

Frustrated and Aware: Knowing That Disagreement Is Deep

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Abstract: How do we know that we are in a deep disagreement – i.e. disagreement irresolvable by rational means? Some suggest, we know that only after trying out all our rational arguments. However, such strategy risks backfiring by polarizing the parties. This paper proposes an alternative way of recognizing depth. Drawing on epistemic capacity of emotions, I argue that debater's emotional experience during deep disagreement, namely frustration, functions as an indicator of the disagreement's depth.

Résumé: Comment savons-nous que nous sommes en profond désaccord, c'est-à-dire insoluble par des moyens rationnels ? Certains suggèrent que nous ne le savons qu'après avoir présenté tous nos arguments rationnels. Cependant, une telle stratégie risque de se retourner contre nous en polarisant les parties. Cet article propose une autre façon de reconnaître la profondeur du désaccord. En m'appuyant sur la capacité épistémique des émotions, je soutiens que l'expérience émotionnelle du débatteur lors d'un profond désaccord, à savoir la frustration, fonctionne comme un indicateur de la profondeur du désaccord.

Keywords: deep disagreement, epistemic emotion, frustration, naïve realism bias

1. Introduction

How can we recognize that we are in deep disagreement, or a disagreement that is immune to all attempts at rational resolution? One possible answer is to keep arguing until we exhaust our rational assets. Only after we have done so, the answer goes, can we be sure we are in deep disagreement and can, therefore, resort to epistemically problematic non-rational means of persuasion, such as storytelling, framing, or nudging.

In this paper, I want to propose an alternative account according to which we can (and should) recognize depth much sooner thanks to epistemic emotions, particularly frustration, elicited in us during such a disagreement. My alternative proposal is motivated by the

empirical literature on “naïve realism bias”, according to which arguing about highly contentious topics (abortion, euthanasia) leads to polarization, in effect *decreasing* the chances of eventual resolution. The plan is as follows.

I start in the second section by surveying the different ways that deep disagreement has been characterized. Apart from that, I use this as an opportunity to introduce a novel distinction in the study of deep disagreements. Namely, I divide the literature into ideal and non-ideal approaches. The approaches differ in the extent to which they attend to pragma-dialectical elements of disagreeing, such as arguers’ context, relationship, or emotions. What makes non-ideal approach to deep disagreement stand out is that it characterizes deep disagreement as *any kind of irresolvable* disagreement. In my argument, I adopt the non-ideal approach to deep disagreement.

In the third section, I introduce and problematize the idea that we can recognize disagreement’s depth by trying to argue our way out of it. On the so-called steadfast family of views, the replies to the deep disagreement can be divided into optimistic, wherein rational argumentation is still possible, and pessimistic, wherein we must resort to non-rational persuasion. Keeping only to the former, I draw on the claim by David Adams (2005) that until we have exhausted all our options, we must engage in rational argumentation. Although it is a viable strategy, I shall draw on empirical literature to show that this strategy can have adverse effects, such as polarization of the parties and the escalation of their disagreement into an aggressive conflict. To avoid the risk of making everything worse, I propose that the task of recognizing depth can be outsourced to emotions.

The fourth section outlines an account of epistemic emotions that is most useful for my purposes. The account comes from Michael Brady (2013), and it asserts that emotions aid in the practice of knowledge acquisition in two ways. First, when taken at face value, emotions tell us that there is a thing that elicits the emotion, and the thing is such and such. For example, fear tells us that there is something dangerous. Second, emotions focus our attention on an object, motivating us to explore it further. In this way, emotions also facilitate understanding of why the given emotional situation is as it is. Although both assets can be cashed out in my account, I shall use only the first.

In the fifth section, I apply this account of epistemic emotions to show how the feeling of frustration, defined as a negative feeling caused by unmet expectations, communicates to us that disagreement is irresolvable. Assuming the goal of a disagreement is to resolve it by changing one or both of the arguers' minds (Baumtrog 2023), frustration arises exactly when this goal is not achieved. That is, the presence of frustration indicates to me that I am unable to resolve the disagreement.

The last section deals with the fact that irresolvability does not *prima facie* imply depth. This is where I cash out the distinction of ideal and non-ideal. According to ideal conceptions of deep disagreement, disagreement can be practically irresolvable, but nevertheless not deep. On the other hand, non-ideal accounts go as far as to identify irresolvability with depth, meaning that under non-ideal framework, whatever the reason for irresolvability, the disagreement is said to be deep.

So, when I say that frustration conveys depth of a disagreement, I mean "depth" in a non-ideal sense. Toward the end of the paper, I explain that conceptualizing depth in this manner is not uncontroversial. And although I do not argue for the superiority of the non-ideal approach, I do bring attention to the fact that it opens new venues for studying deep disagreements because it brings in the hitherto unexamined pragma-dialectical elements.

2. Deep disagreements, ideal and non-ideal

In the original account provided by Robert Fogelin (2005), deep disagreement is a type of disagreement that occurs outside of the *normal* argumentative context. Which context is normal? It is a context where the disagreeing parties share to a significant extent a set of background beliefs, procedures, and assumptions pertaining to the disagreement. They implicitly or explicitly agree on, say, what counts as evidence, reasons, rules that govern the inference, etc. It is when this shared background is absent that disagreement becomes deep and argument impossible: What happens to arguments when the context is neither normal nor nearly normal? The answer that seems forced upon us is this: to the extent that the argumentative

context becomes less normal, argument, to that extent, become impossible (Fogelin 2005, p. 7).

By “impossible” Fogelin does not mean that the disagreement is irresolvable *per se*, but that it is not “subject to *rational* resolution” (Fogelin 2005, p. 11, emphasis mine). The tools for resolving the disagreement we are left with, Fogelin concludes, is a “nonrational persuasion”, which usually includes tactics such as storytelling, (re)framing, nudging, etc. Widely used examples of deep disagreements include contentious debates on the permissibility of abortion, assisted suicide, vaccination, or creationism versus evolutionism.

Fogelin’s original conception has been extensively elaborated upon since its publication. Traditionally, the most widely discussed topic concerning deep disagreement is its nature – what such a disagreement is essentially *about* (Ranalli and Lagewaard 2022a). Researchers debate whether deep disagreements are essentially disagreements about “hinge commitments” (Pritchard 2021), or of “fundamental epistemic principles” (Lynch 2016).

The latter family of theories maintains that deep disagreements boil down to disagreements on what constitutes the most fundamental standards of proper knowledge acquisition. What makes a principle “fundamental”? It is the fact that the principle “can’t be shown to be true without employing the source that the relevant principle endorses as reliable.” It is for this reason why any “explicit defenses of such principles will always be subject to a charge of circularity” (Lynch 2016, p. 250). One example would be perception. On this account, the often-mentioned examples of deep disagreements, such as the permissibility of abortion, boil down to how we should form our beliefs pertaining such issues (e.g., Bible/medical science/one’s intuition should be followed when answering the question about abortion).

On the other hand, hinge epistemologists argue that deep disagreements boil down to disagreements over “basic arational commitments, commonly known as *hinges*” (Pritchard 2021, p. 1118), which might include beliefs like “I have never been to the moon” or “there is an external world”. These “hinge commitments” are arational because they constitute conditions necessary for rational evaluation, while they themselves are excluded from such an evaluation. Under hinge commitments view, deep disagreement over abortion

boils down to a disagreement over hinge commitments pertaining to, say, whether a person has a soul.

Notably, there is an ongoing debate on whether the two conceptions of deep disagreement are rival or not. For instance, Chris Ranalli (2021) proposes a set of desiderata that any theory of deep disagreement ought to meet, concluding that hinge commitments approach fares better in that regard. On the other hand, Guido Melchior (2024) has recently argued that both approaches deal with distinct *explanans*, and as such they can stand shoulder to shoulder. But be that as it may, many of the iterations of the just presented views share one thing: disagreement can be practically irresolvable, without being deep.

In their review paper, Ranalli and Lagewaard (2022a, p. 4) state that “[s]ome disagreements are merely *persistent* without being deep”. Likewise, Drew Johnson (2022, p. 356) asserts that not every disagreement with a “stubborn” interlocutor where “substantial consensus” is impossible, is deep. Tim Dare (2013, p. 46) makes an explicit distinction between disagreements that are “deep”, and those that are “merely complex” or “staleated by the intransigence or obstinacy of opponents”. And, finally, from the original author of the notion of deep disagreement himself: “A disagreement can also be unresolvable without being deep” (Fogelin 2005, p. 8).

What this division of disagreements into persistent and deep reflects, I think, is the perceived special metaphysical nature of deep disagreements – i.e. deep disagreement is not just like any other persistent disagreement, it is more than that. As Fogelin explains, deep disagreements are unlike disagreements that persist due to bias or “pig-headedness” of the arguers because “charges of bias and pig-headedness only make sense in a normal (or near normal) argumentative context, for in each case an appeal is made to common ground” (Fogelin 2005, p. 7). In short, deep disagreements are unlike more mundane persistent disagreements because the latter has features (e.g. shared common ground) that the former lacks.

Looking at the literature from this perspective, the perceived special nature of deep disagreements forces researchers to take a peculiar stance toward the pragma-dialectical aspects of deep disagreements. As Harvey Siegel (2023) explains in the recent paper, pragma-dialectics takes arguments to be an *interpersonal dialogical*

exchanges. And it is this personal dimension – the fact that deep disagreements include *people* – that is in my view missing in the above conceptions of deep disagreement. What we have there is a sort of “unwordly”, to borrow Laura Candiotta’s term (2022), analysis of deep disagreement that overlooks the actual *protagonists* of the deep disagreement.

There is a ready-at-hand answer as to why scholars pay attention to the structure of deep disagreement more than to its protagonists and their dynamics: the real-life dynamics are interesting but have little bearing on the question of deep disagreement. That answer, however, seems too hasty. As Eugen Popa (2022) noted recently, in our everyday practice of disagreeing there does not seem to be a noticeable difference between disagreeing “deeply” and “normally” (see also Campolo 2013). This raises an interesting question: what does it mean to say that deep disagreements exist? According to Popa, the answer to that question is so troublesome that “some scholars have resorted to simply stipulating deep disagreement into existence and defining it rather as abstract entities, regardless of whether they would actually occur in real-life” (Popa 2022, p. 7).¹ Noticing this issue, other authors set out to search for the existence of deep disagreements in real-life contexts (Kiš 2023).

So, looking at the arguers involved in deep disagreements does seem to have a bearing on how we understand the notion. For one, it tells us whether the notion refers to a real-life phenomenon.

This is what motivates me to adopt an approach to deep disagreement different to what was presented above. Let me start sketching what I have in mind with a quote by Aidan McGlynn (2023, p. 13):

¹ A similar argument has been recently proposed by Guido Melchior (2024), who argues that Fogelin introduced the term “deep disagreement” as a *stipulative definition*. The problem is that nowadays the term is treated like any commonsense term (e.g. knowledge, belief), which creates an expectation that we have a shared set of pre-theoretical intuitions about deep disagreements against which we can test our explanations of the term. But as the intuitions differ so much, not adequate explanation is possible. Hence, he proposes to drop the term “deep disagreement” completely (see also Melchior 2023).

[A]ny disagreement that's overly persistent due to one party cognitively underperforming for *any* reason – prejudice, tiredness, dogmatism, drunkenness, grief, inherent stubbornness or arrogance, misplaced loyalty to others, sheer ignorance, and so on – will count as deep (McGlynn 2023, p. 13).

The contrast between McGlynn's claim and what was said above is striking. He goes on to explain, persistent disagreements due to ignorance, stubbornness, etc., can be said to be deep without needing to involve any clash in fundamental epistemic principles/hinge commitments. Why? Because they do “feature something that has much the same effect” (McGlynn, 2023, p. 12). Namely, they are very hard, perhaps even impossible, to resolve through “usual persuasive means” (i.e. argumentation). This feature, which McGlynn takes to be *central* for the notion of deep disagreement, is very well present in disagreements that boil down to, say, the lack of argumentative prowess due to tiredness of one of the arguers.

Notice the shift in focus toward the *protagonists* of the deep disagreement. All the possible causes of the depth of disagreement that McGlynn lists – “displaced loyalties”, “arrogance”, “prejudice”, “tiredness”, or “drunkenness” – are *contextual* features ascribed to *persons*. To say that the features giving rise to depth of a disagreement are contextual has a very profound implication for the nature of deep disagreement: it means that deep disagreement is something that is dependent on the context of epistemic agents and, therefore, it need not arise at all should the context change! Needless to say, this is a very different characterization of deep disagreement from what we have seen above.

It merits stressing again why the characterization is so different. As I see it, it is because McGlynn pays much more attention to the pragma-dialectical aspects of irresolvable disagreements, which leads him to conclusion that any kind of persistence ought to be identified with depth. Significantly, McGlynn is by no means alone in his deviation from the established approach. Nowadays, authors conventionally incorporate the pragma-dialectical aspects into the analyses of deep disagreements. They invoke sociological notions like polarization (Lavorerio 2023; de Ridder 2021) or intractable conflict (Kiš 2023). Additionally, they explain how deep disagreements arise, persist, and are navigated by considering *arguers'* emotions

(Kiš 2023; Lavorerio 2023), biases (Lagewaard 2021), argumentative virtues/vices (Aberdein 2021; Phillips 2021), or even his/her existential values (Pritchard 2023). Notably and unsurprisingly, it is a common sight for this part of research to draw on empirical findings. All of this, again, paints a very different picture of deep disagreements than what was presented above.

I hope the reader can sense the difference between the two introduced approaches to the phenomenon of deep disagreement. I wish to capture this difference with the vocabulary borrowed from epistemology and claim that the approaches to deep disagreement can be divided into *ideal* and *non-ideal* camps. Following Robin McKenna (2023), I understand non-ideal epistemology as an evidence-based, practice-oriented methodology rejecting idealizations about reasoners and their social situatedness. Under this framework, we approach epistemic questions in a way that does not lose sight of epistemic agents, their context, cognitive capacities, and external influences. Importantly, non-ideal epistemology pays attention to these factors exactly because omitting them risks “ignoring phenomena that are of real interest” (McKenna 2023, p. 3; Thorstad 2023).

It seems clear to me that a part of the literature on deep disagreements ticks some, if not all, of the features of non-ideal methodology. Importantly for my purposes, adopting the non-ideal approach has the effect of *broadening* the notion of depth by identifying it with *any kind of irresolvability*. This methodological move is important for my claim that frustration conveys depth of a disagreement.

One more caveat. Unsurprisingly, adopting non-ideal approach does not come without a cost. As McGlynn explains, “something of Fogelin’s conception of deep disagreements surely *has* been lost”. What is it? Well, in opting for a non-ideal approach, “we no longer have a sharp distinction between disagreements that involve ‘a clash in underlying principles’ and those that don’t” (McGlynn 2023, p. 14). In other words, deep disagreements lose their special metaphysical status I have mentioned above. Under non-ideal framework, all we have is a *spectrum* of disagreements, with persistent on one side, and easily resolvable on the other (cf. Aikin 2019). This loss is something that McGlynn (and many others) is willing to “bite the bullet” on (McGlynn 2023, p. 14). In my argument, I shall follow suit.

Moving on, let me explain why arguing no matter what is not always a good strategy.

3. Argue no matter what?

What are we to do when we face deep disagreement? The answers to this question can be roughly divided into two camps (Ranalli and Lagewaard 2022b). The first maintains that even in the situation of deep disagreement, we should persevere in our attempts at resolution. Call this a *steadfast view*. The second camp argues that deep disagreement should serve as higher-order evidence of the fact that we are, for one reason or another, unable to resolve the issue, and thus should suspend our judgment on it. Call this a *conciliatory view*.

Now, the steadfast view, which is of the most interest to me, can be divided further based on how we resolve deep disagreement. Some authors argue, *contrary* to Fogelin, that we can rely on rational argumentation (Finocchiaro 2013).

In this regard, Michael Adams' (2005) proposal is the most relevant for my purpose. According to Adams, even when we are in deep disagreement, as far as the means of overcoming the disagreement are concerned, we should act *as if* the disagreement was normal and not deep. His argument is twofold. First, he raises concerns about the legitimacy of non-rational means of persuasion, such as appeals to self-interest, authority, emotion, indoctrination techniques, and other rhetorical ploys (Adams 2005, p. 73). Roughly, all of these are at odds with the accepted model for resolving bioethical disputes – the area in which he is most interested. They can lead people to the right beliefs based on the wrong reasons.

Striking a bargain or reaching a compromise between two opponents may meet their need to resolve their differences and move on, but the focus of ethics consultation is supposed to be the patient's well being, not those of the people around the table (Adams 2005, p. 73).

To generalize Adams' point: non-rational persuasion is epistemically suspect.

The second part of Adams' argument concedes that the deployment of these non-rational means could be justified in cases of deep disagreement *exactly because there is* nothing else available there. However, this raises a new question. How do we know that there is

nothing else available? That is to say: how do we know that we are in deep disagreement?

For to forsake the pursuit of reasons makes sense as a recommendation only on the assumption that the disputants not only *are* locked in a deep disagreement, such that further efforts at rational deliberation would prove unavailing, but that they *know* they are (Adams 2005, p. 74).

According to Adams, Fogelin does not “specify any epistemic criteria sufficient to ground the belief that a given disagreement is in fact deep” (Adams 2005, p. 74). The only way to know that we are in deep disagreement is to see that rational argumentation, in fact, does not work. But that we can know only after we have “exhausted the resources of normal discourse” (Adams 2005, p. 76), never *a priori*. Thus, even when it appears that we are in deep disagreement, we must proceed with rational argument as if we were in what Fogelin calls normal disagreement.

I think this strategy is not only viable, but also intuitive. As mentioned already, the real-life practice of arguing does not discriminate between disagreements that are *prima facie* deep and those that are normal (Popa 2022). In both cases, Popa argues, people keep finding new (or seemingly new) reasons to support their case – no matter the apparent futility of arguing. To answer the question from the beginning of this section, then, when we face deep disagreement, we need to try to argue our way out of it.

However, as I will show now, the practice of arguing no matter what can have adverse effects. Namely, if one is not careful, arguing can drive the involved parties further apart, in effect deepening (in both metaphorical and technical senses) the disagreement. To see this, consider the phenomenon of naïve realism.²

² See Campolo (2019), for a different explanation as to why arguing no matter what is harmful. For him, persisting in exchange of arguments has an adverse effect of creating a false impression that the two arguing parties share more common ground than is actually the case. This is a problem because identifying the shared ground is an epistemic skill that, like any other skill, can be dulled when not exercised.

Naïve realism bias is a conviction that one perceives the world in an “unfiltered”, objective fashion, leading one to believe that one’s assessments of the world is generally correct (Oeberst and Imhoff 2023; Ross and Ward 1996). In effect, one expects others to draw the same conclusion as one’s own given the same evidence. When this does not happen, as is the case during disagreements, a naïve realist explains the adversary’s dissonant view by branding him/her as biased (Minson and Dorison 2022; Minson et al. 2011), self-serving (Reeder et al. 2005), irrational (Ross and Ward 1996), or prejudiced (Platow et al. 2023). In short, we tend to depreciate rationality and objectivity of those who disagree with us (Kennedy and Pronin 2008; Sammut et al. 2015). Importantly for us, this has serious *polarizing effects*.

Generally, polarization refers to a process and/or a state wherein the individuals or groups become more pitted against each other (Talisso 2021). Depending on the given kind of polarization, groups or individuals can be polarized in their beliefs (i.e. moving toward the extreme versions of one’s views), partisanship/ideology (i.e. hostility toward political opponents), or affect (i.e. heightened dislike of the opposition). Furthermore, polarization can be driven by factors like cognitive dissonance, confirmation bias (Minson and Dorison 2022), or even proper Bayesian belief-updating (Jern et al. 2014). Another such driver is the mentioned naïve realism bias (Minson and Dorison 2022).

The most explicit way in which naïve realism drives polarization is exemplified in people avoiding disagreeable interactions (Chen and Rohla, 2018; McLaughlin *et al.*, 2022; Minson and Dorison, 2022). When that fails, however, people resort to “adversarial” strategies (i.e. primary goal is to *attack* the view of the other) instead of “cooperative” ones (i.e. primary goal is to learn from the other) (Minson, Liberman and Ross, 2011; Yan *et al.*, 2016). Such adversarial arguments tend to escalate civil disagreements into aggressive verbal conflicts (Kennedy and Pronin, 2008; Sammut et al. 2015). Taken together, these findings suggest that arguing conjoined with naïve realism bias drives the involved parties further apart, not the opposite.

Given these findings, we can turn Adams’ argument on its head. Assuming non-ideal characterization of deep disagreement, it seems

like arguing to identify whether a disagreement is deep might as well be a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is, if deep disagreement is practically irresolvable disagreement, and if arguing can polarize and render disagreement irresolvable, then arguing itself can deepen the initially normal disagreement!

In conclusion, one way to recognize depth of a disagreement is to see whether we can argue ourselves out of it. Now, even when assuming that deep disagreements are not rationally solvable, this strategy, I have tried to show, is still problematic. Seeing that humans are prone to dislike dissonant views, direct exposure to such views risks polarizing the parties, in effect *deepening* their disagreement (again, in both metaphorical and technical senses). If that is so, arguing no matter what can have an adverse effect of decreasing the chances of eventual successful resolution of the disagreement – no matter the resolution means we adopt. For this reason, I want to suggest a different, non-argumentative way to recognize depth. To that end, I submit, we can rely on emotions' capacity to provide us with epistemic yield.

4. Epistemic emotions

It has been recognized for some time that emotions and cognition, the realm of knowledge, are not separate independent faculties. Instead, it is now accepted that proper functioning of cognition *requires* emotions (Damasio 2005). Some doxastic theories of emotions go as far as to say that emotions just are a sort of cognitions (Nussbaum 2004). Other theories maintain that emotions are analogous to visual perception in that they provide us with evaluative representations of their objects (Tappolet 2016). Others still identify emotions with felt bodily tendencies to action (Deonna and Teroni 2012).

However, virtually all accounts of emotions can factor in the fact that emotions often figure in our processes of knowledge acquisition by, say, motivating us toward inquiry and focusing our attention (Candiotto 2023). These abilities have earned the emotions that possess them the name of “epistemic emotions” (Morton 2009). Examples of epistemic emotions include curiosity, appreciation, surprise, or confusion. I will make a case in a moment that frustration be

added to this list as well. Accounts of how exactly emotions possess epistemic yield differ. The most useful account for my purposes comes from Michael Brady (2013).

According to him, emotions are epistemic in that they promote an evaluative understanding of a given object or event. First, let me explain what Brady means by evaluative understanding. For him, understanding consists of grasping or awareness of “connections or links between various items; it involves seeing how things fit together, how features are related, how facts support and explain other facts, and so on” (Brady 2013, pp. 139–40). The fact that such an understanding is evaluative means only that how the features at question and their connections are interpreted is dependent on the values of the perceiver.

Importantly, Brady considers understanding to be different from and epistemically superior to *knowing*. In knowing, we maintain *that* something is the case. In understanding, we know both *that* and *why* it is the case. The difference between the two can be seen on analogy from morality: “It is uncontroversial to hold that moral development requires that subjects gain an understanding of why certain actions are right and wrong, in addition to knowing that such actions are right and wrong” (Brady 2013, p. 142).

Emotions, according to Brady, can provide us with both knowledge and understanding of evaluative situation. How do they do this? Say I see a wild dog and start feeling fear. According to Brady, this fear represents the dog as dangerous to me, which is an evaluative judgment (cf. Brady 2013, p. 78). But notice that I do not yet know why I judge it as such. All that I have right now, according to Brady, is a “proxy-reason” in the form of the emotion of fear. Proxy-reasons are “useful stand-ins or surrogates for genuine reasons for evaluative beliefs, but lack that status themselves” (Brady 2013, p. 129). All that proxy-reasons can tell us is *that* something is the case, but not *why* it is the case.

To gain an understanding of my situation is to grasp what Brady calls “genuine reasons” for my evaluative belief. “Such reasons are considerations that speak to the question of whether some object or event really is dangerous, contaminated, lovable, an achievement, shameful, morally wrong, and so forth” (Brady 2013, p. 130). Essen-

tially, the genuine reasons for evaluative beliefs are evaluative properties or features that constitute the belief. In the mentioned case of the dog, it is its angry expression, barking, sharp teeth, etc.

According to Brady, then understanding my predicament consists of learning the genuine reasons for my emotion. That is, it requires me to connect the relevant evaluative properties to my evaluative judgment. “[T]o discover the reasons that make it the case that the pub is dangerous just is to understand the dangerousness of the pub, and hence to understand one’s evaluative situation” (Brady 2013, p. 147).

Above, I have mentioned that Brady considers understanding to be epistemically superior to knowing. Why is that? Consider my fear of the dog again. In such a situation, I have an option: either take the fear at “face value” (knowing-that), or assess whether it is, in fact, appropriate (understanding-why). That is, I am either content with the proxy-reason or start searching for genuine reasons. Brady does argue that we are usually moved by emotion to seek understanding, which is also preferable for appropriate behavioral response to the stimuli. Notice, however, that in the case of my fear of the dog, seeking whether my emotion is, in fact, appropriate would be a highly imprudent thing that could expose me to harm by the dog. The point that understanding is advantageous for proper conduct but is not always possible for practical reasons. In such cases, the only option left to us is to take our emotion at face-value.

In a moment, I will argue that taken at face value, frustration during a disagreement is a proxy-reason for my evaluative judgment that the disagreement is *irresolvable*. But first things first: what is frustration?

Mary Carman’s (2020) treatment of the term will help us answer that question. According to her, frustration is “an affective and intentional state that is a response to an opposition to the attainment of some goal, where it is a response to an opposition *as* an opposition” (Carman 2020, p. 221). Following Carman, let us unpack this definition.

First, what does it mean that frustration is affective and intentional? The sense of the term that Carman is interested in is not frustration as a thing that stands in the way of one’s goals. Rather, it is a

state of mind that a person is in when he/she is frustrated by a situation. To illustrate this, Carman uses an example of a traffic jam. When I am driving home and come across a heavy traffic jam, I get, among other things, *frustrated*. To that we can add another example: when I am fatigued and unable to finish the writing of my paper, the result is me being frustrated. It is in this sense that frustration is an “affective”, felt state. It means that there is something it is like to *feel* or *undergo* the episode of frustration. This is widely considered to be a typical feature of emotions (see Moors 2022, p. 36).³

Next, like any other emotion, the feeling of frustration arises under certain circumstances. What circumstances are that? According to Carman, they involve two components. First, frustration is a response to a situation that involves some kind of *opposition* to the attainment of a person’s goal – be it a traffic jam or fatigue. However, it is not enough that there is some such opposition. The person must *recognize* or *apprehend* the thing as such. This is the second component of situations that give rise to frustration.

According to Carman, frustration is a response to an opposition “*as an opposition*”. To understand the postulate, consider the following analogy: in seeing a painting, I can see it *as* depiction of Mona Lisa, *as* a gallery piece, *as* a very old thing, etc. The idea is that I can *apprehend* or *appraise* one and the same thing differently. The same applies to things such as traffic jams or my fatigue during writing. I can appraise the traffic as an opposition to my getting home or as evidence that it is Friday afternoon. I can appraise my fatigue as an opposition to my writing or as a signal that I should rest. Carman’s point is that in frustration, we evaluate the situation *as* somehow standing in a way of our goals. In her words:

³ Carman notes that there is a debate on whether frustration should be categorized as emotion, or a different thing entirely (Carman 2020, p. 218; see also Elpidorou 2017, p. 255). Roughly, it could be argued that frustration is composed of different emotions, but it itself is not a *sui generis* emotion. Carman herself is inclined to accept frustration as an emotion. In my account, I follow the state-of-the-art psychological account of frustration, which also takes it to be an emotion. Particularly: “Frustration is a key negative emotion that roots in disappointment (Latin *frustrā* or ‘in vain’) and can be defined as irritable distress after a wish collided with an unyielding reality” (Jerominus and Lacculle 2017, p. 1).

As such, frustration is directed at some object – the heavy traffic, say – and the object is represented as being a certain way, as an opposition to my wanting to get home on time. When the opposition is represented in a different way, a different emotion arises. For instance, when I realise that I will miss an important deadline because of the traffic, I become angry at the traffic (Carman 2020, p. 219).

Importantly, this implies that not all people will react to a traffic jam or an inability to write with frustration. A person need not necessarily appraise the situation as including an *opposition* to the attainment of his/her goal. When that happens, the result is not frustration, but a different emotion entirely (Carman 2020, p. 218). In the following, I assume that what is elicited by the situation is, indeed, frustration.

With that said, let me expose the strong connection of frustration and deep disagreements. Doing so will show us why frustration is particularly suited for the task of recognizing the depth of a disagreement.

5. Epistemic yield of frustration in deep disagreements

How is the emotion of frustration connected to deep disagreements? Let us start with an example. Say I disagree with my father-in-law regarding whether the police should be abolished. I try to explain that abolishing police is first and foremost about eliminating the reasons for policing, such as crime, drug abuse, domestic violence, etc. My father-in-law rebuttals with the claim that I am a naïve optimist if I believe that people can be good without some authority watching over them. After a couple of exchanges, I – but not my father-in-law – feel frustrated. This (not so) imagined scenario raises three questions. First, why did I get frustrated? Second, why was my father-in-law spared the same fate? And third, what does my frustration tell me? Let me deal with each question in turn.

Starting with the first question, recall that frustration is a response to an opposition to the attainment of my goal, and I apprehend the state as such. What goal do I hope to achieve here? That is, why do I engage in disagreement? Argumentation theory, especially its feminist strand, notes that there can be many goals to arguing: learning

(Hundleby 2021), strengthening relationships and having fun (Sifianou 2012), developing the skill of “perspective taking” and fostering one’s tolerance (Mutz 2002), finding shared ground (Gilbert 1997), or brainstorming and exploring solutions to problems (Hample 2005). Doubtless, opposition to any of these goals will likely lead to frustration.

With that said, however, the way I understand the goal in this paper is in a sense of *winning* the argument by changing the mind of the opponent (Novella 2012; Zarefsky 2005). Janice Moulton (1983) has famously called this narrow view of argument an “adversary method” (see also Kilby 2022). Following her, I shall call those disagreement where the goal is to reach resolution by changing the mind of the other an *adversarial disagreement*. I take it that the disagreement with my father-in-law is adversarial in this sense.

To achieve this objective of mine, I give him what I consider to be the strongest reasons for my belief. He does the same to me. After the first round of exchanges, our disagreement remains unresolved. Thus, we continue exchanging arguments. Each round, we bring yet unmentioned reasons. When finally, we run out of new reasons and start rehearsing and rephrasing the already introduced ones *à la* Popa (2022). At that point, I am beginning to understand that there is some kind of opposition to the attainment of my goal. My father-in-law is for one reason or another unmoved by my arguments. It is noteworthy that this analysis is congruent with empirical evidence.

In a study of two people discussing whether George Bush will be re-elected, Changrong Yu (2011) reports that displays of frustration, such as sighing, changes in tone of speaking, shaking head in disapproval, or avoiding eye contact, appear only gradually. In the case Yu analyzes, the parties display higher levels of frustration only after it is becoming increasingly clear to them that agreement is unlikely (Yu 2011, pp. 2979).

Moving to the second question, if this description is correct, how come my father-in-law is not frustrated at all? One answer would be that there is no opposition to *his* goal. However, given that his goal is identical to mine – i.e. to change the mind of the other –, and given that I have not changed my mind, this answer is unlikely. Better answer, in my estimation, is to say that he is not a kind of person who

gets easily frustrated.⁴ In psychologists' terms, he has low "frustration intolerance" (Harrington 2005). Perhaps this is due to his *temperament*, or the general pattern in his reactivity toward emotional stimuli (Strelau 2017; Yao 2010). Be that as it may, here is the likely answer to the second question: unlike me, my father-in-law does not get frustrated easily.

But doesn't this pose a problem for a claim that frustration conveys depth of a disagreement? That is, how can one learn thanks to frustration that one is in a deep disagreement if one does not feel frustrated? I do not think that the consequences of this point are severe, but they are worth mentioning. In my estimation, what this point shows is that frustration as a signal of depth is not available to *everyone*. It is not available to those who have high frustration tolerance, for instance. I am hopeful, however, that non-ideal framework will allow us to discover different recourses to recognize depth. It is uncontroversial to say that disagreements are full of emotions (Sutrop 2016; Gilbert 2004). By analyzing frustration, I have no doubts that I have scratched only a surface of this venue of research. One candidate for a similar analysis is *anger* (Howes and Hundleby 2018). I am postponing that task to another time, however.

Finally, assuming frustration *does* arise during argument, and my goal in that argument is to change that mind of the other, what does the experience of frustration tell me? The answer should be clear by now: it signals to me my inability to achieve my goal, which is to convince my father-in-law to become police abolitionist. In Michael Brady's terms introduced above, my feeling of frustration during the disagreement with my father-in-law is a proxy-reason for my evaluative belief that the disagreement is irresolvable. Put differently, attending to my frustration and taking it at the face value justifies me in inferring from it that there is an opposition to my goal – in case of disagreement, this opposition just is the *irresolvability* of the disagreement. There is a catch, however.

Notice that I say "irresolvable" instead of "deep". I have already laid the groundwork for identifying the two terms. Let me therefore bring the point home in the last section.

⁴ I am indebted to the anonymous referee for this point.

6. Irresolvability, or depth?

Let us take stock. So far, I have argued against the notion that we can recognize depth of disagreement by trying to argue our way out of it. I have claimed that pursuing argument no matter what is likely to increase the divide between the parties, making everything worse. To avoid worsening our epistemic situation, I suggested an alternative way to recognize the depth of a disagreement. Namely, that experience of frustration during a disagreement provides us with knowledge that a disagreement is irresolvable. But does disagreement's irresolvability imply it is also deep? Here I return to my discussion of deep disagreement in section 2.

Even if we were to accept my proposal that frustration during disagreement conveys to us that we are unable to change the mind of the other, this may, but need not, mean that it conveys to us depth. It could surely be the case that disagreement with my father-in-law is irresolvable because it is deep. Perhaps my father-in-law has a radically different view of human nature (i.e., hinge commitment that I do not share), which underpins his belief that a policeless society is a bad idea. But perhaps this is not the case, and instead, he is simply being stubborn (and the same analysis – it pains me to say – applies to me). He does not want to be proven wrong by his son-in-law – this surely constitutes irresolvability, but does it constitute depth?

Without a clear answer to that question, the most I can say is that frustration *sometimes* conveys depth. However, this essentially leaves us where we started: how do we know when frustration conveys depth (due to different hinge commitments) and not mere irresolvability (due to stubbornness)?

One way to deal with this conundrum is as follows. Recall that in addition to providing us with knowledge-that, emotions also facilitate the understanding-why. In the case of frustration, then, we could also rely on its ability to focus our attention on the disagreement's intractability, motivating us to gain understanding as to *why* we cannot resolve it. I suspect that in practice this would have the effect of disagreeing parties shifting their focus from attempts to change each other's minds to exploration of whether there is enough common

ground between them that would allow for such a change.⁵ In other words, we would channel our capacity into identifying why our arguments do not work in this disagreement of ours.

The problem with this strategy, as Brady warned, is that the search for genuine reasons behind the emotion is not always possible. Such a search can be hampered for practical reasons, such as a lack of time or will. In that case all we are left with is a proxy-reason, which can only tell us *that* something is the case, not *why* it is such.

Despite this, I want to maintain that frustration during disagreement is to be seen as proxy-reason that reliably conveys *depth* of the disagreement. The trick is, of course, in what depth are we talking about: do we mean ideal or non-ideal version? Recall that on ideal approach, deep disagreement is seen as metaphysically special and as such it is not identical to any irresolvable disagreement. Now, supposing that me and my father-in-law do not differ radically in our hinge commitments/fundamental epistemic principles, our disagreement *is not deep* in the ideal sense. On the other hand, should we opt for a non-ideal approach, where deep disagreement is *any kind of irresolvable disagreement*, then I and my father-in-law are in a deep disagreement.

So, to say that frustration is a proxy-reason for depth is to adopt a non-ideal understanding of depth, where depth is any kind of irresolvability. Now, as already discussed in the section 2, this understanding of depth is by no means uncontroversial. For one thing, non-ideal approach strips deep disagreement of its special metaphysical status. That in turn raises a question as to whether we should drop the term “deep” disagreement entirely. Although for different reasons, such an argument was put forth recently by Guido Melchior (2023). He claims that the term “deep disagreement” ought to be replaced by “rationally irresolvable disagreement” (see also Melchior 2024). I would be fine with that, but I can imagine that many would not (cf. Sutrop 2020).

⁵ In such a case, the parties would essentially adopt Michael Gilberts’s (1997) model of *coalescent argumentation*, wherein we start with the search for that on which we can agree.

Apart from these considerations, we should also mention that the way forward regarding the scholarship of deep disagreements depends on our appropriation of the non-ideal epistemology. I have tried to show that there is a trend toward non-ideal epistemology in the literature on deep disagreement. Now, I do not want to argue in favor of non-ideal approach. I do wish to point out, however, that it opens new venues for exploration because it brings pragma-dialectical considerations into deep disagreements, which have been hitherto largely unexplored in this context. Finally, my hope is that the present study has exemplified at least some of the merits of the non-ideal approach to deep disagreement.

To sum up, if a person gets frustrated during a disagreement, I propose that this feeling should be taken as conveying to the arguer that he/she is in a disagreement that is deep, where depth is understood so broadly as to include most cases of unsuccessful persuasion.

7. Conclusion

In a world marked by profound ideological disagreements, the ability to navigate the disagreements and respond to them thoughtfully is an invaluable skill. In this paper, I have argued that frustration, in its capacity to signal the depth of disagreement, can be a valuable asset in that regard.

Deep disagreements, characterized by their resistance to resolution, pose a significant threat to democratic societies in that they lead to polarization and undermine trust between groups of peoples (Aikin 2019; de Ridder 2021; Kloster 2021; McGlynn 2023). For these reasons, it is highly desirable for us to be equipped to navigate them. Whatever that might entail, it will include *recognizing* that we are in deep disagreement.

In this paper, I have tried to show one strategy of how we can do that. Namely, I proposed that we can recognize depth thanks to our feeling of frustration during the disagreement. In connection to conflictual disagreements – i.e. disagreements where the goal is to convince the other side –, frustration is an emotional response to the inability to change the perspective of the other party, and it is this inability that frustration conveys to us. This strategy, I have claimed, is preferable to that of simply trying out our arguments and see whether

they work, as trying out arguments in that manner can polarize the parties.

However, does the fact that the disagreement is irresolvable imply that it is “deep”? The answer to that question depends on our characterization of depth. If we keep to what I have called *ideal* approach to deep disagreements, then depth is seen as something special and distinct from mere irresolvability. On the other hand, should we adopt a *non-ideal* approach to deep disagreements, then the notion of “depth” is broad enough to include cases of irresolvability due to, say, tiredness, stubbornness, or lack of intellectual prowess.

Notice that I have not argued for the supremacy of a non-ideal approach. I did however try to bring attention to the fact that non-ideal approach is fruitful and yet much unexplored domain.

The practical implications of my proposal are significant. Recognizing the depth of disagreement based on the feeling of frustration empowers people to adapt their persuasion strategies accordingly. Jeremy Barris (2018) has argued, for instance, that the recognition of depth is the first step on the way to its resolution because it makes the arguers realize that they have so far been speaking past each other. Similarly, Neil Levy (2021) asserts that awareness of disagreement’s depth can motivate the arguers to reexamine their most basic assumptions with which they entered the disagreement.

And not only does recognizing depth of disagreement open new possibilities in regards of its resolution, but it also decreases the chances of polarization occurring. All of this, finally, starts with the feeling of frustration during a disagreement.

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