in terms of the changing colour of litmus paper.

106. Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, p. 73.

107. Wilfrid Sellars, “Concepts as Involving Laws and Inconceivable Without Them,” in *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds: The Early Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, ed. Jeffrey F. Sicha (Atascadero, California: Ridgeview, 2005), pp. 174-208, §16, p. 185.

108. Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Theme*, (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1992), Chapter 3, §42-57, pp. 73-78. A dot quote (•x•) serves to indicate the function of a given sign design, which might be written, spoken or communicated in some other manner. A dot quote might be used to identify a particular (e.g., •Socrates•), a universal (e.g., •red•), a state of affairs (e.g., •Socrates is wise•), a logical constant (•not•) or other dot quoted intensions (e.g., •Socrates is •not wise••). The dot quote is used as a means of identifying the manner in which some sign is used within a particular group. Dot quoted intensions play a key role in the Sellarsian account of translations. For example, “‘nein’s (in Germany) are •not•s” establishes that, among German speakers, the sign design ‘nein’, has an analogous functional role to that played by ‘not’ among English speakers.

109. In Wilfrid Sellars, “Naming and Saying,” in *Science, Perception and Reality* (Atascadero, California: Ridgeview Publishing, 1991), pp. 204-224), Sellars presents what he calls a jumblese interpretation of a subject-predicate sentences, wherein the predicate is a modification of the sign used to identify the subject. For example, the sentence “Snow is white” might be translated into jumblese by writing the word ‘snow’ in white on a blackboard. Another example is writing ‘Bill is bold’ simply as ‘**Bill**.’ Jumblese allows us to construct sentences which have “the same, or at least a closely related sense, by placing [names] in a configuration which involves no use of an additional sign design.” (*SM* Ch. 4, §46) “[P]redicate expressions are ancillary expressions and are dispensable in a way in which referring expressions are not.” (*SM*, Ch. 4, §47). Sellars (NS, §1) credits Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* §3.1432 with inspiring Jumblese.

Sellars introduces his notion of *material inference* by considering the enthymematic approach to understanding ordinary inferences. On such an approach, the inference is understood as involving nothing more than the formal rules of deductive logic filled in with contingent generalizations which describe a learned expectation that certain things tend to happen in such and such an order. Such an understanding, which characterizes empiricism from at least Hume into the Logical Atomism of the twentieth century, effectively eliminates the role that the concept itself plays with respect to reasoning about that concept.<sup>110</sup> The idea of material inference is intended to correct this misstep. Sellars's rules of material inference are understood as being "as essential to meaning (and hence to language and thought) as formal rules, contributing the detail within the structure of logical form."<sup>111</sup> This provides impetus to recoil from the idea that to be a rational being is to be somehow in tune with a universal set of valid inferences or *rules of thought*, which has always been in the background of good inferences and is captured in the rules of deductive classical logic.<sup>112</sup> Sellars' notion of material inference is thus not to be confused with a merely dressed-up deductivism, but instead represents the sort of radical departure from the *deductivist* instinct (that the only good inference is a

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110. Sellars, IM, §1-5, pp. 329-31 writes that the typical reason "the empirically-minded" philosopher turns to the enthymematic approach is

the idea that, whereas formal rules are necessary conditions of the existence of concepts or the possession of meaning by terms, and, in this sense, are generic conditions of meaning, the specific content of a concept, or meaning of a term, is derived from experience, and is prior to any material rules of inference in which this concept or term may come to play a role. (Sellars, IM, §8, p. 332).

111. Sellars, IM, §9, p. 333.

112. E.g., Frege states in the preface to *Begriffsschrift* that "to follow pure logic [is] a way that, disregarding the particular characteristics of objects, depends solely on those laws upon which all knowledge rests"(Gottlob Frege, "Begriffsschrift," in *From Frege to Gödel*, ed. Jean van Heijenoort, Third edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 1-82, p. 5). Kant writes in the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that "logic is the science that exhaustively presents and strictly proves nothing but the formal rules of all thinking" (Kant, *Bx*, p. 107).

formally valid deductive inference) recommended by Fogelin as the basis for good informal logic.<sup>113</sup>

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113. Fogelin, p. 1.

## **Chapter 2: The Rules of Material Inference Theory of Deep Disagreements**

In this chapter, I will set out to answer the following three questions which were posed in the introduction:

- 4) How does Sellarsian inferentialism provide a useful understanding of deep disagreements?**
- 5) What are the more commonly accepted views on the nature of underlying principles?**
- 6) What differentiates the inferentialist's conception of underlying principles from the more commonly accepted views?**

My answer to these three questions is captured in the following claim, the explanation of which will make up the remainder of the chapter: The Rules of Material Inference theory of deep disagreements is better suited to satisfy Chris Ranalli's six desiderata for an adequate theory of deep disagreements than the more prominent Wittgensteinian Hinge Commitment (WHC) and Fundamental Epistemic Principle (FEP) views.

In his 2018 "What is Deep Disagreement?" Chris Ranalli argues that any adequate theory of deep disagreement must satisfy six desiderata. Ranalli's declared motivation for the provision of these desiderata is the view that one must get clear on the *nature* of deep disagreements before moving on to answering questions surrounding their resolvability.<sup>114</sup> I think Ranalli is right about this. One needs to know what counts as a cat before deciding whether cats are good pets. So, before moving on to my broader claim that a Sellarsian view of deep disagreements lends itself to optimism about the role of

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114. Ranalli, §1.

argumentation in deep disagreements, I will attempt to justify its status as a good theory of deep disagreements in light of Ranalli's desiderata.

## 2.1 Ranalli's Project

Ranalli's desiderata for an adequate theory of deep disagreements are of two sorts. The first sort I will call the *theoretical* desiderata. There are two such desiderata, each of which is an answer to one of the two questions below. The questions have to do with the *nature* or *metaphysics* of deep disagreements. The two questions that any adequate theory of deep disagreement must answer are:

**[The] Constitution Question:** What do the disputants disagree over in cases of deep disagreement—that is, what are the objects<sup>115</sup> of their disagreement?

**[The] Attitude Question:** What are the disputants' attitudes to what they disagree over in cases of deep disagreement?<sup>116</sup>

The other sort of desiderata, which I will call the *practical* desiderata, can be understood as a means of evaluating the answers to the *theoretical* desiderata. The *practical* criteria, each of which will be looked at more closely below, are presented by Ranalli as:

**Disagreement:** It needs to be consistent with the conflict being a genuine disagreement.

**Reason-taking:** It needs to be consistent with the view that in cases of deep disagreement, the disagreeing parties at least take themselves to be giving reasons for their views.

**Systematicity:** It needs to explain why deep disagreements involve systematic disagreement.

**Persistence:** It needs to explain why deep disagreements tend to be persistent and thus unresolved.<sup>117</sup>

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115. The specific "objects" of a deep disagreement are the underlying principles at issue in a deep disagreement. I will thus interpret the constitution questions as asking about the nature of the underlying principles. Such an interpretation aligns with Ranalli's treatment of the constitution question throughout his paper.

116. Ranalli, §2.

117. Ranalli, §2

It should be noted right away that the *theoretical* desiderata are primary in so far as they must be answered before we can consider whether the theory in question satisfies the *practical* criteria.

The focus of Ranalli's paper is to consider two prominent theories of deep disagreements in light of these desiderata. These two views are the fundamental epistemic principle (FEP) theory and the much more prominent Wittgensteinian Hinge Commitment (WHC) theory. Ranalli ultimately deems neither theory fully satisfactory. The FEP view is deemed too narrow to account for the range of possible deep disagreements.<sup>118</sup> Meanwhile the WHC view is problematic largely because of the variety of views on the nature of WHCs themselves, each variation of which seems to bring its own difficulties.<sup>119</sup> My focus here is not on either of these two views, but rather on Ranalli's suggestion that there might be an alternative view which is able to satisfy his various desiderata without the flaws he associates with either of these theories.<sup>120</sup> Providing one possible alternative theory is the task to which I devote the rest of this chapter. In making the case for my alternative theory of deep disagreements, I will highlight how it avoids the various shortcomings Ranalli associates with the WHC and FEP views; this requires in turn that I provide an introduction to both the WHC and FEP views.

One thing to note before moving on to introducing the WHC and FEP views is that we can safely infer from these examples of possible theories of deep disagreements that *to put forward a theory of deep disagreement is to provide an answer to the constitution question*. In that respect, my theory of deep disagreements might be fairly

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118. Ranalli, §5.

119. Ranalli, §3.

120. Ranalli, §6.

called the “rules of material inference” (RMI) theory of deep disagreements. After a short digression to introduce the WHC and FEP views. I will argue that the RMI theory of deep disagreements satisfies the desiderata recommended by Ranalli. In making my case, I will attempt to demonstrate how the RMI view avoids the pitfalls identified by Ranalli with respect to the WHC and FEP views.

### 2.1.1 The WHC View

The WHC view of deep disagreement is the most prominent theory of deep disagreements. Indeed, Fogelin is typically understood as subscribing to the WHC view, and not without good reason, for he introduces the idea of deep disagreements by making repeated reference to Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty* in his 1985 “The Logic of Deep Disagreements.”<sup>121</sup> Pritchard describes the basic thesis regarding WHCs as “the idea that all rational evaluation takes place relative to a backdrop of basic arational commitments, commonly known as hinges (OC, §141–143).”<sup>122</sup> WHCs are not justified through argumentation, but are what make argumentative justification possible to begin with. Ranalli echoes this when he describes WHCs as statements which are exempt from doubt because they form the basis upon which we conduct any rational evaluation. Pointing to §93 of *On Certainty*,<sup>123</sup> Ranalli describes the WHCs as statements which all of our experience gives us reason to endorse.<sup>124</sup>

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121. Fogelin, pp. 3, 4, 6.

122. Pritchard, p. 4.

123. “The propositions presenting what Moore ‘*knows*’ are all of such a kind that it is difficult to imagine *why* anyone should believe the contrary. E.g. the proposition that Moore has spent his whole life in close proximity to the earth. — Once more I can speak of myself here instead of speaking of Moore. What could induce me to believe the opposite? Either a memory, or having been told. — Everything that I have ever seen or heard gives me the conviction that no man has ever been far from the earth. Nothing in my picture of the world speaks in favour of the opposite.” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1972), §93, underline added).

124. Ranalli, §2, p. 5.

Wittgenstein builds the notion of hinge commitments with reference to apparent knowledge claims such as “I know that this is a hand” or “I know I’ve never been to the moon.” For Wittgenstein, the noteworthy aspect of claims such as these is that it is difficult to understand what it would mean to find out that one is mistaken about them, or how one would come to realize one’s mistake.<sup>125</sup> Wittgenstein is thus tempted to understand statements asserting some hinge commitment not as a statement about the world, but as *instructions* regarding the proper use of the term(s) in question. “These X are physical objects” is taken by Wittgenstein to be not a statement about the world (which he claims would be nonsensical), but as an *instruction* regarding the use of the words ‘physical objects.’<sup>126</sup>

It is worth acknowledging here that the claim that statements related to the WHCs are understood as instructions regarding the use of particular terms has a certain ring to it which is reminiscent of the Sellarsian claim that such statements might be understood as the rules of material inference which govern the use of language.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, there is more than a passing resemblance between the works of these two thinkers. Sellars makes frequent use of Wittgensteinian ideas such as language games and picturing (though

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125. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §32.

126. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §35-36.

127. Brandom mentions WHCs very briefly when describing how Sellars and Wittgenstein are alike in their rejection of descriptivism and so in turn grant first class status to various vocabularies that the descriptivist has typically given second class status. (Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, pp. 35-37). Brandom highlights what he takes to be the most relevant distinction when he writes that Sellars “characteriz[es] at least a broad class of nondescriptive vocabularies as playing generically the *same* expressive role. They are broadly metalinguistic locutions expressing necessary features of the framework of discursive practices that make description (and so—explanation—possible). Of this broad binary distinction of expressive roles, with ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary on one side and a whole range of apparently disparate vocabularies going into another class as ‘metalinguistic,’ there is, I think, no trace in Wittgenstein” (Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, p. 36). The *not*-ordinary empirical descriptive vocabularies are understood as related to the ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary in so far as the former explains the “lawful-causal explanatory connections between” the elements of the latter vocabulary. (Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, p. 37. See also, note 83 of this thesis).

always with a Sellarsian twist) and I have mentioned above how Sellars's jumblese originated with his reading of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* §3.1432. I think this is part of the reason why Fogelin's Wittgensteinian problem of deep disagreements lends itself to an effective Sellarsian interpretation. Although it would be a worthwhile project, a thorough comparison of these two thinkers is well beyond the scope of this thesis. For now, I will highlight two important differences between the two. The first is that Sellars was a systematic writer, whose densely packed works leave much less room for (mis)interpretation than Wittgenstein's. That the Sellarsian account is much more clearly defined in this manner presents an advantage over the Wittgensteinian account with respect to developing a theory of deep disagreements because, as Ranalli argues, the various manners in which the WHCs are construed each bring about their own difficulties, which will be highlighted below.

A second important difference between Wittgenstein and Sellars has to do with their construal of the role of philosophy. Whereas the later Wittgenstein is often described as presenting a view of philosophy as a therapeutic method aimed at remedying/clarifying various confusions which come about from misunderstanding the grammar of our language, Sellars tends to describe the role of philosophy as *essentially constructive*.

Sellars writes, in *Science and Metaphysics*:

Clarity is not to be confused with insight. It is the latter which is the true final cause of philosophy, and the insight which philosophy seeks and which always eludes its grasp is total insight. If the maxim *hypotheses non-fingo* had captured classical and medieval philosophy there would have been abundance of clarity but no science, and in particular, no theoretical science as we know it today.<sup>128</sup>

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128. Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics*, Chapter 1, §29, p. 18.

### 2.1.2 The FEP View

On the FEP view, deep disagreements are understood as disagreements which result from a clash of fundamental epistemic principles. Matheson, an advocate of the FEP view, describes two marks of FEPs. These are that an FEP 1) “[amounts to the claim] that some epistemic property (justification, knowledge, warrant, etc.) obtains whenever some property obtains” and 2) “is not derived from any other principle.”<sup>129</sup> The first marker is exhibited by epistemic principles more generally, while the second marker is the feature which makes some epistemic principle *fundamental*.

Citing Lynch<sup>130</sup> and Kappell,<sup>131</sup> Ranalli provides the following possible examples of (conflicting) fundamental epistemic principles,

**Fossil Record:** With respect to the facts about the distant past, you ought to conform your beliefs to fit with the evidence from the historical and fossil record. The historical and fossil record is the most reliable method for knowing about the distant past.

**Holy Book:** With respect to the facts about the distant past, you ought to conform your beliefs to fit with the holy book. The Holy Book is the most reliable method for knowing about the distant past.<sup>132</sup>

On the FEP view, deep disagreements are understood as *disagreements* over fundamental epistemic principles<sup>133</sup> marked by the following three features identified by Lynch. 1) “*Commonality*” which demands that each interlocutor must share an epistemic goal (e.g. settling the moral status of abortion), 2) “*Competition*” which demands that the disagreeing parties cannot agree on a method of achieving their shared epistemic goal,

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129. Jonathan Matheson, “Deep Disagreements and Rational Resolution,” *Topoi*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-018-9576-y>, §5.

130. Michael P. Lynch, “Epistemic Circularity and Epistemic Incommensurability,” in *Social Epistemology*, ed. Adrian Haddock, et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 262-77.

131. Klemens Kappel. “The Problem of Deep Disagreement.” *Discipline Filosofiche* 22, 2 (2012): 7-25

132. Ranalli, p. 10.

133. On Lynch’s view, the disagreement need not be construed as a *clash* of FEPs, but rather cases where “one side does not affirm a principle that the other side does affirm.” Lynch, p. 267.

and 3) “*Mutual Circularity*” which says that each party invokes epistemically circular<sup>134</sup> FEPs. Lynch also includes a fourth mark of a deep disagreement on the FEP view, which he calls “*Non-arbitration*: There is no further epistemic principle, accepted by both parties, which would settle the disagreement.”<sup>135</sup> Ranalli, of course, rejects the notion that non-arbitration should characterize deep disagreements on the grounds that it entails defining deep disagreements as unresolvable, and we are not entitled to any claim regarding the resolvability of deep disagreements until we have shown that we have an adequate theory of deep disagreement. I am not sure that Ranalli’s criticism applies here, since the non-arbitration criterion appears to amount to a restatement of the fundamental nature of the FEPs, which, since they are fundamental, could not be justified by another principle (which appears in line with Lynch’s own use of this feature). Nonetheless, whether Ranalli’s objection applies or not, I am inclined to view the non-arbitration criterion as somewhat redundant, given that the FEPs are *fundamental* and so I think one can proceed safely with an understanding of the FEP view which requires that deep disagreements involve only the first three marks; commonality, competition, and mutual circularity.

## **2.2 The RMI View and Ranalli’s Desiderata**

### **2.2.1 Constitution question**

On the RMI view, deep disagreements are disagreements over the *rules of material inference* which govern the use of concepts that play a constitutive role in a person’s conceptual framework. In his “Inference and Meaning,” Sellars describes the

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134. Lynch describes epistemic circularity as “supposing a source is trustworthy by relying on that very source” (Lynch, p. 262).

135. Lynch, p. 265.

idea of rules of material inference with reference to Carnap's distinction, in *The Logical Syntax of Language* between the formal rules of logic (L-rules) and the rules which govern the use of concepts (P-rules).<sup>136</sup> Sellars is clear that the P-rules are exactly what he has in mind with respect to his *rules of material inference*. But Sellars diverges sharply from Carnap in his understanding of the role that the P-rules play in reasoning. Carnap views the P-rules as entirely dispensable and holds that there could be a meaningful language with only L-rules. Sellars, meanwhile, holds that the P-rules (RMIs) are "as essential to meaning (and hence to language and thought) as formal rules, contributing the detail within the structure of logical form."<sup>137</sup>

Though the RMIs which govern the use of concepts such as 'person' or 'fairness' are obvious candidates, there is no requirement that any particular concept play a constitutive role in every system of RMIs (effectively the language *in toto*), nor is there any restriction on which concepts can play such a role (of course, certain concepts seem to be less likely candidates).<sup>138</sup> Since all concepts are governed by the same sorts of RMI, any concept *might* be found at the bottom of a deep disagreement. In this regard, the RMI view is better suited to capture the breadth of possible deep disagreements than the FEP view.

Ranalli claims that the most significant problem with the FEP view is that it is too limiting to adequately capture the phenomenon of deep disagreements. After all, not all deep disagreements have epistemic principles or sources of knowledge at their core.

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136. Sellars, IM, §10-19, pp. 333-38.

137. Sellars, IM, §9, p. 333.

138 An important consideration to keep in mind is that the concepts which will play a constitutive role in A's conceptual framework will be related to A's motivations, which are themselves shaped by biological, social and environmental factors.

Indeed, the aforementioned Holy Book FEP does not seem to offer a clear answer regarding the essentials of concepts such as fairness, which is at the center of Fogelin's description of deep disagreements over affirmative action, other than, perhaps, to check if the Holy Book has anything to say about it. For this reason, Ranalli prefers an alternate version which he calls the Fundamental Normative Principle (FNP) view, though he provides no clear example of what such a principle might be, stating only that such a principle must not be derivable from any other principle (i.e., must be fundamental) and must be categorical.<sup>139</sup> I will assume, then, that such a principle would be something along the lines of the Kantian Categorical Imperative or the Utilitarian Greatest Happiness Principle. On one hand, it is entirely feasible that clashing FNPs might result in deep disagreements. One can easily construe disagreements between Kantians and Utilitarian in just this way. On the other hand, as Ranalli points out, it seems clashes of FNPs cannot account for certain metaphysical deep disagreements. To this end, Ranalli provides the example of a possible deep disagreement between realism and idealism. Ranalli points out that, in a deep disagreement between metaphysical positions, either interlocutor could conceivably endorse the same FEPs (such as an empiricist FEP along the lines of 'sensory input is the only reliable source of knowledge') and yet find themselves in a deep disagreement, which he is at a loss to describe in terms of a clash of FNPs.<sup>140</sup>

The RMI view of deep disagreements is not susceptible to the kinds of limitations which plague the FNP/FEP views. First, in claiming that the underlying principles (RMIs)

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139. Ranalli considers "*persons have moral status*" as one possible normative principle, but he is hesitant to endorse it as an FNP because it is not in any clear way *fundamental*. (Ranalli, §5.1-5.2.)

140. Ranalli, §5.3.

are metalinguistic statements in the material mode, the advocate of the RMI view is able to account for deep disagreements over any topic. The key to deep disagreements, on the RMI view, is that the RMIs exist as part of an entire system as it is actually *used* by some linguistic *community*. Since all concepts are modally involved, all concepts necessarily involve RMIs and are thus equally legitimate candidates for possible deep disagreements. Secondly, the RMI view need not be altered/expanded in the ad hoc manner recommended by Ranalli in order to account for normative disagreements because the pragmatic understanding of concepts as fundamentally related to actions, which informs the Sellarsian picture, entails that all RMIs (indeed all concepts) have some normative implications, as they are inextricably linked to our ability to correctly and justifiably make the statement in question.<sup>141</sup>

One may object that the RMI view is in fact *too* broad, since it appears to allow for deep disagreements over, say *redness*, and there does not appear to be any legitimate possibility of such a deep disagreement. My response would be to return to Matthew Shield's characterization of deep disagreements as disagreements over *constitutive concepts* which was mentioned above in section 1.1. Shields describes constitutive concepts as those which "defin[e] the inquiry's key vocabulary."<sup>142</sup> Since, on the RMI view, all concepts play some role in defining other concepts, the constitutive-ness of concepts might be understood as *quantitatively* but not *qualitatively* different than non-constitutive concepts. That is, the constitutive role some concept plays in a deep disagreement has to do with the number of RMIs relevant to the disagreement which

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141. Sellars's rules of material inference are learned as "rules of criticism" or "ought-to-bes" which "define the standard against which linguistic activity is judged to be correct or incorrect." (DeVries, p.48). See, e.g., *Science and Metaphysics*, Chapter 5, §4-7, pp. 112-14.

142. Shields, §3. See note 18 of this thesis.

involve the concept in question. But there is no *qualitative* difference between any of these concepts on the RMI view. While it is unlikely that a deep disagreement might turn upon the concept of redness, at least amongst 21<sup>st</sup> century humans, it is entirely feasible that such a deep disagreement might arise within some hypothetical linguistic community in which the notion of redness does play a constitutive role, although such a community is admittedly difficult to imagine. So, far from being a weakness of the RMI view, I think that this breadth is a merit, since it is not the *kinds* of concepts, but the *role* they play in the language as it is used within a community which are the source of deep disagreements.

Before moving on, it is worth saying a bit about how the RMI view describes deep disagreements of varying depths. On the RMI view, there are two factors which determine the depth of the disagreement. These are 1) the degree to which the concept(s) at issue play(s) a constitutive role in the disagreement, and 2) the level of disagreement between the interlocutors' respective systems of RMIs which govern the use of the concept(s) in question. Regarding the second point, it is important to note that complete disagreement over the RMIs at issue can be accommodated on the RMI view but that it is not a requirement of deep disagreement on this (nor Fogelin's)<sup>143</sup> view. Indeed, both parties in a deep disagreement over personhood might endorse a relevant RMI along the lines of "persons must always be treated morally."

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143. Fogelin, p. 5, specifies that interlocutors who deeply disagree about the moral status of the fetus can indeed agree on a number of relevant biological and moral statements because there is no method to settle the fetus' moral status by way of appeals to either "biological facts" or "moral principles already limited to moral agents or patients."

### 2.2.2 Attitude question

On the RMI view, the attitude question is answered by stating that the underlying principles at issue in a deep disagreement (the RMIs) are *beliefs*. It must be kept in mind, however, that the pragmatist places special emphasis on *habits* or *actions* when considering beliefs.<sup>144</sup> For the pragmatist, all beliefs involve *some* disposition to behave in a certain way. To that end, Sellars describes beliefs as “at least in part, dispositions relating to assertion.”<sup>145</sup> Beliefs about ‘red’ manifest in certain behaviours towards red things. For example, reporting that certain things are red, a communal tendency to agree on reports of red things, a communal tendency to correct misuse of the word “red,” not to mention a wealth of political associations which vary from community to community.

The FEP/FNP view shares the merit of capturing the dispositional nature of beliefs in its answer to the attitude question, but, again, the FEP/FNP view is more limited than the RMI view. Whereas the FEP view describes *only* dispositions to accept certain pieces of information (or, on the FNP version, dispositions to deem certain acts moral or immoral), the RMI view has no such limit. On the RMI view, any beliefs are understood as including a very wide range of dispositions because all predicate terms are understood as *modally involved* and rule governed.

*That* the RMI view can provide a clear answer to the attitude question presents an advantage over the WHC view, for there are a number of possible responses to the attitude questions which might be put forward by those who subscribe to the WHC view.

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144. Sellars, LRB, writes: “The mode of existence of a rule is as a generalization written in flesh and blood, or nerve and sinew rather than in pen and ink” (§17, p. 218). Later in the same paper, he writes: “To describe rules is to describe *skeletons* of rules. A rule is *lived*, not *described*. Thus, what we justify is never a rule, but behavior and dispositions to behave” (§43, p. 231).

145. Sellars, LRB, §12, p.215. It might be worth stating outright here that making (or endorsing) an assertion is an action.

While one might be inclined to understand the WHCs as *beliefs*, this is not universally accepted. Some theorists, such as Wright, advance *trust* as the propositional *attitude* in question (to which Ranalli replies that this trust would ultimately need to “retain the mechanics of disagreement in belief”), while others, such as Moyal-Sharrock, advance a non-propositional account of WHCs which effectively *rejects* the attitude question, since the notion of propositional attitudes requires that there be some proposition about which we have an attitude.<sup>146</sup>

### 2.2.3 Systematicity

The systematic nature of deep disagreements is well-accounted for on the RMI view, since the Sellarsian conception of language is distinctly non-atomistic. For Sellars, every word in a given language is understood as being meaningful only with respect to its role in the whole language. That is to say, the correct use of the word at issue (whether in a deep disagreement or not) is grounded in a whole system of linguistic expressions.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, Brandom states this succinctly with the specification that, for Sellars “one cannot have *one* concept without having *many*.”<sup>148</sup>

On the inferentialist view of language, learning the correct use of the word “red” involves gaining the ability to correctly use sentences like “X is not green,” including the correct use of the various words contained therein, none of which can be gained in isolation. For Sellars, there is no foundation of basic or given concepts upon which the language is built, a feature which drastically differentiates the Sellarsian understanding

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146. Ranalli, §2, p.8. Crispin Wright, “On Epistemic Entitlement (II),” ed. Dylan Dodd and Elia Zardini, *Scepticism and Perceptual Justification*, January 2014, pp. 213-47. Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, *Understanding Wittgenstein’s “On Certainty”* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

147. Sellars, LRB, §22, p. 221.

148. Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, p. 23.

from traditional empiricism, wherein red sensory experience is understood as a sure foundation upon which to build empirical knowledge. The empiricist allows that the *sensation* of redness is sufficient for *knowledge* that something red is present. But this is rejected on the Sellarsian account, wherein “characterizing an episode or state as one of *knowing* [is] placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says.”<sup>149</sup> Justifications are, of course, offered as *statements in the language*. So knowing some statement necessarily involves an understanding of the roles that the various terms therein play together.

On the RMI view, in a deep disagreement, the interlocutors are to be understood as representatives of distinct linguistic communities. This point is not blunted even if, in the everyday sense, they are still speaking the “same” language—“person” is governed by rule-set A for group A, but governed by rule-set B for group B, even though both group A and B are communities of English speakers.<sup>150</sup> This, I think, is very much in line with Fogelin’s descriptions of deep disagreements as conflicting forms of life.<sup>151</sup>

I think that the manner in which the systematicity desideratum is satisfied on the RMI view presents a significant strength over the FEP/FNP view. On the FEP/FNP view, the systematicity of deep disagreements is understood as following from the FEP/FNP in question. The FEP/FNPs are thus, as the name implies, understood as the rock-bottom *foundation* of the deep disagreement. I think this presents a misleadingly simplistic roadmap for the resolution of deep disagreements—simply address *the* FEP/FNP at issue

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149. Sellars, EPM, §36, p.76. Sellars’s rejection of the “myth of the given” makes up perhaps his most famous work. DeVries, p.171, writes that Sellars considers the distinction between sensations and thoughts to be among Kant’s most important contributions. See Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics*, chapter 1 for a detailed treatment of this Kantian theme.

150. Sellars, LRB, §37, p. 228.

151. Fogelin, p. 6.

(assuming, optimistically, and contra Lynch, that said principle can in fact be addressed) and resolution should follow (alternatively, failing to achieve resolution by addressing the FEP/FNP at issue can be taken as a sure indication that resolution is impossible). But the RMI view does not present such a simplified course of action. Because of their essentially systematic nature, changes in RMIs will necessarily reverberate throughout the entire conceptual framework and so, by extension, 1) will necessitate the bringing about of changes elsewhere in the conceptual framework, 2) can be affected with reference to discussions of surface level *use* of the concept in question, without necessitating that one dig one's way to the core of her interlocutor's conceptual scheme and 3) might be resisted for unforeseen reasons having to do with the role of the term in the whole language of either interlocutor other than the context in which the disagreement emerges. The third point, of course, is central to appreciating the difficulty associated with addressing deep disagreements through argument, for it can be understood as the reason for the above-mentioned resistance to an *experimentum crucis* which marks deep disagreements. I think this is a merit of the RMI view of deep disagreements (and the Sellarsian conception of meaning more generally), since it allows for an appreciation of the fact that while, per Peirce's principle, all meaningful concepts necessarily involve some perceptual effects, these perceptual effects are not restricted to only those things which lend themselves to direct experiment. While Peirce, as we have seen above, might claim that disagreements between Catholics and Protestants over the nature of the Eucharist are nothing other than senseless jargon, the RMI view helps one appreciate that this disagreement does indeed have real sensible effects in terms of the role that transubstantiation plays in the broader conceptual framework of the believer. This line of thought will be picked up below with reference to the disagreement desideratum.

#### 2.2.4 Reason-taking

Ranalli insists that an adequate theory of deep disagreement include an explanation for the fact that the interlocutors actually take *themselves* to be offering reasons for or against their views. This desideratum is not a problem on the RMI view, since, on the RMI view, understanding any concept is construed as the ability to place it in the logical space of reasons. It is part of the nature of RMIs to be the sort of things which are given as reasons. But Ranalli specifies that the reason-taking desideratum presents a problem for at least certain construals of the WHC view, which will be examined below. Since the RMI view is not susceptible to this criticism, if the objection effectively entails that WHC view cannot satisfy the reason-taking desideratum (of which I am not convinced), then the reason-taking desideratum strengthens the case for the RMI view of deep disagreements over the WHC view.

On the RMI view, we take ourselves to be giving reasons for our views because we are in fact doing just that. By invoking the rules of material inference which govern the use of certain words, the interlocutors are in fact providing reasons, are justifying their claims in the same way as they would in ordinary disagreements. My ability to correct your misuse of the word ‘red’ relies on the way I have learned to use the word ‘red’ and my reasons for correcting your use of ‘red’ will be produced against that linguistic backdrop. To invoke such a rule *is* to provide a reason. “No, you’ve got it wrong—that thing can’t be red because it’s green and green things can’t be red things.” More directly relevant in a deep disagreement, one might say “This outcome cannot be *just* because the perpetrator is the beneficiary” (note the modally involved nature of the concept of justice here—“*Were* the outcome just, the beneficiary *would* not be the perpetrator”).

Ranalli describes the reason-taking desideratum as a problem for the WHC view because the WHCs are typically described as being beyond rational justification. Indeed WHCs are understood as a necessarily arational backdrop against which rationality occurs. So, Ranalli claims that the advocate of the WHC view must explain why the interlocutors are “so easily misled” into thinking that they are providing evidence in favour of, *at best*, “non-paradigmatically justifiable” WHCs.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, Wittgenstein’s question “what would a mistake here be like?”<sup>153</sup> must be answered before we could begin to attempt to correct the mistake.

I think that this objection might not hold up. The WHC view might be defended by claiming that, regardless of whether or not the WHCs are understood as being propositional or truth-apt *from a theoretical perspective*, the interlocutors invariably *treat* WHCs as acceptable justification (or justifiable, as the case may be) in an argument, unless, perhaps, we are trained to identify them (so, if one were to object that Wittgenstein would never attempt to justify his own WHCs, I would reply that he is certainly non-paradigmatic in that regard). It is that we *treat* the WHCs as justifiable, not their actual status as justifiable or not, that is at issue when considering the reason-taking desideratum. Indeed, the very point of WHCs is that they are supposed to present an explanation for *those statements to which we can turn at any time and say “I know that X,”* where X is invariably treated as a proposition by the person who claims to *know* (which entails *believe*) X. If this is accepted, as I think it should be, then the WHC view can still effectively satisfy the reason-taking desideratum despite the objection. In any event, whether the objection holds or not, the RMI view avoids it entirely.

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152. Ranalli, §2, p.7.

153. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §17.

### 2.2.5 Persistence

The persistence desideratum asks that any adequate theory of deep disagreement explain why the disagreement persists despite attempts at argumentation. In the context of the RMI theory of deep disagreement, the persistence of deep disagreements is deeply intertwined with the systematicity of the RMIs themselves. Since the use of the concepts at issue in a deep disagreement are necessarily governed by a *multitude* of RMIs which define their role in either interlocutor's conceptual framework, it is entirely feasible that *even if* two interlocutors are able to come to an agreement with respect to one particular RMI, the disagreement will (or, at least *can*) *persist* since (or, so long as) there will still be relevant disagreement elsewhere in their respective conceptual frameworks (i.e., systems of RMIs).

To borrow a familiar example from Kuhn, the drastically different conceptions of “space” in classical and relativistic mechanics render translations across frameworks, at best, “inevitably partial.”<sup>154</sup> This leads Kuhn to the idea that “proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds.”<sup>155</sup> On the RMI view, we might account for this statement with reference to Sellars's idea that “universals and laws are correlative: same universals, same laws; different universals, different laws.”<sup>156</sup> The at best *partial* nature of the translations Kuhn describes appears compatible with the Sellarsian understanding inter-framework translations as analogical rather than univocal.<sup>157</sup>

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154. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 148.

155. Kuhn, *Structure*, p. 149.

156. Sellars, CIL, §16.

157. Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics*, Ch. 5, §37-47, pp. 122-25. Sellars discusses the fact that “the use of abstract terms admits of a dimension of flexibility which [. . .] has never been given an adequate explanation, though the materials for this explanation have long been at hand.” (Ch. 5, §37). Sellars uses his

On the RMI view, a deep disagreement will persist despite argumentation because the analogous rule-governed roles some concept plays in the interlocutors' respective conceptual frameworks are different, despite the fact that either interlocutor utilizes the *same* sign-design, the use of which might be *partially* governed by compatible RMIs. So, while it is correct to say that a deep disagreement turns on a particular concept, it is more precise to say that there is a disagreement over the RMIs which govern the use of a particular concept in either conceptual scheme. To the inferentialist, this is the reason that argumentation can fail in a deep disagreement—on occasions when a disparity between systems of RMIs results in the interlocutors accepting different conclusions, reasons for or against belief that-P which are acceptable in conceptual scheme A can miss the mark entirely in conceptual scheme B. While a deep disagreement may indeed ultimately be located in disparate understandings of a single concept (e.g., personhood or fairness), one who adheres to the RMI view recognizes that that singular concept *cannot* exist in isolation and so the resolution of the disagreement necessitates many changes elsewhere in interlocutors' respective conceptual schemes. The difficulty associated with resolving a deep disagreement through argumentation can be seen as following from attempts to

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claim that abstract terms function in the same manner as distributive singular terms (e.g., “*triangularity*” can be construed as ‘the •triangular•’ and employed in the same way as ‘the pawn’) to “mobilize the familiar fact that it can make very good sense to say that a piece in a certain game is a pawn without implying that it works in *exactly* the same way as pawns do in standard chess” (Ch. 5, §38, p. 123). In certain senses, Euclidean and Riemannian geometries are inter-translatable, but in others they are not. Triangles of either sort could be described as consisting of three intersecting straight (or geodesic) lines, but certain general statements expressing geometrical truths about the objects defined in either manner (e.g., the sum of their internal angles) would not be translatable. The fact that there might be two senses of ‘triangular’ is *not* to be mistaken for a simple ambiguity. Instead, Sellars’s point is that the *function* of triangularity is the *same* in either context. The two senses of triangularity are *analogs*. The idea of analogy is crucial for an appreciation of the importance of the admission of these functional translations. “To say that the semantic rules governing ‘f’s in our language could change over a period of time, and yet that the ‘f’s could all be •f•s, is what is meant by saying that f-ness has changed over this period.” (Ch. 5, §47, p. 125).

reconcile these rich conceptual differences by addressing a complex concept via a line of argument which considers only a single RMI (or a single application thereof).

It is a merit of the RMI view that it allows one to account for deep disagreements which exist despite partial agreement across systems of RMIs. When we keep in mind that there might be significant overlap between languages<sup>158</sup> which are nevertheless governed (in part) by drastically different rules,<sup>159</sup> actual deep disagreements suddenly appear more sensible. For example, a deep disagreement about abortion should not have to preclude agreement on certain relevant rules or principles along the lines of “murder is immoral” or “murder involves at least two people” although agreement on rules such as these is by no means *required* on the RMI view and so the possibility of an infinitely deep disagreement remains.

### **2.2.6 Disagreement**

Ranalli’s disagreement desideratum demands that deep disagreements be understood as *genuine* disagreements. On the RMI view, a deep disagreement is understood as the clashing of systems of RMIs which govern the use of particular words in the language. These clashes come to the fore as disagreements over particular statements. The deep disagreement *proper* is understood not as a disagreement over the particular statement at issue, but as disagreements over the status of various RMIs which govern the use of the terms relevant to the singular statement (e.g., “abortion is immoral”). After explaining this in a bit more detail, I will turn my attention to addressing the possible objection that the pragmatic understanding of concepts seems to deny that a

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158. All or any of which might be rightly called ‘English.’

159. These drastically different rules might nevertheless lead to conclusions which coincide in many instances and contexts. For example, classical and relativistic mechanics will agree (within a reasonable margin of error) on the trajectory of a baseball thrown by a human.

deep disagreement is a genuine disagreement because deep disagreements are resistant to resolution by way of *experimentum crucis* despite the fact that we might infer from Peirce's principle that any genuine disagreement must be resolvable by some *experimentum crucis*.

In order to appreciate how the disagreement desideratum is satisfied on the RMI view, we should return to the manner in which the RMI view answers the constitution question. On the RMI view, a deep disagreement is clashing *systems of rules of material inference*, which manifest in disputes over particular propositions, such as "abortion is morally permissible." Key to appreciating the RMI view, then, is recognizing that the disagreement over statements such as "abortion is immoral" are not themselves the deep disagreement, but rather the manifestation of a disparity between systems of RMIs. The disagreement over the singular proposition "abortion is immoral" is an effect of the deep disagreement proper. The deep disagreement proper has to do with the RMIs which govern the use/role of the relevant terms (such as "personhood") in the whole language. So, on the RMI view, the deep disagreement exists because the concepts ("person," "fairness") at issue will typically play an analogous (i.e., at least partially recognizable) role in both languages and so many of the things pointed to as persons by either interlocutor will be the same. But, since the different languages bring with them different rules for correct use of the term, there might be a *genuine surface level* disagreement over, for example, whether A is to be considered a person, because of a *genuine deep* disagreement over some of the various RMIs which govern the use of the word "person" in either language. *One* such RMI might be something along the lines of "If anything were a person, it would necessarily be rational."

There is a possible objection to the RMI view of deep disagreements towards which I gestured above (in section 1.2.1). It was noted there that, for the pragmatist, any genuine disagreement must involve some difference in practical effects, which might be taken to mean that the pragmatist views any genuine disagreement as decidable by way of an *experimentum crucis*.<sup>160</sup> The objection has to do with the fact that deep disagreements seem to defy this requirement and so cannot be abided by the pragmatist. Indeed, as we have seen above (section 1.1), per Aikin, a deep disagreement can be understood as a symmetrical version of the problem of the criterion,<sup>161</sup> which has the effect of precluding agreement on any possible *experimentum crucis*. This is a fair but defeasible objection which should be addressed if the RMI theory of deep disagreements is to be considered adequate. I will defend the RMI view by disambiguating the notion of discernable practical effects from that of an *experimentum crucis*.

The inference from the premise (which I endorse) that the pragmatic requirement that any genuine dispute involves some practical effect to the conclusion (which I deny) that the pragmatist only recognizes disputes which can be resolved by way of *experimentum crucis* requires some additional premise (or, more accurately, requires that the notion of practical effects is governed by certain RMIs) along the lines of what Sellars calls “descriptivism.” Sellars describes descriptivism as “the claim that all meaningful concepts and problems belong to empirical or descriptive sciences, including the sciences

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160. James, *Pragmatism: A New Word for Some Old Ways of Thinking*, p. 25. It was also noted in chapter 1.2.1, that Peirce introduces his pragmatic rule as following from the observation that the dispute over the nature of the eucharist between Protestants and Catholics is not a genuine dispute precisely because it entails no discernable difference between the sensible effects of the wine and bread in either case. Peirce’s rule leads to the conclusion that “to talk of something as having all the sensible characters of wine, yet being in reality blood, is senseless jargon.” (Peirce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” p. 31). To be clear, pragmatists need not be construed as being opposed to religious belief, as is clearly demonstrated by James’s “The Will to Believe” (1897).

161. Aikin, “Problem of the Criterion,” §3.

of human behaviour.”<sup>162</sup> One can see immediately how the Peircean claim that the Protestant/Catholic dispute over the eucharist is mere “senseless jargon” aligns with descriptivism. But, I think there is ample reason to reject that the notion of practical effects should be limited in the manner recommended by the descriptivist.

For his part, Sellars claims that “a sound pragmatism must reject descriptivism in all areas of philosophy.”<sup>163</sup> Sellars explains that descriptivism is often adopted by the pragmatist in order to avoid the rationalist conclusion (which Sellars also rejects) that the use of certain non-empirical concepts (for example, those having to do with morality or validity) stands as evidence of the existence of some non-empirical realm.<sup>164</sup> The key to the Sellarsian response is that, on an inferentialist account, the choice between rationalistic *a priorism* and descriptivism is an illusory dilemma and so the pragmatist needn’t embrace either horn.

As described above, a key differentiator for the Sellarsian understanding of meaning is seen in understanding meaning as involving a ternary real relation between language, language users and the world.<sup>165</sup> This understanding of meaning stands in opposition to the more commonly adopted understanding of meaning as a binary correspondence relationship (naming) between words and objects which is assumed by the descriptivist and the rationalist alike. Understanding meaning in terms of a correspondence relation entails that words such as “red” or “matter” are meaningful because they name some object (which might be platonic or empirical). But the Sellarsian

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162. Sellars, LRB, §1, p. 211.

163. Sellars, LRB, §5, p. 213.

164. Sellars, LRB, §2-5, pp. 211-213.

165. Here we might emphasize Sellars’s *naturalism*, whereby “everything that exists is an element in the spatiotemporal causal nexus” (deVries, p. 16). See note 56 of this thesis.

inferentialist understands the meaning of these words in terms of their use within some community. The meaning of a term has everything to do with its possible uses between language users, for example, in various justifications. These various justifications, whatever they may be, are possible only in virtue of the RMIs which govern the use of the word in the whole language. A word is not meaningful because it connects to some object, but because it can be used to justify the adoption of other claims<sup>166</sup> by way of its shared public meaning.

The key to understanding why the Sellarsian pragmatist needn't embrace either descriptivism nor rationalism, then, is the recognition that *accepting (or rejecting) a justification is a reliable practical effect* of the act of producing a justification. We needn't embrace rationalism, since meaning can still be located "in the world" with respect to linguistic practice within a community, nor do we need to accept descriptivism, for disagreements over topics such as the nature of the eucharist can indeed be deeply related to the ways of life of those who endorse the claim that, for example, the wine *actually is* the blood. So, while some of the RMIs which govern the use of the words "wine" and "blood" etc. can overlap, at least in part, between communities, the RMIs which govern the use of these terms are multitudinous and so certain claims will be endorsed by one community and not the other. Thus, there won't be some *experimentum crucis* to which we might turn to *resolve* this *genuine* dispute. Our failure to find one is not the failure of argumentation but rather a fact of the topography. But, the pragmatic

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166. "Clearly it is proper to speak of justifying assertions, which are, in a suitably broad sense, *actions*. It is equally proper to speak of justifying beliefs, which are, at least in part, dispositions relating to assertion. Shall we say, then, that one does not justify a *proposition*, but the *assertion* of a proposition?—that one does not justify a *principle*, but the *acceptance* of a principle? Shall we say that all justification is, in a sense which takes into account the dispositional as well as the occurrent, a *justificatio actionis*? I am strongly inclined to think that this is the case." (Sellars, LRB, §12, p. 215).

requirement that there be some practical difference is not left on the trash heap, for there is still a role for practical effects on the inferentialist account. Indeed, the upshot appears to be that since certain justifications will be accepted or rejected on the basis of the set of RMIs which govern the use of some concept, attempts to provide reasons, whether they succeed or fail, serve as a (less reliable and more temperamental) sort of *experimentum non-crucis* for determining whether or not we are in fact faced with a deep disagreement. Thus, the RMI theory of deep disagreement seems to leave open the possibility that a cunning interlocutor might be able to identify which RMIs are or are not at issue in a deep disagreement by way of observing her interlocutor's reactions (acceptance or rejection) to justifications, because these reactions will be indicative of genuine disagreements over particular RMIs which are reflective of the broader systematic disagreement which is the deep disagreement proper.

### **Chapter 3: The Role of Argumentation on the RMI View of Deep Disagreements**

In this chapter, I will answer the central question in this thesis

What role, if any, is there for argumentation in deep disagreements?

from the perspective of the RMI view. My optimistic answer will be that the RMI view gives us reason to believe that argumentation can play various significant roles in deep disagreements. This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, I consider a variety of possible positions one might take with respect to the role that argumentation might play in a deep disagreement and ultimately claim that the RMI view gives us reason to endorse several of the optimistic positions. In the second section, having established that the RMI view lends itself to optimism about the role of argumentation in deep disagreements, I will consider a number of argumentative strategies put forward by Steven Hales and attempt to express how they might (or might not) be effectively utilized in a deep disagreement, while simultaneously explaining why none of these resolution strategies provides an effective procedure for the resolution of deep disagreements.

In this section, argumentation will be understood as a linguistic (verbal or written) exchange of ideas. I will include as argumentation any linguistic exchange which occurs in what Sellars has called “the space of reasons” and which involves “justifying and being able to justify what one says.”<sup>167</sup> This is in line with Finocchiaro’s helpful description of argumentation as “essentially ‘reasoning-together,’ that is, reason-giving and reason-assessing.”<sup>168</sup> The sense of argumentation with which I am concerned will be called

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167. Sellars, EPM, §36, p.76.

168. Finocchiaro, p. 7.

*earnest* argumentation, which will be understood as cases of argumentative interaction wherein interlocutors seek to improve their respective understandings with respect to truth, rather than seeking to convince their interlocutor or win the argument.

### **3.1 The RMI View and Optimism**

This section aims to answer the following question, which was posed in the introduction:

#### **7) How does the inferentialist’s conception of underlying principles motivate optimism about deep disagreements?**

In order to provide an answer to this question, I will adjudicate a number of positions one might take with respect to the role that argumentation can play in a deep disagreement in light of the RMI view. The various positions I will here consider have been outlined by Scott Aikin in his 2018 “Deep Disagreements, the Dark Enlightenment, and the Rhetoric of the Red Pill.” Most broadly, there are two positions, optimism and pessimism, regarding the role of argumentation, though each of these positions has been further divvied up by Aikin. Rather than shoehorning the RMI view into one specific sub-grouping of optimism, I will describe how the RMI view lends itself to several (though not all) of the forms of optimism outlined by Aikin. Ultimately, I will argue that the RMI view supports four of the six forms of optimism offered by Aikin, along with a modified version of theoretical optimism.

#### **3.1.1 Pessimism**

Pessimism about deep disagreements is the view that “argument is impossible” in cases of deep disagreement. Aikin divides pessimism into two sub-groupings, which he

calls 1) non-engagement and 2) polemical.<sup>169</sup> I will briefly introduce each sub-grouping before assessing it from the vantage point afforded by the RMI view. From that vantage point, the appeal of each sub-grouping of pessimism can be understood, but the RMI view leads to the conclusion that settling on pessimism is at best too quick.

### **Non-Engagement**

Aikin defines the variety of pessimism he calls **non-engagement** as the view that “[i]n deep disagreements, one should not try to engage.”<sup>170</sup> Aikin points to Chris Campolo’s 2005 “Treacherous Ascents: On Seeking Common Ground for Conflict Resolution” as a representative of this brand of pessimism.<sup>171</sup> Campolo maintains this position in his 2019 “On Staying in Character: Virtue and the Possibility of Deep Disagreement” where he writes that deep disagreements should be understood as disagreements that “reasons can’t fix” because they are cases marked by an absence of the conceptual common ground required for effective argumentation.<sup>172</sup> Campolo describes the term “deep disagreement” as something of a misnomer, for *his view is that deep disagreements are not genuine disagreements* since, as has already been pointed out, the notion of *disagreement* implies the possibility of agreement. But Campolo construes deep disagreements as cases where the emphasis “needs to be not on difference, but rather on *not being enough the same*.”<sup>173</sup> Campolo argues that 1) deep disagreements are better understood as “deep gaps” and 2) our attempts to argue in deep disagreements will inevitably be harmful in two ways. “First, it will lead us, if it leads us anywhere, to

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169. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” p. 2.

170. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” p. 2

171. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” f. 6, p. 14.

172. Chris Campolo, “On Staying in Character: Virtue and the Possibility of Deep Disagreement,” *Topoi* 38, no. 4 (2018): pp. 719-23, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-018-9578-9>, p. 719.

173. Campolo, p. 719.

conclusions, and then actions, that have no appropriate connection to our understanding. Second, it will seriously harm our reasoning skills.”<sup>174</sup> In a nutshell, since A can only accept reasons for P from B relative to A’s conceptual framework (and vice versa), continued argumentation between A and B over P will lead to B (or A, if the roles are reversed) adopting bad argumentative habits, and so Campolo believes that continued reason-giving will not merely fail to convince, but is harmful with respect to our ability to argue felicitously in future arguments.<sup>175</sup>

While I take Campolo’s point that relentlessly arguing the same point in certain situations can be harmful in so far as it can lead to the development of bad argumentative practices, I think his pessimism ultimately rests on a false dichotomy between two extremes. Specifically, I am hesitant to accept Campolo’s characterization of optimism about deep disagreements as the view that one should “[a]lways proceed as if, no matter what, there is no understanding of life, or the world, that is significantly different from your own.”<sup>176</sup> I grant that adopting pessimism about deep disagreements might be a legitimate alternative to the caricature of optimism Campolo provides. But I think that there is a wide range of middle ground that Campolo ignores. Campolo’s view is built on the idea that deep disagreements are cases wherein disparate conceptual schemes share no relevant common ground, and the only alternative considered is the idea that there can be no relevant difference. But this is not the case. Similarly, the only types of argumentation that Campolo considers are cases where a particular proposition is tackled, with capitulation being the only measure of success (as I will highlight in the next section of

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174. Campolo, p. 721.

175. Campolo, pp.719-22.

176. Campolo, p.722.

this chapter, I agree that such an argumentative approach to a deep disagreement is ill-conceived). Again, I can grant that approaches often associated with arguments, such as the simple exchange of premise-conclusion structures following well-known argument schemes, will be ineffective if one hopes to sit down and “hash-out” a deep disagreement. But this is far from the only argumentative strategy (and measure of success) one might adopt in a deep disagreement (see section 3.2 for an overview of various argumentative strategies).

I think that the RMI view of deep disagreements paints a picture of deep disagreements which makes room for far more conceptual common ground than Campolo allows. The RMI view is centrally informed by the pragmatic emphasis on *linguistic practice within a community*, which ties conceptual schemes to the real, shared world in (and about) which that community communicates. Meaning, understood in a Sellarsian fashion, consists in ternary *real relation* between language, language users and the world, which requires that there be some common ground between conceptual schemes because of certain facts about people, the things they do and how they operate in the world.<sup>177</sup> So while the inferentialist has no problem whatsoever admitting that there might be the “significant” differences Campolo thinks are ruled out by the optimist, she is not convinced that these differences lead to the hopelessly unbridgeable gaps Campolo describes. The temptation to adopt non-engagement is understood and accounted for on the RMI view, but ultimately deemed too quick.

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177. See note 9 of this thesis.

## **Polemical:**

Aikin defines the variety of pessimism he calls **polemical** as the view that “[in] deep disagreements, one should use non-argumentative or alternative argumentative techniques.”<sup>178</sup> Aikin points to Manfred Kraus, Jeremy Barris and Claudio Duran as representatives of this brand of pessimism.<sup>179</sup> Though Aikin does not make the connection explicit, Fogelin is frequently lumped into this camp as well.<sup>180</sup> In his 2018 “Deep Disagreements and the Virtues of Argumentative Incapacity,” Barris’s *pessimism* comes across as part of his story of deep disagreements, which is told in terms of a version of the WHC view wherein the WHCs are understood as being undoubtable<sup>181</sup> and so not “capable of being debated so that the practice of debating them is necessarily not doing what it understands itself to be doing.”<sup>182</sup> Thus, Barris’s pessimism focuses on the familiar theme of a lack of conceptual common ground between interlocutors. His view is that the vast disparities of sense which mark different systems of WHCs preclude any hope of rational comparison between frameworks, rendering inter-framework argumentation impossible.<sup>183</sup>

Barris’s pessimism is properly branded **polemical** because of his focus on the essentially systematic and dynamic nature of WHCs, which leaves open the possibility that conflicting motivations which make up a person’s character (he provides the example

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178. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment” p. 2.

179. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment, f. 7, pp.14-15.

180. See, for example, Ranalli, p. 3 (§2), Finocchiaro, p.3, and David M. Adams, “Knowing When Disagreements Are Deep,” *Informal Logic* 25, no. 1 (January 2005): pp. 65-77, p. 67.

181. Barris, p. 372-373. Barris’s description of WHCs here renders his view subject to the same criticism Ranalli points out with respect to the reason-taking desideratum. The objection is that a theory of deep disagreements which renders the WHCs beyond rational consideration altogether owes an explanation of why the interlocutors are so frequently mistaken into thinking they are giving reasons in support of their own view. As I said in chapter 2, I do not think this objection is fatal to the WHC view as a whole, but it seems especially relevant to Barris’s account.

182. Barris, p. 377.

183. Barris, p. 391.

of the drive to live an isolated life of reflection conflicting with the drive towards “active intervention in injustice”<sup>184</sup> can be the source of inconsistencies and paradoxes within an individual’s conceptual framework. These inconsistencies can become reason for the conflicted individual (call her A) to abandon or reform some WHC, not because of an argument against the WHC in question, but because the WHC in question might suddenly appear to be a spandrel, a part of A’s conceptual framework which is no longer reflected in her character.<sup>185</sup> So, *non-argumentative* techniques which bring these inconsistencies to the fore can still be effective on Barris’ account.

From the perspective of the RMI view, there might be some truth here, but it does not tell the whole story. I take no issue with Barris’s claim that an individual’s conflicting drives might be the source of inner turmoil which can result in the abandonment or refinement of previously held beliefs (be they WHCs or RMIs). Further, I agree that non-argumentative (or at least non-paradigmatically argumentative) techniques characteristic of (but not limited to) the fine arts can be effective in pushing one towards the kind of self-realization that Barris describes. So there is certainly a role that these techniques can play on the RMI view. But the pessimism that Barris describes is not warranted on the RMI view because the RMI view does not necessitate, as (Barris’s version of) the WHC does, that the underlying principles at issue in a deep disagreement be somehow beyond *rational* consideration. It seems entirely reasonable to entertain the idea that one might come to *recognize* the sort of inner conflict described by Barris as a direct result of earnest argumentation. We might even attempt to represent the inner conflict in terms of an inner argument. Understood as RMIs (rather than WHCs), the underlying principles at

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184. Barris, p. 403.

185. Barris, pp. 403-05.

issue in a deep disagreement are not exempt from rational consideration. On the RMI view, we take ourselves to be giving reasons for our views (i.e. using claims justify the endorsement/assertion of other claims) because we are in fact doing just that. So while there is most certainly a role for non-argumentative techniques in a deep disagreement (and many normal disagreements), the RMI view does not push us towards abandoning argumentation altogether.

### **3.1.2 Optimism**

Optimism about deep disagreements is the view that “argument is possible and can be effective” in a deep disagreement. Aikin divides optimism into six sub-groupings, which he calls 1) prudential, 2) practical, 3) arbitrational, 4) supplemental, 5) internal and, 6) theoretical.<sup>186</sup> I will briefly introduce each sub-grouping before offering an assessment from the vantage point afforded by the RMI view. From that vantage point, all will be endorsed, but to varying degrees. Prudential, practical, supplemental and internal optimism will be endorsed more or less as they are presented. Arbitrational optimism, which demands that the disagreement be adjudicated by an external third party will be only hesitantly embraced because it appears to be pessimism dressed up as optimism. Meanwhile, the versions of theoretical optimism I encounter (from Phillips and Feldman) will be rejected because both invoke (in different ways) unwarranted restrictions on the nature of reasoning. I will offer a modified version of theoretical optimism which I think is better suited to the pragmatic inferentialist.

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186. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” p. 2.

## Prudential

Aikin describes the sub-grouping of optimism he calls **prudential** as the belief that “[o]ne can discern deep disagreements only if one continues to argue; so one’s defaults should be set on arguing.”<sup>187</sup> Aikin cites David Adams’s 2005 “Knowing when Disagreements are Deep” as an exemplar of this brand of optimism.<sup>188</sup> Adams assumes that actual deep disagreements are cases where rational *resolution* is absolutely precluded and thus characterizes all deep disagreements as absolutely deep.<sup>189</sup> From this assumption, he proceeds to focus on the question of what sort of role argumentation might play in a deep disagreement.<sup>190</sup> His answer is that “the only way for the parties to establish that their disagreement is deep is to reject the very path of non-rational persuasion recommended by Fogelin [and the polemical pessimist more generally] and concentrate instead on their collective efforts at mutual persuasion by reasons”<sup>191</sup> because the only manner in which we might determine with certainty that we are in fact faced with a deep disagreement is to *exhaust* normal argumentative techniques. Since it seems to be a practical impossibility that all normal argumentative techniques could actually *be* exhausted, argumentation ought to be maintained as one’s default position.<sup>192</sup>

Prudential optimism aligns nicely with the fact that much of the frustration one might encounter in a deep disagreement has to do with mistaking a deep disagreement for a normal disagreement since, on the surface, they can look the same. Indeed, Kuhn,

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187. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” p. 2.

188. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment” f. 8, p. 15.

189. In Adams’s defense, he indicates in his conclusion that an understanding of deep disagreements as absolutely deep in all cases renders the notion of deep disagreements *practically* irrelevant, a claim with which I am inclined to agree. (See Adams, p.76.)

190. Adams, p. 67.

191. Adams, p. 76.

192. Adams, pp. 75-76.

whose clashes of paradigms have been likened to deep disagreements (see above), might be understood to be describing prudential optimism as an essential part of scientific progress when he writes that

the vocabulary of the two theories may be identical, and most words function in the same ways in both. But some words in the basic as well as in the theoretical vocabularies of the two theories—words like ‘star’ and ‘planet,’ ‘mixture’ and ‘compound,’ or ‘force’ and ‘matter’—do function differently. Those differences are unexpected and will be discovered and localized, if at all, only by repeated experience of communication breakdown.<sup>193</sup>

I take no issue with (and indeed endorse) the claim that argumentation can serve to help us recognize *that* we are in a deep disagreement. But Adams’s account involves two central claims to which I object. These are 1) that deep disagreements are necessarily disagreements which cannot be resolved through argumentation and 2) that we can confidently declare that we are faced with a deep disagreement only after we have completely *exhausted* normal argumentative techniques. The first claim amounts to a definition of deep disagreements as absolutely deep, which has the effect of precluding the possibility that there might be deep disagreements of varying depth. I reject this claim, and the RMI theory of deep disagreements can accommodate deep disagreements of various depths.

Meanwhile, the (deductivism-flavoured) claim that a deep disagreement can only be discerned through the complete exhaustion of all possible arguments is far too sweeping and seems to preclude the very cases to which Fogelin (and other writers) point as exemplars of deep disagreement. The value of the notion of deep disagreements is the recognition that these disagreements turn upon recognizing that there are *analogous*

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193. Thomas Kuhn, “Objectivity, Value Judgement, and Theory Choice,” in *Philosophy of Science: The Central Issues*, ed. Martin Curd and J. A. Cover (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998), pp. 102-118, p. 117.

concepts in either conceptual scheme (such as personhood or fairness), the use of which is governed by disparate systems of underlying principles (which I construe as RMIs). The notion of deep disagreements is useful in so far as we are able to recognize that our interlocutor is not being irrational because we can locate the source of the disagreement in a disparity between conceptual frameworks. We do not need to exhaust all possible arguments in order to realize that the arguments which fail tend to turn upon significantly different RMIs which govern our use of a particular term. The interlocutors need only to make some recognition along the lines of “attempts to resolve this disagreement about abortion continue to fail because it turns upon supernatural vs natural understandings of personhood” in order to recognize that they are faced with a deep disagreement. Indeed, as Memedi writes, “[d]eep disagreement is often a case of understanding too well the gap that separates you from others.”<sup>194</sup> Thus, I am left to endorse the central claim of prudential optimism, which is that argumentation has a role in deep disagreements in so far as it can help us recognize that we are indeed faced with a deep disagreement, but the possibility that there might be a further role for argumentation remains since I am in no way committed to the claim that all argumentation can do is allow us to discern that we are faced with a deep disagreement.

**Practical:**

Aikin describes the sub-grouping of optimism he calls **practical** as the view that we should continue to argue despite a deep disagreement because doing so “prevents worse options.”<sup>195</sup> Aikin cites, among others, Lynch’s 2010 “Epistemic Circularity and

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194. Vesel Memedi, “Resolving Deep Disagreement,” OSSA Conference Archive, no. 108, (2007), <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/ossaarchive/OSSA7/papersandcommentaries/108>, p. 2.

195. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” p. 2

Epistemic Incommensurability” as representative of practical optimism.<sup>196</sup> Therein, Lynch writes that deep disagreements should be understood as *epistemically* irresolvable because they are cases wherein “arguments for the reliability of some *method won’t be recognized as a reason to accept that method by those challenging its reliability in the first place.*”<sup>197</sup> Once again, this description of deep disagreements brings to mind Aikin’s description of a symmetrical version of the problem of the criterion. Lynch’s optimism is made plain in his view that, while *epistemic* resolvability might be out of the question,<sup>198</sup> we need not turn to the *non-rational* methods favoured by the polemical pessimist (such as persuasion) and instead can focus on *practical* reasoning. Indeed, Lynch claims that attempts to resolve a deep disagreements should be treated as a “matter of *epistemic practicality.*”<sup>199</sup> Lynch is clear that the value of shifting our focus to practical reasoning is that “practical reasons—and this has been my point—are still reasons. They are better than big sticks.”<sup>200</sup>

On the RMI view, the claim that continued argumentation will prevent the adoption of worse options can be captured within the fourfold framework of belief fixation (tenacity, authority, a priori and scientific) offered by Peirce. What Aikin describes as “worse options” than continued argumentation are those which might be associated with the method of belief fixation through enforcement by an *authority* and

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196. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” f. 9, p. 15.

197. Lynch, p. 273.

198. Lynch explains that epistemic resolvability is out of the question on the FEP view because of the fundamental nature of the FEPs. Since the FEPs can only be given a circular justification, any justification one provides will necessarily fail to convince those who do not already affirm the FEP in question. (Lynch, p. 270)

199. Lynch, pp. 273-74. An example of this kind of practical reasoning is provided by Lynch when he suggests taking a Rawlsian-veil-of-ignorance-style approach to selecting which underlying principles a community should privilege. (Lynch, pp. 274-75)

200. Lynch, p. 276.

include, as Lynch says, “big sticks.” Continued argumentation, meanwhile, can be aligned with both Peirce’s *a priori* and *scientific* methods of belief fixation, which are concerned with *justifying* beliefs by way of reasons. In the case of the *scientific* method, beliefs are justified through experiment, while, in the case of the *a priori* method, beliefs are justified primarily by way of coherence with other beliefs. In line with Peirce and Lynch, I grant that continued argumentation through the *scientific* and *a priori* methods would be *preferable* to settling disputes by way of “big sticks.”<sup>201</sup> Of course, since, as has been discussed, the notion of an *experimentum crucis* can be taken off the table in the case of a deep disagreement, we might not be able to settle a deep disagreement using the *scientific* method, but the *a priori* method is still on the table. Indeed, Lynch’s proposed method game<sup>202</sup> is in line with the sort of appeal to reason one might expect from an interlocutor who appeals to the *a priori* method.

But the RMI view involves a blurring of the line Lynch draws between epistemic and practical reasoning. Epistemic reasons are concerned with showing that some underlying principle ought to be adopted because it is correct, while practical reasons urge us to accept some underlying principle because it gets us the results we want.<sup>203</sup> But

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201. Of course, this is by no means self-evident. Peirce, for example, describes the method of authority as the path to peace, so it seems like describing the *a priori* and *scientific* methods as *preferable* or *better* betrays a bias towards some specific end.

202. Lynch suggests taking a Rawlsian-veil-of-ignorance-style approach to selecting which underlying principles (which he construes as FEPs) ought to be privileged by some community which he calls the “method game.” His belief is that such a game will pick out underlying principles which offer the kinds of methodological success we want. There are three rules to the method game. 1) Players cannot assume any principle is more reliable than any other, 2) players cannot assume any metaphysical description of the world and 3) players must view themselves as living in the world they establish. Lynch believes that “were we to play the method game, it would seem in our self-interest to favour privileging those methods that, to the greatest degree possible, were *repeatable, adaptable, public and widespread*.” (Lynch, p. 275).

203. It is here assumed that the “results we want” with respect to earnest argumentation in a deep disagreement have to do with settling beliefs on the basis of reasons which justify the endorsement of claims relevant to the disagreement at hand (i.e., which appeal to the system of RMIs which govern the use of the relevant concept). Our context is such that practical reasoning in a deep disagreement wouldn’t include, for example, agreeing in order to receive monetary remuneration.

the pragmatic understanding of concepts which informs the RMI view, whereby concepts are understood as fundamentally related to actions, ties these practical and epistemic reasons together in a complex system of rules of material inference which make up the language. On the RMI view, an *epistemic* argument for the reliability of some method will involve a *practical* argument which serves as a demonstration of the *correctness* of that method. Put another way, a statement's having the property of being *correct* turns on some shared *practice* against which it is measured. In rejecting the strict bifurcation Lynch draws between epistemic and practical reasons, the RMI view need not limit the role of argumentation to the one Lynch prescribes, while wholeheartedly endorsing the claim that continued argumentation is a preferable (and legitimate) alternative to despair or taking up arms.

**Arbitrational:**

Aikin describes the sub-grouping of optimism he calls **arbitrational** as the view that deep disagreement can, at least in certain instances, “be resolved by an impartial third party.”<sup>204</sup> Aikin cites Memedi as a representative of arbitrational optimism.<sup>205</sup> In his 2007 “Resolving Deep Disagreement,” Memedi writes that, while two parties in a deep disagreement might appear to each other to be entirely irrational, by inviting a third party to the discussion “[w]e can still deal with such type of a [sic] discourse and pinpoint the defects of that particular discourse.”<sup>206</sup>

Memedi describes how a legitimate deep disagreement between A and B can, at the same time, take the form of a normal disagreement *if* construed as a sort of

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204. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” p. 2.

205. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” f. 10, p. 15.

206. Memedi, p. 5.

performance intended to convince an impartial third party to decide between cases. Memedi offers the example of competing state news outlets that present radically different accounts of an armed conflict. While these two accounts of the conflict might amount to a legitimately deep disagreement if construed as justifications intended to convince *each other*, Memedi maintains that these incommensurable accounts of the conflict might be viewed as normal argumentative exchanges if we view the target audience as an external third party (Memedi's example is the international community).<sup>207</sup> Memedi provides two potential marks of someone who might play the role of a third party in a deep disagreement, though he is careful to highlight that these are neither necessary nor comprehensive marks of a potential third party. The marks he offers are that a third party to a deep disagreement should 1) be open to influence on the relevant topic,<sup>208</sup> and 2) have the power to affect the change which is needed to resolve the dispute.<sup>209</sup>

By introducing the notion of a third party, Memedi's arbitral optimism presents a unique take on the role that argumentation can take in a deep disagreement. I think that bringing in a third party might be a useful move with respect to striking a compromise, but there are two concerns which the RMI view brings to light. The first is that arbitral optimism seems to slide back to Peirce's method of authority as a means of resolving the dispute. While there is a role for the *a priori* and *scientific* methods in arbitral optimism in so far as each party can make her own case to the third party, arbitral optimism proceeds from the assumption that there is no possibility of making

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207. Memedi, pp. 5-8.

208. Memedi, p. 8.

209. Memedi, p. 9.

argumentative headway with one's interlocutor and instead seems to amount to an agreement to submit to the authority of the third party.<sup>210</sup> I grant that this might be the most practical move one can make in certain situations and with respect to certain interlocutors, but I am hesitant to endorse arbitrational optimism as anything but a last resort, since, in this regard, it arguably amounts to pessimism disguised as optimism.

The second concern strikes more deeply at the core of arbitrational optimism and has to do with the requirement that the third party be open to influence on the relevant topic. The concern is that it is difficult to endorse the claim that there might be an impartial third party when it comes to arbitrating a deep disagreement over conflicting ways of life which characterize deep disagreements because it is difficult to see how one might find a third party who is not already steeped in *some* relevant ways of life. On the RMI view, any human who might play that role is of necessity part of some linguistic community and thus subject to various rules of linguistic practice which inform her values and shape her way of life. It seems that even the most well-intentioned, well-trained third party will bring to the table preconceived notions of fairness or personhood and so cannot be *equally* open to influence from either party, thus defeating the impartiality requirement. As before, I grant that this might be the most practical move one can make in certain situations and with respect to certain interlocutors, but arbitrational optimism again appears to be a last resort rather than a default option.

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210. This concern might be allayed if the role of the third party is understood as playing a *mediating* rather than *arbitrating* role, i.e., where the third party enters the discussion in hopes of bridging a comprehension gap between the two parties rather than hearing both sides and making an authoritative decision. Memedi might be open to such a role for the third party (see Memedi, p. 9), but the role he describes is that of arbitrator, not mediator.

Arbitrational optimism might be defended against my second concern in so far as Memedi himself recognizes that we cannot involve an impartial third party in all cases of deep disagreement.<sup>211</sup> This leaves us with a glimmer of hope that, while a third party cannot be turned to in deep disagreements over abortion, since she will inevitably already endorse certain RMIs related to (say) personhood, we might still be able to turn to a third party in cases of, for example, purely scientific deep disagreements characterized by clashes of Kuhnian paradigms. Unfortunately, a recourse such as this presents more trouble for arbitrational optimism as a result of the fact that those of us who do not already have a sufficient background in science should *for that reason* be disqualified from adjudicating the dispute, lest we wind up leaving important decisions (about, say, what should be taught in a science course) in the hands those ill-prepared for the task of understanding and assessing the information with which they are presented (i.e., there may be no disinterested third party who is competent to adjudicate the disagreement).

### **Supplemental**

Aikin describes the sub-grouping of optimism he calls **supplemental** as the view that “[a]rgument in [a] deep disagreement can produce or uncover shared reasons.”<sup>212</sup> Worth noting is that supplemental optimism has been advanced as a response to Fogelin since his first respondent, Andrew Lugg, wrote in 1986 that “individuals who disagree deeply may still be able to narrow the distance between themselves by dint of argument, debate; inquiry and research.”<sup>213</sup> Aikin cites, along with Davson-Galle, Godden and

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211. Memedi, p. 6.

212. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” p. 2.

213. Andrew Lugg, “Deep Disagreement and Informal Logic: No Cause for Alarm,” *Informal Logic* 8, no. 1 (January 1986): pp. 47-51, <https://doi.org/10.22329/il.v8i1.2680>, p.48.

Brenner's "Wittgenstein and the Logic of Deep Disagreements" as representative of **supplemental** optimism.<sup>214</sup>

Godden and Brenner liken the distinction between normal and deep disagreements to disagreements over measurements (particular judgements) and methods of measuring (the concepts which define the meaning of the judged proposition) respectively. If there is a disagreement over measurements and we use the same system of measurement, then checking is simple enough. But when our methods of measuring are incompatible, then repeated measuring will not resolve our disagreement.<sup>215</sup> One key point to appreciate in the context of deep disagreements is that there needn't be anything inherently better about one system of measurement over the other, since their value has everything to do with their use within some community. Godden and Brenner claim that the resolution of a deep disagreement "will consist, not in getting one party to reject a false or improbable opinion, but in one party being able to accept a new concept-formation—i.e., to acknowledge a new rule about what it does or doesn't make sense to say and do."<sup>216</sup> Their recommendation is that argumentation in a deep disagreement should proceed by way of "rational persuasion," which they describe as the sort of analogical or dialectical exchanges typical of philosophical discourse.<sup>217</sup>

Godden and Brenner provide several examples of rational persuasion covering a range of topics such as morality, religion, mathematics and science.<sup>218</sup> The example which stands out most clearly to me is an anecdote about John Wisdom, who recounts in

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214. Aikin, "Dark Enlightenment," f. 11, p. 15.

215. Godden and Brenner, pp. 49, 71.

216. Godden and Brenner, p. 68.

217. Godden and Brenner, p. 57.

218. Godden and Brenner, pp. 61-70.

his *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics* how, as a child, he was taught to grasp why ‘ $3 \times 0 = 0$ ’ is correct and ‘ $3 \times 0 = 3$ ’ is incorrect. In the example, Wisdom’s expectation that ‘3’ is the result has to do with his conception of multiplication. The young Wisdom took the signs ‘ $\times 0$ ’ as indicating that the ‘3’ was not to be multiplied. This is not *unreasoned*, since an unmultiplied ‘3’ remains a ‘3’, and some system *could* incorporate stipulated rules along those lines (i.e., reading ‘ $3 \times 0$ ’ as “do not multiply 3” is not *in itself* contradictory or incorrect). Ultimately, the error was corrected when Wisdom’s tutor explained multiplication using the following analogical argument

Three multiplied by three = three threes ( $3 \times 3 = 3 + 3 + 3$ )

Three multiplied by two = two threes ( $3 \times 2 = 3 + 3$ )

Three multiplied by one = one three ( $3 \times 1 = 3$ )

*Therefore, by analogy*

Three multiplied by zero = zero threes ( $3 \times 0 = 0$ )<sup>219</sup>

On the RMI view, we might say that what the argumentative analogy here accomplished was a refinement of the system of RMIs which governed Wisdom’s use of the word “multiplication.” At the very least, as a result of the lesson Wisdom incorporated some RMI into his conceptual framework along the lines of “the number on the right of the multiplication sign is the number of instances of the number on the left” which served as a refinement of or substitution for some previously held RMI along the lines of “the number on the right of the multiplication sign indicates the number of times the act of multiplication is to be performed on the number to the left.” By connecting the concept of *multiplication* to that of *addition*, Wisdom’s tutor demonstrated the former’s place in a *system* of concepts. In turn, Wisdom better understood the concept of multiplication and

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219. Godden and Brenner, p. 69.

gained (or came closer to) mastery over the use of the word ‘multiply’ as it is used in the broader community.

The RMI view supports supplemental optimism. Indeed, the appeal to shared reasons which supplemental optimism requires is built into the RMI view with respect to how it answers Ranalli’s systematicity desideratum. Any word is only meaningful in so far as it is part of a shared linguistic practice within some community. But we are well-served by keeping in mind that there might be significant overlap between (and differences within) languages<sup>220</sup> which are nevertheless governed (in part) by drastically different RMIs because keeping this fact in mind helps one appreciate that actual deep disagreements can occur between sensible people and can be difficult to discern (or identify the source of). The example above would not have been an effective means of teaching Wisdom about multiplication if Wisdom did not already accept some relevant RMIs (namely, those which govern his use of the word ‘addition’ since an understanding of addition is assumed in the argument). While the example from Wisdom is clearly occurring in the context of a normal disagreement, a *deep* disagreement about abortion should not have to preclude agreement on certain relevant rules or principles along the lines of “murder is immoral” or “murder involves at least two people.” By seeking out and appealing to these shared reasons, argumentation is shown to play not *just* the role of uncovering a deep disagreement, as the prudential optimist would have it. Thus, supplemental optimism allows us to appreciate that there is indeed a constructive role that argumentation can play in a deep disagreement. Indeed, the specification that shared

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220. All or any of which might be rightly called ‘English.’

reasons can be *produced* is a key point for the pragmatist, since it goes hand in hand with the dynamic nature of conceptual schemes.

### **Internal**

Aikin describes the sub-grouping of optimism he calls **internal** as the view that “[i]nternal argument is still possible in deep disagreements”<sup>221</sup> Aikin cites Zarefsky and Finocchiaro as representatives of **internal** optimism.<sup>222</sup> Finocchiaro writes that deep disagreements might be resolved not by arguing in favour of one’s own position through an appeal to external facts (argument *ad rem*),<sup>223</sup> but by “[criticizing] a thesis by arguing that it implies consequences not acceptable to its proponent.”<sup>224</sup> Finocchiaro adopts Henry Johnstone Jr.’s convention<sup>225</sup> and call this type of argument *ad hominem* (which Finocchiaro is careful to point out is not to be confused with the *ad hominem* fallacy).<sup>226</sup> The RMI view is able to account for the effectiveness of arguments *ad hominem*, while making plain the limits of this approach.

Finocchiaro provides three examples of effective *ad hominem* arguments which he finds in 1) Berkeley’s arguments against materialism, 2) Aristotle’s reply to Eudoxos’s thesis that pleasure is the greatest good, and 3) the debate between naturalists and non-naturalists over the basis of knowledge.<sup>227</sup> I think that another example of the effectiveness of argument *ad hominem* can be seen in the internal debate between Logical Positivists (specifically Carnap and Neurath) over the nature of protocol sentences (which

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221. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” p. 2.

222. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” f. 12, p. 15.

223. Finocchiaro, p. 31.

224. Finocchiaro, p. 5.

225. Johnstone, 1959 *Philosophy and Argument*. Finocchiaro finds a similar naming convention in Galileo, Locke, Reid and Whatley (Finocchiaro, p. 31).

226. Finocchiaro, p. 5.

227. Finocchiaro, pp. 30-32.

were postulated as the most basic sort of sensory report one can provide and the foundation for empirical knowledge). The question at issue between Neurath and Carnap was whether protocol sentences should be given a physicalist (fallible) or phenomenalist (indubitable) interpretation. Neurath's case for physicalism about protocol sentences can be understood as just the sort of argument recommended by Finocchiaro. Neurath points out that, for Logical Positivists more generally, the defining mark of a sentence is that it is verifiable, so any indubitable sentence should not be counted as a sentence, but rather a pseudo-proposition, along the lines of '2+2=4' and thus should be understood as meaningless.<sup>228</sup> Additionally, Neurath points out that the phenomenalist interpretation of protocol sentences opens the door to various metaphysical commitments (such as the existence of a private language),<sup>229</sup> which the Logical Positivists (including Carnap)<sup>230</sup> were keen to expunge from philosophical discourse. By explaining how the phenomenalist interpretation of protocol sentences stood in opposition to these tenets of Logical Positivism, Neurath provided an *ad hominem* argument for a physicalist interpretation of protocol sentences which ultimately won the day.<sup>231</sup>

I take no issue with the reliance on arguments *ad hominem* with respect to their effectiveness in resolving internal disputes and, like Finocchiaro, am inclined to liken this sort of internal argumentation to the dialectical arguments frequently offered by philosophers. On the RMI view, this sort of argument leads to the refinement of concepts by appealing to one RMI and demonstrating its failure to cohere with the broader system

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228. Neurath, pp. 204-05.

229. Neurath, pp. 199-200.

230. Rudolf Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language," in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A J Ayer (New York, NY: Free Press, 1959), pp. 60-81.

231. Frederick Suppe, *The Structure of Scientific Theories*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), pp. 14-15.

of RMIs of which it is a part. Carnap and Neurath would agree, for instance, on various RMIs along the lines of “Protocol sentences are (necessarily) not reducible to other sentences” or “Protocol sentences are (necessarily) meaningful” and it was to these RMIs which Neurath’s criticism of a phenomenalist interpretation protocol sentences appealed.

There is a possible objection to the sort of argument Finocchiaro prescribes with respect to its usefulness in deep disagreements. The objection would be that *ad hominem* arguments are ineffective with respect to deep disagreements *because* they require the very sort of common ground which is supposed to be absent in a deep disagreement. Indeed, Neurath was able to make his argument against Carnap effectively precisely because of the significant overlap in the manner in which they viewed the problem. This might be unattainable in a deep disagreement, where, per Barris (who subscribes to the WHC view), the meanings of the terms at issue are necessarily misappropriated into the competing conceptual schemes. One possible response to this objection is that, in offering an *ad hominem* argument, one is supposed to assume the competing framework and attempt to demonstrate its internal contradictions, so the term is not being misappropriated into the opposing framework. But the degree to which the competing framework can be assumed by the dissenting party will vary according to the depth of the disagreement.

The RMI view allows for significant overlap between conceptual schemes, even those steeped in a deep disagreement, so the above objection is not as salient on the RMI view as it is on, say the FEP or WHC views. On the RMI view, we might be able to bring to the surface various RMIs upon which we agree and then put forward various *ad hominem* arguments in the interest of attempting to locate the source of the disagreement

more precisely (see supplemental optimism). So the RMI view makes room for *ad hominem* argument in cases of deep disagreement. At the same time, however, the RMI view can serve to highlight why premature attempts to offer *ad hominem* arguments will likely flounder. Earnest attempts to provide an *ad hominem* argument without adequate familiarity with the competing framework might ultimately serve only to highlight the gulf between conceptual schemes. One can imagine a hypothetical argument for a phenomenalist (or physicalist) interpretation of protocol sentences which appeals to the sorts of metaphysical commitments rejected by Carnap and Neurath alike missing the mark in just this way.

Ultimately, I think that the key insight behind internal optimism is the manner in which it accounts for the dynamic nature of conceptual schemes. This insight is a reminder that a deep disagreement can change over time because either camp might refine their understanding of the subject matter at issue without moving any closer to agreement. While I recognize the important role that *ad hominem* arguments can play in changing the shape that a deep disagreement takes over time, I think that some caution is warranted. It seems that internal optimism appeals not to the manner in which you and I might resolve our (deep) disagreement, but rather to the manner in which my friends and I are able to resolve our (normal) disagreements about the topic over which you and I deeply disagree. But this is far from any kind of resolution between you and me, and it may indeed lead to further polarization within each competing camp. While I think that internal optimism presents a clear, centrally important role for argumentation in a deep disagreement, the role it defines for argumentation might not always be accessible to those parties who are directly involved in a deep disagreement.

## Theoretical

Aikin describes the sub-grouping he calls **theoretical** as the view that “[a]bsolutely deep disagreements are impossible, since insofar as one can identify another as one with whom one disagrees, one must see that other as one with whom one can argue.”<sup>232</sup> Aikin cites Feldman, Phillips and Siegel as representatives of **theoretical optimism**<sup>233</sup> and endorses the view himself.<sup>234</sup> Phillips’s case for theoretical optimism (wherein underlying principles are construed as background beliefs) centers on the sole requirement that the interlocutors share a joint commitment to earnest argumentation (detailed below). Feldman’s case for theoretical optimism (wherein underlying principles are construed as fundamental principles) regards the suspension of judgment as a legitimate option in deep disagreements.

Below I will explain why, on the RMI view, neither of the above-mentioned cases for theoretical optimism hold water. Nevertheless, I believe that theoretical optimism of a different flavour follows from the RMI view. The version of theoretical optimism which I think is supported by the RMI view is a consequence of two key features which I have highlighted throughout this thesis. These features are 1) a view of language which locates meaning in a ternary relationship between language (or linguistic tokens), language users and the world and 2) certain facts about human language users as obligate social animals. As such the version of theoretical optimism that I wish to defend would be rightly characterized by the following modified definition. Theoretical optimism, as I wish to defend it, is the view that “absolutely deep disagreements are [**a practical impossibility**

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232. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” p. 2.

233. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” f. 13, p. 15.

234. Aikin, “Dark Enlightenment,” pp. 12-14.

**between humans]**, since insofar as one can identify another [**human**] as one with whom one disagrees, one must see that other as one with whom one [**shares a number of biological, environmental, and social features which suitably constrain the development and use of her language**].”

Phillips’s case for theoretical optimism focuses on the claim that argumentation in deep disagreements does not require *any* agreement about the topic at issue, but rather “that the common ground required for productive argument amounts to certain joint commitments and competencies with respect to the argumentative exchange itself.”<sup>235</sup> These joint procedural commitments are 1) “a joint commitment to maintain a rational stance,” 2) “Basic freedom of expression [which allows] the knowledge, beliefs, and reasons of both participants [to] be considered comprehensively” and 3) a “joint commitment to communicate sincerely and transparently.”<sup>236</sup> So, on Phillips’s view, a deep disagreement might involve certain very substantial practical difficulties, but the sufficient condition for a role for argumentation to play in such disagreements is that the interlocutor’s enter the discussion with the intention to have a *productive* argument (which Phillips rightly distinguishes from a *conclusive* argument with the specification that a productive argument need only spur the interlocutors to further reflection).<sup>237</sup>

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235. Dana Phillips, “Investigating the Shared Background Required for Argument: A Critique of Fogelin’s Thesis on Deep Disagreement,” *Informal Logic* 28, no. 2 (May 2008): pp. 86-101, p. 87.

236. Phillips, p. 98.

237. This construal of productive argumentation complements the Peircean conception of *thought* as the consequence of being presented with evidence which confounds our pre-existing beliefs. Peirce writes: “The action of thought is excited by the irritation of doubt, and ceases when a belief is attained; so that the production of belief is the sole function of thought.” (Peirce, “How to Make out Ideas Clear,” p. 26). In this regard, Phillips’s productive argumentation can, I think be fairly given a Peircean interpretation whereby we would say that an argument is to be considered productive if it spurs *thought* in the interlocutors rather than consensus between the interlocutors. It is with this in mind that I interpret Phillips’s statement that productive discourse should be measured by its ability to result in “a tentative unsettling of a belief that will [might] eventually lead to its dislodgement” (Phillips, p. 88). My suggested word change in the quotation from Phillips just provided should be interpreted with Peregrin’s distinction between causal and normative inferentialism in mind.

Despite some concerns with the manner in which they are portrayed (which will be discussed shortly), I am inclined to endorse Phillips's prescription that the interlocutors share something like the above joint procedural commitments (which I take to be similar in spirit to my specification that I am concerned with earnest argumentation in a deep disagreement). Nevertheless, I am hesitant to endorse Phillips's version of theoretical optimism because I deny both that these conditions are sufficient for effective argumentation in a deep disagreement, and that they are to be taken as *given* outside of the context of the disagreement.

Phillips's theoretical optimism involves the specification that there can be complete disagreement over the topic at hand in a deep disagreement and that said complete disagreement poses no real trouble for the possibility of resolving the disagreement through argumentation. This appears to be a consequence of the manner in which Phillips divorces "common beliefs, values or preferences with respect to the topic at hand"<sup>238</sup> (which Phillips takes to be at issue in a deep disagreement) from "the meanings of at least some terms or signs"<sup>239</sup> and the above-mentioned joint procedural commitments. For the inferentialist, that's a tough pill to swallow. On the RMI view, *complete* disagreement about some topic would necessitate that there be no overlap in the RMIs governing all of the relevant terms in either conceptual scheme (i.e., their meaning).<sup>240</sup> While this is plainly more than Phillips intends, it would be no help to argue that Phillips is to be interpreted as making the seemingly more sensible claim that

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238. Phillips, p. 88.

239. Phillips. p. 88.

240. This, of course, would amount to an infinitely deep disagreement which, as has been established, is not a disagreement at all, and is better described as making noises *at* each other rather than communicating *with* each other.

complete disagreement amounts to ascribing opposite truth-values to the proposition(s) at issue (rather than the more extravagant claim that there be no overlap whatsoever in relevant RMIs). Such a tactic would involve the assumption that the terms involved are understood in the same way by (i.e., have the same meaning for) either interlocutor. This assumption would undermine the essential point about deep disagreements that the origin of the disagreement is located in the radically different roles that some word/concept can play across conceptual schemes.

Further, even the joint procedural commitments which Phillips requires cannot be taken for granted as being outside of the context of the disagreement at hand. That is to say, on all of the theories of deep disagreement which I have considered in this paper (FEP, WHC, and RMI) the various joint commitments which Phillips takes as *independent of the disagreement at hand* might indeed *be* the topic at issue in (or the source of) a deep disagreement. In this regard, Phillips's case for theoretical optimism seems to miss the mark, for it appears to assume an unwarranted monolithic construal of rationality. In other words, the *joint* commitment to maintain a rational stance requires that there be some identifiable rational stance which we can *agree* to maintain. We are once again faced with Aikin's problem! If there isn't an agreed upon rational stance, we will inevitably encounter a situation analogous to bringing a basketball to a hockey game. If, for example, the two interlocutors endorse contrary FEPs (e.g., Holy Book vs Fossil Record), or disagree over the nature of a good argument (i.e., formal validity vs material inference), one interlocutor's earnest attempt to remain rational might be construed as irrationality by the other.<sup>241</sup> So, while I am willing to side with Phillips with respect to the

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241. Chomsky mentions "the new head of a subcommittee on the environment who explained that global warming cannot be a problem because God promised Noah that there will not be another flood." (Noam

claim that *some* joint procedural commitments might be necessary conditions for the possibility of productive discourse in a deep disagreement, I must specify that these commitments are neither *sufficient* nor *given* and that they themselves might be the source of the disagreement. With all of this in mind, I think Phillips's first requirement is better stated as "a mutual recognition on the part of each interlocutor that the other has attempted to assume a rational stance" and that similar modifications be made to the other recommended procedural commitments listed above.

Meanwhile, Feldman's argument for theoretical optimism focuses on the claim that presenting or being faced with evidence which competes with one's own claims through the course of an argumentative exchange can lead to a rational resolution of a deep disagreement in so far as competing evidence ought to lead either interlocutor to suspend judgement. Feldman recognizes the importance of the distinction between one form of rational resolution which involves ending the disagreement, and another form of rational resolution which involves ending the debate. Feldman is clear that the resolution he is prescribing is of the latter sort.<sup>242</sup>

In so far as Feldman's position echoes the Peircean view that the recognition of the existence of competing theories should spur us towards *fallibilism*, I am inclined to endorse this claim. But where I disagree with Feldman is with respect to the notion that suspension of judgment in these cases is a legitimate option for us to choose. I am inclined to think that whether we believe some proposition or not is what William James

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Chomsky, *Who Rules the World?* (New York, NY: Picador, 2017), p. 56). If we charitably assume that this explanation was offered in earnest, we can appreciate the difficulty we might face with respect to recognizing our interlocutor's commitment to maintain a rational stance.

242. Richard Feldman, "Deep Disagreement, Rational Resolutions, and Critical Thinking," *Informal Logic* 25, no. 1 (January 2005), <https://doi.org/10.22329/il.v25i1.1041>, pp. 17-18.

calls a “forced” option. When confronted with a forced option, the suspension of judgment amounts to the denial of the claim. James’s example is that attempts to suspend judgment about belief in God has the practical effect of choosing not to believe in God.<sup>243</sup> While I agree that interlocutors in a deep disagreement might be presented with evidence contrary to their beliefs, and that such evidence ought to be taken as reason to *refine* or *adapt* one’s position (I have in mind the internal optimist’s use of *ad hominem* arguments described by Finocchiaro, above), I deny that refining or adapting one’s existent view can be rightly construed as *suspending* judgement.

Feldman’s case for theoretical optimism, like Phillips’s, seems to be founded upon an unwarranted construal of rationality as monolithic and given. This is most evident with respect to his reliance on what he calls “The Uniqueness Thesis” which states that “there is only one reasonable response to a body of evidence.”<sup>244</sup> Feldman invokes the uniqueness thesis in opposition to the claim that the beliefs one already has will have an impact on how she interprets new information.<sup>245</sup> In this regard, invoking the uniqueness thesis amounts to a denial of the problem of deep disagreements. I cannot see how the uniqueness thesis can be defended without appeals to innate knowledge or, like Phillips, the mistaken belief that being reasonable is to be understood as monolithic and given.

Theoretical optimism of a different sort is built into the RMI theory of deep disagreements because of the pragmatic way in which the Sellarsian inferentialist construes meaning. This sort of theoretical optimism begins with a clear description of an absolutely deep disagreement which is a theoretical possibility on the RMI view, before

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243. James, “The Will to Believe” p. 215.

244. Feldman, p. 20.

245. Feldman, pp. 20-21.

proceeding to argue that any deep disagreements humans encounter in practice will not be absolutely deep. An absolutely deep disagreement is almost like a platonic form, while actual deep disagreements, like actual triangles, exist in the realm of becoming. An absolutely deep disagreement would be one wherein either interlocutor is unable to play the game of giving and asking for reasons with the other as a result of a complete lack of convergence between conceptual schemes (I am inclined to think of the non-interaction between mental facts with physical facts described by the parallelist). This is certainly a theoretical possibility. Two conceptual schemes might be completely different in this way if the capacities/environment/biology of two language users were sufficiently distinct. For example, a two-dimensional being would encounter significant difficulty appreciating why we call them *deep* disagreements. This example is admittedly imperfect since, even in this case, we might be able to develop a means of communicating the notion of depth mathematically. But it has the strength of gesturing towards the manner in which our physical environment constrains the system of concepts we can develop. Other examples include “grasping” a concept, “bouncing” a thought off another person, ideas “hanging” together, and countless others. It seems that even if we successfully communicated the notion of depth to a two-dimensional being using mathematics, this mathematical understanding of depth would not be able to play the variety of roles which the concept of depth plays for human beings because it would not be observable to the two-dimensional being as part of the environment. Of course, one consideration which cannot be ignored is that disagreements of this sort should not really be considered disagreements at all, since,

as Godden and Brenner have stated, “disagreement is only possible where agreement is also possible”<sup>246</sup>

While the theoretical possibility of two completely disparate conceptual schemes can be understood and discussed by the pragmatist in the same way that a perfect circle can be discussed by the geometer, the development of any actual conceptual scheme is constrained (but not settled)<sup>247</sup> by the same reality (and the existence of some independent reality is presupposed in the notion of a community of language users—how else would they form a community?). Different groups might come up with different names for colours (and what counts as a distinct colour might vary from group to group, not to mention the wide range of possible secondary, tertiary etc. uses of the colour terms within a given community), but some rules along the lines of “‘A’s (in L1) are •B•s” will be discernible. Of course, these inter-linguistic translations are to be understood as analogies rather than direct translations.<sup>248</sup>

A second reason deep disagreements oughtn’t be construed as actually being infinitely deep has to do with the fact that, however significant they might be at a particular instant, their depth can vary with time. Conceptual schemes are dynamic, but an absolutely deep disagreement seems to necessitate two diametrically opposed, immovable conceptual schemes. That meanings of words change over time as a result of novel uses and argumentation is central to this process (hence, the philosopher’s favourite pastime of concept-chopping). In this way, theoretical optimism compliments supplemental

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246. Godden and Brenner, p. 46.

247. Cf. Brandom, *Empiricism to Expressivism*, pp. 44-45, where he distinguishes between weak and strong inferentialism. Brandom’s context there is different than ours, but the manner in which he draws his distinction is applicable in our context.

248. See note 157 of this thesis for a description of this sort of analogical translation.

optimism. Indeed, Finocchiaro draws just this link between Phillips and Lugg (representatives of each respective group), for they both pay special attention to the essentially dynamic nature of a person/community's conceptual framework, which they claim is ignored by pessimists.<sup>249</sup>

On the version of theoretical optimism supported by the RMI view, we can encounter disagreements which might *appear* intractable and which might even be intractable, given constraints on human being in terms of time, energy, open-mindedness and patience. But the ability to recognize *that* we disagree about P necessitates that there is at least some overlap between our conceptual schemes which allows us to disagree about P. In other words, our disparate conceptual schemes have been suitably constrained by our environment in such a way as to result in both conceptual schemes invoking some P about which we disagree.

### **3.2 The RMI View and Some Argumentative Strategies**

Having established that the RMI theory of deep disagreements makes it plain that there is indeed a role for argumentation in deep disagreements, this section will be devoted to answering the final question posed in the introduction

#### **8) Given that we have embraced optimism, what argumentative approaches should be taken when faced with deep disagreements?**

I will attempt to answer this question by considering some options regarding how to proceed argumentatively in the face of a deep disagreement. I should flag at this point that I am by no means offering any kind of effective procedure for the resolution of deep disagreements. In that regard, this section is best understood as offering direction by way

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249. Finocchiaro, p. 10.

of subtraction. To that end, I will turn my attention to considering five disagreement resolution strategies put forward by Steven Hales. I will use the RMI view to explain the merits and limits of these resolution strategies in a deep disagreement. To be sure, Hales nowhere claims that his list is an exhaustive list of possible resolution strategies. Still, I think that this list is instructive when trying to better understand deep disagreements because each of the strategies Hales considers can be broadly understood as being *rational* resolution strategies for disagreements and deep disagreements are often described as disagreements over which there can be no rational resolution. So we will not here consider things like enforcement by an authority or the earth exploding—which could very well end the debate!

The argument resolution strategies that will be considered are 1) arguing to the point of capitulation, 2) arriving at a compromise, 3) identifying an ambiguity, 4) adopting Pyrrhonian skepticism and 5) adopting relativism. While I will argue that none of these strategies is a surefire resolution strategy for a deep disagreement, I will attempt to highlight how they might be invoked productively in a deep disagreement.

### **Capitulation**

Arguing to the point of capitulation occurs when two interlocutors keep arguing until one of them concedes that the other's position is correct. If we end up agreeing on the same truth-value for *the proposition at issue* as a result of *argumentation* (rather than, for example, exhaustion, hunger or torture), then we have argued to the point of capitulation.<sup>250</sup> It seems like the most likely way to achieve capitulation is through a *direct* demonstration. In this sense, arguing to the point of capitulation seems geared

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250. Steven D. Hales, "Motivations for Relativism as a Solution to Disagreements," *Philosophy* 89, no. 1 (2013): p. 64.

towards *proving* a point, being *right*, *convincing* one's interlocutor, or *winning* the argument. There might be something to the claim that these are points commonly associated with debate as a public spectacle, but arguing to the point of capitulation is not the best resolution strategy to adopt if one's interest is in using argumentation to gain clarity or insight—one way to have an opponent capitulate might involve a well-planned strategy of careful equivocation (this strategy need not even be planned, as the same effect might be achieved even if this equivocation is unnoticed by its author). Capitulation seems best suited to cases wherein the disagreement lends itself to an *experimentum crucis* (which, in this context, might include activities like checking a compendium). But capitulation fares less well on the more complex/nuanced issues which typify deep disagreements because it demands more common ground than that which exists between the two deeply disagreeing parties. In these cases, I think that most philosophers (and certainly the fallibilistic pragmatist) will recognize that there is always the possibility of a better explanation than that which she is offering, which has the effect of diminishing the appeal of seeking resolution through capitulation.

At first sight, one might be inclined to define deep disagreements as disagreements which defy resolution by way of capitulation. But such a definition of deep disagreements would be inadequate, for while it would be accurate in so far as it could be universally applied to deep disagreements, it is too broad, since some normal disagreements might not be resolvable through capitulation either (e.g., in cases where both parties are mistaken and come to realize their respective mistakes through argumentation). More problematic is the fact that such a definition of deep disagreements would mistake the symptom for the disease. If one were to define deep disagreements in opposition to arguing to the point of capitulation, then one would omit the more

fundamental feature of deep disagreements which is, crucially, the *reason* for this fact—a deep disagreement is a case where the clashing (or incommensurability) of each interlocutor’s respective set of underlying principles has the *effect* of precluding agreement on the conditions that would allow for the resolution of the disagreement to be achieved in the first place. This key feature, of course is captured in the RMI view (and indeed any theory of deep disagreements which satisfies Ranalli’s systematicity and persistence desiderata). While there might be *some* room for capitulation in a deep disagreement with respect to, for example, the *ad hominem* arguments recommended by Finocchiaro and the **internal** optimist more generally, effective argumentation between deeply disagreeing parties should focus on a broader change in the interlocutors’ respective systems of underlying principles rather than capitulation on the single statement on which the deep disagreement is focused.

### **Compromise**

There are two small cupcakes and two very hungry people whose favourite source of sustenance is cupcakes. Despite both parties’ intention to eat both cupcakes (which we will construe as a disagreement over the proposition “A will eat both cupcakes and B will have none”), a compromise is struck and both parties end up with one cupcake.

Compromise is a familiar, effective and useful strategy to adopt in a disagreement.

However, as I will show, any compromise at which we arrive cannot be understood as a resolution to deep disagreements, which are more persistent than finite disagreements like that sketched above. Arriving at a compromise in a deep disagreement is at best armistice, not peace.

Hales points to compromise as a strategy adopted in cases which, like deep disagreements, appear utterly hopeless. Indeed, Hales directly relates compromise to disagreements over abortion by providing the example of how

an abortion conservative (who believes that all abortions, even of zygotes, is morally impermissible) and an abortion liberal (who believes that all abortions, even of very late term foetuses, is morally permissible) might settle their differences through compromise on a moderate position. Perhaps they decide that early abortions are morally permissible, late abortions are not, and that they can amicably work out the middle-term boundary cases.<sup>251</sup>

This example from Hales, I think, serves to highlight just why compromise cannot be looked to as a legitimate resolution strategy for deep disagreements. While I think that Hales intends his example to ring true to some degree, as Hales himself points out, those who believe themselves to be in possession of the truth might not easily arrive at compromise when faced with a deeply held moral conviction.<sup>252</sup> Recent legislation in Georgia, Alabama and other American states<sup>253</sup> serve as a strong reminder that compromises are not long-term solutions. Adams directs a similar response towards the idea that we can resolve a deep disagreement through a compromise which appeals to self-interest as a means of achieving some sort of consensus about what to do. Adams is hesitant to find relief in this sort of compromise, pointing out that the conflict would persist despite these results.<sup>254</sup>

Compromise is not about settling on the truth-value of the proposition or set of propositions about which we disagree, but is instead about deciding what to do. Of course, it in no way precludes argumentation, because there is nothing in the notion of

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251. Hales, p. 64.

252. Hales, p. 65.

253. Unknown Author, "Which US States Have Recently Passed Abortion Bans?" USA News | *Al Jazeera*, May 31, 2019, accessed June 10, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/states-passed-abortion-bans-190514142646289.html>

254. Adams, pp. 73-74.

compromise which precludes us from making a case in favour of our own position. Indeed, when these appeals are made to a third party, they are a crucial component of Memedi's **arbitrational** optimism. But even without the involvement of a third party, when faced with a deep disagreement, I can make arguments that can certainly sway the outcome, as can you. In any event, compromises are cases where we end up agreeing on some proposition other than that over which we disagreed to begin with. After the disagreement is over, both interlocutors can think of themselves as having been right, but pushed to an impasse by the other, who was wrong but at least willing to compromise. The interlocutors don't end up agreeing on what they *think* so much as agreeing on what to *do*. Valuable, to be sure, but different. Ultimately, I think that a compromise is something we can arrive at *despite* a deep disagreement, but it is not a resolution of the deep disagreement.

### **Ambiguity**

We might resolve a disagreement by identifying an ambiguity in our respective uses of the terms involved in the disputed proposition. The classic example, which is cited by Hales,<sup>255</sup> is from William James, who uncovers an ambiguity in order to settle a disagreement regarding a squirrel going around a tree so that it is always on a side exactly opposite a person walking round the same tree. If we ask whether the person has gone around the squirrel, then the correct answer depends upon whether we intend going around the squirrel to mean 1) from north, to east, to south, to west or 2) from left, to front, to right, to back. In the first case yes and in the second case no. Once the ambiguity has been identified, the disagreement simply fizzles away.<sup>256</sup>

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255. Hales, p. 65.

256. James, "Pragmatism," p. 24

In addition to cases where the ambiguity is related to the terms involved in the description of some proposition, Hales includes *contextualism* as a kind of ambiguity which is related to the shifting meanings that a word or statement can have based on the setting in which it used. On a contextualist understanding, apparent disagreements dissolve once we take into account the context in which the statement is made.<sup>257</sup> When asked whether we would judge that someone knows what arsenic is based on an utterance (say “arsenic is poisonous”), the contextualist looks to the setting in which the utterance was made. The contextualist claims that we can rightly judge that A knows what arsenic is in a casual context, but not if “arsenic is poison” were all A were to provide as a long-form written answer on a biochemistry exam asking about the specific effects of arsenic on the human body.<sup>258</sup> Similarly, a strawberry may well be considered a berry in a casual context, but not in a conversation with a botanist.

Ambiguities of either sort can be differentiated from arguing to the point of capitulation on the grounds that once a person is made aware of the ambiguity, that person gets to save face, so to speak, by saying “well it still *looks* like a square if you hold it like this” or something to that effect. I think that this is key to the appeal of ambiguity, as it involves a collaborative approach to disagreement resolution which sets up all parties involved in the dispute for continued productive discourse.

Sadly, this type of *resolution* seems inapplicable to deep disagreements. I think it is fair to describe this kind of resolution as appealing to *deeper* level agreement to resolve a *surface* level disagreement. So seeing contextualism as a resolution strategy to deep

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257. Hales, p. 66.

258. Patrick Rysiew, "Epistemic Contextualism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, September 07, 2007, §1.

disagreements amounts to affirming the consequent in so far as one would have to make the jump from the (correct) statement

If there is a resolution to a deep disagreement, then that resolution will involve appeals to deeper level beliefs.

to the (incorrect) statement

This is a case of disagreement resolution which involves appeals to deeper level beliefs, so it must be a resolution to a deep disagreement.

The reason that this strategy fails to resolve the deep disagreement is that the resolution afforded by the discovery of an ambiguity appeals to a system of **shared** RMIs in order to resolve the dispute, but the availability of such RMIs cannot be taken for granted in a deep disagreement.

Another objection to ambiguity as a resolution strategy for normal and deep disagreements alike has been outlined by both Hales<sup>259</sup> and Francén.<sup>260</sup> The objection is that ambiguity doesn't really do justice to the idea of disagreement because seeking out ambiguity amounts to pretending that there *are not* genuine disagreements, that we *were not* disagreeing about that thing, but both saying true things about different things. By way of contrast, a deep disagreement can be a case where I *am* saying A (abortion is to be

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259. Hales, p. 67.

260. Ragnar Francén, "No Deep Disagreement for New Relativists," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 151, no. 1 (2010) pp. 26-27. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40856589>

permitted), and you *are* saying not-A (abortion is not to be permitted), and I understand your saying not-A just fine, while you understand my saying A just fine. Seeking out ambiguity in cases such as these doesn't seem to help.

Although I am doubtful regarding the possibility of *resolving* a deep disagreement through the uncovering of an ambiguity, the RMI view allows for the uncovering of ambiguities as a viable role for argumentation in a deep disagreement. In particular, I think that the uncovering of ambiguities is highly compatible with prudential optimism, since it will help the interlocutors recognize that they are indeed faced with a deep disagreement. Since at least part of the frustration one often faces in a deep disagreement has to do with the misapplication of various terms from one conceptual framework to the other, simply discovering this type of ambiguity through an earnest argumentative exchange remains a possibility and should be viewed as a success. Even if this discovery is not itself a resolution to the deep disagreement, it is a necessary condition of any resolution because the discovery of any such ambiguity will allow the interlocutors to better understand the source of their deep disagreement.

### **Skepticism**

The resolution strategy Hales calls “Pyrrhonian skepticism”<sup>261</sup> is defined with reference to “Sextus’s ‘Skeptic Way’ [of] suspending judgment without hope of leaving the state of suspension.”<sup>262</sup> As a resolution strategy, the Pyrrhonian skeptic attempts to take a seat *outside* of the disagreement, from which she might adjudicate it fairly.<sup>263</sup> As a *resolution* strategy for deep disagreements, all-out Pyrrhonian skepticism might be a non-

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261. Hales, p. 67

262. Hales, p. 68.

263. Hales, pp. 67-68.

starter and definitely only takes us so far. As much as the idea of “suspending judgement without hope of leaving the state of suspension”<sup>264</sup> might seem plausible, sensible or even laudable, we don’t really get the option to stay in this state of suspension. Occasion to act is inevitable. Pyrrho walking off the cliff demands that he come to a *judgment* to the effect that that thing approaching that appears to be the edge of a cliff is, in fact, *not* the edge of a cliff, or is at least not to be treated as such. In the context of deep disagreement, we might say that Pyrrho wouldn’t be in a deep disagreement to begin with if he didn’t already hold beliefs about the topic at issue.

There is certainly value to skepticism, in so far as it is contrasted with credulity, but the kind of skepticism which would be relevant in a deep disagreement would be skepticism about one’s own views (since a deep disagreement assumes ample skepticism towards the competing view). This is the sort of suspension of judgement we have already seen recommended by Feldman, above. There, I rejected the suspension of belief as a viable option by appealing to the Jamesian notion of a forced option and suggesting that, when faced with problematic evidence, a rational response may well include *refinement* of the belief in question rather than *suspension* of the belief. Ultimately, the pragmatist thinks that fallibilism is a more sensible epistemic stance than skepticism. The pragmatist rejects the idea that genuine doubt is the kind of thing a person can decide to adopt as an attitude towards any proposition. And, as a result of the methodological difficulties highlighted in Aikin’s characterization of the problem of deep disagreements as a symmetrical version of the problem of the criterion, the kinds of evidence with which an

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264. Hales, p. 68.

arguer is presented in a deep disagreement cannot be assumed to necessitate (or even push her towards) abandoning her own position.

### **Relativism**

Hales presents the following sort of picture of the adoption of relativism as a resolution strategy one ought to adopt in a deep disagreement. If you and I arrive at a relativistic resolution to a disagreement, then I come to view your claim as true for you but false for me, while you come to view my claim as true for me but false for you. A relativistic strategy for the resolution of a deep disagreement would involve understanding the truth-value of whatever sentence over which two parties disagree as nothing more than the value that that sentence receives relative to the series of sentences which happen to describe either interlocutor's world view. The resolution is supposed to be a *resolution* in the sense that either interlocutor sees that the other's position as just as sensible, well-reasoned, and tenable as her own, and so they stop arguing. Hales thinks this will work in the case of deep disagreement and advances relativism as a viable resolution strategy to settle a debate between Jack (an atheist) and Diane (a theist) who disagree over a proposition, P', which asserts that souls are essential characteristics of human beings

The dispute between Jack and Diane is resolved by determining that P' is both true and false. P' is true relative to Diane's perspective, a perspective which includes as an epistemological component the methodology of appeal to revelation, the Bible, and its expert interpreters as a source of noninferential beliefs. P' is false relative to Jack's perspective, the epistemology of which includes analytic rationalism.<sup>265</sup>

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265. Hales, p. 81.

Relativism is sometimes likened to contextualism or ambiguity<sup>266</sup> because both settle the disagreement by 1) appealing to the system of beliefs which result in the disagreement and 2) admitting that different understandings of some topic will lead to the endorsement of different claims about that topic. The most obvious way that ambiguity and relativism can be *differentiated* is by highlighting that ambiguity seems to indicate a way forward while relativism just tells me that I've won a game of my own invention (or at least that I've won *our* game by playing according to my own set of rules). While uncovering an ambiguity allows me to understand that I *do* endorse your claim when I see it your way, relativism makes the counterfactual claim that I *would* endorse your claim if I were to see it your way—but the fact remains that I don't.

Victoria Lavorerio offers a response to Hales on relativism as resolution strategy I take to be convincing. Her primary objection to relativism is that it demands what she calls the “impossible epistemic judgement”<sup>267</sup> that each interlocutor grant legitimacy to claims derived from a framework which she views as *false*. The physicist will not be swayed by how methodologically soundly (according to some astrological process) a horoscope was written. The central point of Lavorerio's objection to relativism as a viable strategy to adopt when faced with a deep disagreement is that, without endorsing the other's conceptual framework, either party would still think of herself as right and not *just* right by her own perspective.<sup>268</sup> For this reason, a thorough-going relativism amounts to little more than the forfeiture of the possibility of disagreement resolution, the admission

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266. E.g., by Hales, p. 69. Much of Francén's paper is a close comparison of contextualism to various types of relativism.

267. Victoria Lavorerio, "Do Deep Disagreements Motivate Relativism?" *Topoi*, 2018, doi:10.1007/s11245-018-9558-0, §3.

268. Lavorerio, §3.

that we are at a hopeless impasse. The adoption of a thorough-going relativism entails pessimism about the role for argumentation in deep disagreements, and so is rejected on the RMI theory of deep disagreements.

Still, the RMI view leaves some room for a weaker sort of relativism than that which Hales recommends. On the RMI view, it is recognized that a person's disposition to endorse or reject a particular claim is determined relative to the system of RMIs which make up her conceptual framework. This recognition renders A (the inferentialist) apt to avoid the sort of relentless attacks on B's beliefs by way of arguments which rely on A's understanding of the topic, thus completely missing the mark relative to B's understanding of the topic. Indeed, that we oughtn't pursue this sort of argumentation in a deep disagreement is the key insight of Campolo's variety of pessimism (non-engagement). As stated above, where the inferentialist disagrees with Campolo is with respect to his characterization of optimism about the role of argumentation in deep disagreements as the view that there can be no significant differences between various ways of life. In contrast, the inferentialist advances a version of theoretical optimism centered on the notion that the development (and application) of either interlocutor's conceptual framework is necessarily constrained by a number of shared biological, social and environmental features<sup>269</sup> and so recognizes the possibility that there might be significant *partial* overlap, and hence room for argumentation, between A and B's respective frameworks, even in a deep disagreement.

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269. It must be emphasized here that the inferentialist allows for very substantial differences between conceptual schemes despite these shared constraints.

## Conclusion

A deep disagreement arises when two people are faced with a clash between their respective systems of underlying principles which manifests in seemingly intractable disputes over various propositions. The RMI theory of deep disagreements is an attempt to describe the underlying principles at issue in a deep disagreement as Sellars's *rules of material inference* which govern each interlocutor's use of whatever constitutive concept(s) is/are at issue in the deep disagreement. I have attempted to demonstrate how the RMI view not only satisfies Chris Ranalli's six desiderata for an adequate theory of deep disagreements, but avoids certain pitfalls associated with other prominent theories, including the most widely accepted theory of deep disagreements, the WHC view. Further, I have argued that if the RMI theory of deep disagreements is a good one, then, as a result of certain ubiquitous biological, social and environmental constraints on the development and application of the concepts about which we might deeply disagree, we have reason to be optimistic about the various roles that argumentation might play in actual deep disagreements, at least between humans.

I will close with the following promissory note. Since the RMI view measures the depth of deep disagreements along two axes (these axes are 1) the constitutive-ness of the concept(s) at issue and 2) the degree of overlap between conceptual schemes with respect to the RMIs which govern the use of that concept), the RMI theory of deep disagreements provides the basis upon which we might develop a system of classification of deep disagreements. The development of such a system of classification could lead to further refinement/specification of the kinds of argumentative tools (such as Finocchiaro's *ad hominem* arguments) which could/should (or not) be utilized depending on the type of deep disagreement at hand.

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