Deep Disagreement and the Virtues of Argumentative and Epistemic Incapacity

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Abstract: Fogelin's (1985) Wittgensteinian view of deep disagreement as allowing no rational resolution has been criticized from both argumentation theoretic and epistemological perspectives. These criticisms typically do not recognize how his point applies to the very argumentative resources on which they rely. Additionally, more extremely than Fogelin himself argues, the conditions of deep disagreement make each position literally unintelligible to the other, again disallowing rational resolution. In turn, however, this failure of sense is so extreme that it partly cancels its own meaning as a failure of sense. Consequently, it paradoxically opens new possibilities for sense and therefore rationally unexpected resolutions.

Résumé: La vision Wittgensteinienne de Fogelin (1985) du désaccord profond comme n'autorisant aucune résolution rationnelle a été critiquée à la fois du point de vue de la théorie d'argumentation et des perspectives épistémologiques. Ces critiques généralement ne se rende pas compte comment sa vision s'applique aux ressources argumentatives sur lesquelles les critiques s'appuient. En outre, plus que ce que Fogelin lui-même soutient, les conditions de désaccord profond rendent chaque position littéralement incompréhensible à l'autre, ce qui empêche encore une résolution rationnelle. Cependant, cet échec de sens est si extrême qu'il annule en partie son propre sens en tant qu'échec du sens. Par conséquent, cela ouvre paradoxalement de nouvelles possibilités de sens et donc des résolutions rationnellement inattendue.

Keywords: deep disagreement; resolution of deep disagreement; existential decision; argumentative virtue; Fogelin; Wittgenstein

1. Introduction

Fogelin (2005 [1985]) argues for a Wittgensteinian view of deep disagreement as allowing no rational resolution. This view has subsequently been criticized from both argumentation theoretic and epistemological perspectives. I will show, first, that these criticisms typically miss the depth of Fogelin's and Wittgenstein's argument in that they do not recognize how its point applies to the very argumentative resources on which they rely to put their objections and alternatives forward. Second, I shall argue that Fogelin's Wittgensteinian case has even more extreme consequences than those for which he argues. These consequences further confirm his conclusion and its applicability to his critics' argumentative assumptions. Fogelin argues that in cases of deep disagreement there are no shared criteria for resolving disagreement. Beyond this problem, however, the conditions of deep disagreement involve the complete inaccessibility to each disagreeing framework of the sense constituted within the other. That is, neither framework fulfills the other's basic criteria for having sense or meaning at all: each is unintelligible to 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.

These consequences are more directly epistemic than the issues on which Fogelin focuses, in the sense that they concern the problem of each framework's coming to understand the other in the first place. Apart from the inherent epistemological interest of issues of understanding, I take "sense" to include inferential or consequential links between propositions, as, for example, in Robert Brandom's inferentialism. Epistemological approaches to disagreement standardly deal with these kinds of links in the forms, for example, of principles of deduction and induction (along, of course, with other principles that are not inferential). The problem of sense I am discussing is "epistemic," then, in a way which includes, although it broadens, the issues with which epistemological approaches to disagreement are standardly concerned.

Third, however, I shall argue that the extreme character of this mutual failure of sense paradoxically provides resources for possi-

ble resolutions of deep disagreement, with respect to both the argumentative and epistemic difficulties deep disagreement involves. The failure of sense here is so extreme that it turns out to constitute a version of a self-referential paradox. That is, the failure is so comprehensive that it works partly to undermine or cancel its own sense as a failure, and consequently to allow equally valid, alternative outcomes of the problem of negotiating deep disagreement. As a result, our very incapacity to argue, and even correctly to construe the other position's statements, paradoxically becomes the source of unexpected capacities to make sense, and so, to find resolutions that cannot at first be conceived and anticipated. That is, one of the effects of this paradox of sense is that this incapacity undermines and cancels its own meaning as an incapacity.

Because this situation is paradoxical, the resolutions are not straightforwardly rational. I shall argue, however, that they are nonetheless meaningfully connected with rational criteria for sense and resolution of disagreement.

I shall also argue that the failure of sense in these situations provides a second resource, cooperative with that offered by its paradoxical self-cancellation, a resource which might be described as "existential choice." This idea in the sense I have in mind is neither "metaphysically" obscure nor irrationally arbitrary but is again, as I shall show, readily intelligible and intrinsically connected with the criteria for rational evaluation and decision-making.

If asked to define "sense," I would say that the concept of sense is so fundamental to our thinking that we neither can nor need to define it. But if pressed, I would say that sense is roughly what our concepts and activities rightly get at in things and their relations with each other, where "thing" is very broadly understood as whatever is, in whatever way. In a factual error, we fail to get something about the thing right; but in an error of sense, we fail to talk about the thing, or perhaps anything, at all. For example, if I say Tuesday is the last day of the week, I make a factual error, but if I say Tuesday is on the table a foot to the right of the pen, I fail to make sense, in that I fail to refer to what we mean by "Tuesday" at all. The sense of things, then, expresses what is essential to their being the things they are, and without which they would not be that thing.

It will not affect my argument in this paper whether we think of sense as something which characterizes things themselves, as my definition suggests it is, or instead as, for example, constructed by our languages and so as a human affair we project onto the world. Even in the version in which sense is inherent in things themselves, it is still true that we only have access to that sense through the particular forms of expression of sense that culturally specific languages (whether natural or formal) provide. It follows that the limits of our language establish the limits of what we can meaningfully say about things, and so of what we can claim is true or false of them, whether the sense of what we say is exclusively a function of language or expresses something in the world. My argument in fact partly concerns exactly the different constitution of sense by different systems of statements, in correspondingly different forms of social life.

In the first two sections I will lay out the general problem with the criticisms of Fogelin's and Wittgenstein's positions that I have in mind, and then, in the third section, offer some examples of deep disagreement to illustrate and confirm these points. In the fourth and fifth sections, I will turn to the possibility of and resources for resolution that I believe argumentative and epistemic incapacity itself offers in this context.

2. The depth of the problem

Fogelin (2005 [1985]) argues that one of the conditions for argument is "a shared background of beliefs and preferences" (pg. 7). In forming such a background, these beliefs and commitments are interconnected, and some are the nexus of so many connections that they cannot be questioned or doubted without overturning much of the context for, and therefore the successful functioning of, many of the others. For example, as Fogelin quotes from Wittgenstein, even "the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn" (pg. 6; Wittgenstein 1969, prop. 341). Deep disagreement, however, occurs when there is no relevant shared background of beliefs, and as a result, there is a

difference in relevant "hinge" or "framework" propositions. In this situation, there can be no rational resolution of disagreement, because the functioning of belief and statement, and so of argument, depends on the acceptance of hinge or framework propositions, and these crucially differ on each side of the disagreement.

As Fogelin emphasizes, these framework propositions themselves are, and function as, parts of the matrix of interconnected beliefs in which each framework consists. Fogelin gives the example of the debate about abortion and points out that the idea that "an immortal soul enters into the fertilized egg" and makes the embryo a person, while axiomatic for one view, is so by being "part of a wider tradition, grounded in revelation, and sustained and deepened by faith." As a result, if we try to adjudicate the disagreement by discussing such framework propositions themselves, "we do not simply find isolated propositions ('The fetus is a person'), but instead a whole system of mutually supporting propositions (and paradigms, models, styles of acting and thinking) that constitute . . . a form of life" (pg. 8-9). Fogelin qualifies the idea of a form of life here, suggesting instead "a variety of forms of life that overlap and crisscross in a variety of ways," so that some may "have little to do with others" (pg. 9). Propositions, then, including hinge or framework propositions, have their argumentative function and meaning within a system of other propositions, beliefs, attitudes, and practices; and while this kind of system has more and less tightly connected areas, the argumentative meaning of each proposition is nonetheless tied to those of a host of others. Consequently, when disagreements turn on a clash of framework propositions, and so of frameworks, they "cannot be resolved through the use of argument, for they undercut the conditions essential to arguing" (pg. 8).

Wittgenstein's point here is broader than Fogelin's. Wittgenstein argues that meaning or sense, and not only an argumentative role, is constituted in the context of this shared background of beliefs, attitudes, and practices. He bases this view on the same considerations of propositions as having argumentative meaning only within specific forms of life that Fogelin raises but shows the applicability of these considerations to concepts and meanings in general as well. He argues that words can only have the meanings they do on

the basis of systematic interconnections with other words and with the typical activities in which words play a part. For a word or statement to have a meaning, it needs:

> a background, a surrounding…[I]f someone, in quite heterogeneous circumstances, called out with the most convincing mimicry: "Down with him!," one might say of these words (and their tone) that they were a pattern that does indeed have familiar applications, but that in this case it was not even clear what *language* the man in question was speaking. I might make with my hand the movement I should make if I were holding a hand-saw and sawing through a plank; but would one have any reason to call this movement *sawing*, out of all context?—(It might be something quite different!) (1969, prop. 350).

Similarly,

> What would it be like to doubt now whether I have two hands? Why can't I imagine it at all? What would I believe if I didn't believe that? So far I have no system at all within which this doubt might exist (prop. 247).

Winch (2008 [1958]), whose book is one of the seminal accounts of the relevance of this aspect of Wittgenstein's thought to differently constituted forms of social life, gives a helpful example. When someone votes,

> what he does is not *simply* to make a mark on a piece of paper; he is *casting a vote*. And what I want to ask is, what gives his action *this* sense, rather than, say, that of being a move in a game or part of a religious ritual. More generally, by what criteria do we distinguish acts which have a sense from those which do not? (pg. 46).

As Winch points out, for voting to have the meaning it does, the voter

> must live in a society which has certain specific political institutions…If he lives in a society whose political structure is patriarchal, it will make no sense to speak of him as "voting" for a particular government, however much his action may resemble in appearance that of a voter in a country with an elected government.

Further,

> his act must be a participation in the political life of the country, which presupposes that he must be aware of the symbolic

relation between what he is doing now and the government which comes into power after the election (pg. 48).

Someone with no experience of elected parliaments, the concept of the equality of citizens with respect to the right to establish the governing power, the legal institutions which ensure that elections are fair and that their results will in fact be used to decide the winner, the idea of a law rather than the rule of might, and the concept of writing or recorded signs, can make no sense at all of what "voting" means in a society in which those institutions, practices, and concepts play a role.

Similarly, even within a particular society the introduction, for example, of germ theory into medicine involved,

> not merely a new factual discovery within an existing way of looking at things, but a completely new way of looking at the whole problem of the causation of diseases, the adoption of new diagnostic techniques, the asking of new kinds of questions about illnesses, and so on.

As a result, "the concept itself is unintelligible apart from its relation to medical practice" (pg. 114). As Wittgenstein (1958) argues in the case of explaining the game of chess,

> the words "This is the king"…are a definition only if the learner already "knows what a piece in a game is." That is, if he has already played other games, or has watched other people playing "and understood"—*and similar things* (prop. 31).

Outside of a matrix of interconnections between a host of different concepts and practices, then, words and concepts can have no meaning at all, and in the contexts of different matrices of interconnections, the "same" words necessarily have very different meanings. As Winch notes, human society consists of "different and competing ways of life, each offering a different account of the intelligibility of things" (pg. 96). And as Wittgenstein (1958) points out,

> one human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of the country's language. We do not *understand* the people. (And not because of

not knowing what they are saying to themselves.) We cannot find our feet with them.

For similar reasons, "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him" (pg. 223).

In order for us to have access to the meanings of words and activities in an unfamiliar form or area of social life, we need to come to grasp the whole matrix of other meanings and practices in which they exist as the meanings they are. Outside of that matrix, they are not those meanings but are either assimilated to what they would mean in our own matrix, or they have no meaning at all. In this connection, we could think about what the square root of a negative number means to people not trained in higher mathematics, and what it would take to give this concept a meaning for them.

Fogelin is, in fact, drawing on exactly this aspect of Wittgenstein's thought, though limiting himself to a particular province of it. Wittgenstein described these more or less systematic interconnections as analogous to rules, and as Fogelin notes, "what Wittgenstein was inclined to call rules" is what he refers to as framework propositions (pg. 8).

If Wittgenstein is right in this respect, the problem is more extreme than Fogelin proposes. For each framework, the statements of the other, as those statements are meant by the other, cannot have any meaning at all. They are simply unintelligible.[1] While the statements of each framework may well and often do appear to make sense to the other framework, the sense they appear to have is necessarily a misconstrual, resulting from assimilating them to the inapplicable hinge statements and criteria of the home framework.

Further complicating this situation, since sense depends on the relevant system of propositions and practices, each framework *genuinely* does not fulfill the criteria for sense established by the other. As a result, each framework in its own context is in fact also *correct* in not recognizing the criteria of the other framework as the appropriate source for establishing sense. In its own context, it is

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[1] I should say that I think Fogelin himself would reject this more extreme view; see, for example, his 2003, 107-8, on Wittgenstein's claim that skepticism is literally nonsense.

not meaningful to say that it is misconstruing the other at all, at least not in this fundamental way.

The problem, then, is more extreme than that of being unable to decide a disagreement. First, it is a problem of incompatibly differing criteria for the very sense of the disagreed-upon proposition, so that the sense the proposition definitely has in one framework does not count as sense at all in the other. Second, because sense depends on hinge propositions, and these propositions differ between the two frameworks, each side is unqualifiedly correct in making room only for its own construal since the other's criteria for sense legitimately do not count for it as criteria for sense.

3. Fogelin and Wittgenstein and their critics

Critics of Fogelin's and Wittgenstein's position typically miss the way in which their points apply to the argumentative resources on which the critics themselves rely in offering their own arguments and alternatives. Siegel (2013), for example, argues that there is no reason why framework propositions cannot be debated just as any other propositions can be, as is evidenced partly by the fact that they frequently *are* debated in, for instance, philosophy courses (20-1). Siegel is representative of the literature here; he draws on and cites, for instance, Christensen (2007), Feldman (2006), and Lugg (1986). But Fogelin's discussion consists precisely in supplying the reasons which Siegel asserts do not exist: he explains in detail why framework propositions are unusual in not being capable of being debated so that the practice of debating them is necessarily not doing what it understands itself to be doing. This practice is going through the motions of debate where the motions do not do the same job they do in a genuine debate. Siegel (with the others) seems to miss not only the import of these reasons, but also that they apply in turn to the current practices of addressing framework propositions which his own argument invokes, and that they therefore require a response prior to relying on the kinds of arguments these reasons put in question!

Before I rehearse Fogelin's reasoning in this context, it will help to be clear about the specific point at issue in this debate: there is

no problem with discussing framework propositions when we do so non-argumentatively and non-epistemically. Fogelin himself leaves this open; his point, though, does concern only issues of argument, and he raises no problem about non-argumentative discussion. I make the committedly positive comments about non-argumentative discussion on my own behalf. We can come to understand the meaning of framework propositions in their context and say a lot about them. This is both possible and crucial for a responsibly lived life. But Fogelin's argument stands that we cannot rationally justify or criticize these kinds of propositions without begging the question so that when we claim to do so, we are fooling ourselves.

Fogelin's argument is that framework propositions do not function in isolation, but, just as other propositions depend on them, they depend for their argumentative role and in fact for their argumentative meaning on other propositions and practices in their framework. Consequently, they themselves have no argumentative meaning as independent propositions outside the context of their framework, and their argumentative value, therefore, cannot be evaluated outside that context. If, on the other hand, they are evaluated *within* the context of their own framework, they are already established as too foundational to relevant meaning to be questioned, and also in such a way that the arguments of the disagreeing framework have no meaning for them, since the meaning of those arguments is constituted by separate and different criteria for sense. For parallel reasons, if they are instead evaluated within the disagreeing framework, they are then already invalidated in ways for which their home framework has no meaningful response.

There is no "neutral ground" that is not constituted similarly in a system of meanings. Since deep disagreement is the result of different relevant hinge propositions in each framework, a "neutral" framework which somehow included the relevant hinge propositions of both deeply disagreeing frameworks would then *ipso facto* include relevant hinge propositions absent from and incompatible with those of each of those frameworks. And because meanings depend on hinge propositions, the meanings of the "neutral" framework would then necessarily be incompatibly different from

those of both of the disagreeing frameworks. The problem in deep disagreement is not just the clash of different statements expressing disagreeing views, which might be reconciled in a larger perspective, but that statements on each side of the disagreement have incompatible conditions for their very meaning. Consequently, if we try to "reconcile" them under a single set of conditions for meaning, we produce a clash of sense, and so, sheer incoherence. If we preserve the meaning of these statements, on the other hand, we also preserve their incompatible conditions of meaning. In this case, these conditions consist in the two mutually exclusive frameworks with their very different hinge propositions.

Again, if the "neutral" framework were able to address the meanings of one of the disagreeing frameworks, it would necessarily share that framework's relevant hinge propositions without sharing those of the other. Otherwise, again, its meanings would be partly structured by the second framework's incompatibly meaning hinge propositions, and its meanings would, therefore, be incompatible with the meanings of the first framework. As a result, its meanings would necessarily exclude those of the second framework, so that "debate" between the frameworks would have already decided the issue on the exclusive basis of the first framework's criteria for sense.

Any would-be neutral ground, then, necessarily either already takes sides or compounds the problem by offering a third incompatible set of framework propositions and therefore a third competing incompatible system.

This argument holds true whether we are restricting the relevant meanings to argumentative meanings or functions, as Fogelin does, or discussing meaning in general, as Wittgenstein does.

In attempts to debate framework propositions, then, there is only apparent communication between the two parties, and the outcome of the "debate" is necessarily already decided in advance. It follows that these attempts are self-deceived. Consequently, it does not satisfactorily address this argument to point out that we do in fact engage in this kind of debate.

Siegel, following Lugg (1986), offers the further argument that even where framework disagreements offer no existing common

ground, we can still build common ground (pg. 20). But Fogelin's argument shows why we cannot do this either. If the newly built commitments succeeded in meaningfully addressing the concerns of the disagreeing frameworks, these commitments would in turn necessarily have their meaning, too, within the broader systematic contexts of the frameworks in question, and so would in turn bear incompatible meanings, supporting incompatible systems of beliefs, attitudes, and practices.

One of the explicit themes of Wittgenstein's work, as Siegel himself points out, is that philosophy which engages in these kinds of debates about the foundations of sense is un-self-aware nonsense. This theme follows from the argument so far. But Siegel takes this as grounds for rejecting Wittgenstein's view as anti-philosophical and "contrary to the spirit of argumentative virtue" (pg. 20). This, however, is not an argument, but a statement of commitment to philosophy and argumentation as they are most often understood and practiced. Again, Siegel is representative in this presentation of assertion as argument in this context, as I shall show below. In the context of this discussion, as a statement of commitment, it is so far completely arbitrary, since Wittgenstein defends an alternative conception of philosophy and argumentation, and this difference in conception is precisely what is at issue. Siegel's loyalty to philosophy and argumentation as they are typically practiced is no grounds for endorsing the legitimacy of that practice of philosophy and argumentation. He first needs to show why Wittgenstein's argument fails.

Another critic of the position Fogelin defends (although without addressing Fogelin himself in this essay), Lynch (2010), argues that where disagreement turns on specifically epistemic principles that cannot themselves be rationally negotiated, we should find practical solutions, avoiding the irresolvable epistemic issues. He argues that this is nonetheless rational since resolution is in our self-interest and we are offering, if not epistemic reasons, at least reasons that are recognizable as reasons (pg. 276). Again, however, the problem applies to the kind of argumentation he relies on to resolve it. The decision about what is appropriate as a practical solution is, in turn, an epistemic one—we want to know, not guess,

what works as this kind of solution; and in this context each framework differs precisely with respect to broad epistemic principles, that is, with respect exactly to the resources which we would need to invoke here.

Lynch's argument in fact also turns on a non sequitur, since the practical reasons that are nonetheless recognizable as reasons are not reasons for the epistemic issue at hand. They are reasons why the conclusion would suit us in other ways than its being true, and so are simply irrelevant to a specifically epistemic issue.

For another example, Feldman (2005) argues that where we cannot evaluate the competing claims in deep disagreement, we should simply suspend judgment; and this is one kind of rational resolution. But if we take either framework seriously at all, then the other's claim is already established as having no possible argumentative meaning, and consequently as necessarily illegitimate. That is, from the start, neither framework can qualify as an argumentative or epistemic peer for the other, deserving of respect for its possible arguments: this is the whole problem which makes deep disagreement fundamentally different from other kinds of disagreement. In this context, the concept of suspending judgment gets no purchase. Feldman does not show that this view of deep disagreement is wrong, but instead bypasses it altogether as though it had never been raised.

Conversely, if we do suspend judgement, then we are in fact suspending our commitment to either framework as a whole because in this context it is precisely the commitment to a different framework as a whole which accounts for and characterizes the disagreement. This means we are not committed to the relevant statements as meaning what they mean in either framework. As a result, we really are not engaging in the disagreement at all, but instead observing it as, for example, a sociological phenomenon from the outside, with no particular meanings of its own, and so, in fact, as not a conflict of viewpoints or debate at all. In simply observing the disagreement in this way, we do not meaningfully have the option of suspending it. We are not engaging in it as an argumentative practice, which we could then suspend. If we do genuinely engage in it as an argument, then we become subject again to

the non-suspended commitments of each framework, and we are in the rationally baffling situation Fogelin discusses in which each side has necessarily already established the illegitimacy of the other's claims.

Feldman's argument, then, also turns out to be a non sequitur, in that he is really discussing engaging in the argument on the basis of what is possible only when we are not engaging in it.

In fact, the non sequitur character of these criticisms lends additional confirmation to Fogelin's and Wittgenstein's point. The critics have their own deep disagreement with Wittgenstein's view of how sense, argumentative meaning, and rationality itself are constituted. In engaging in this disagreement, they typically bypass the arguments in their context that they are in fact presented with, and implicitly or even explicitly ultimately offer simple reaffirmations of their own underlying commitments in place of responding arguments. This is clearly not deliberate sophistry, but an attempt to engage in rational debate. That is, just as Fogelin argues is necessarily the case in deep disagreement, in the critics' debate with Fogelin and Wittgenstein they evidently take for granted that there are no reasonable fundamental commitments that could conflict with their own, and consequently fail to recognize the argumentative meaning of what their interlocutors say when it is tied to different fundamental commitments.

In this connection, Lynch makes a revealing comment at the end of his essay. Having offered the example of debate between a scientific and a religious standpoint, he comments that "I have not tried to specify *which* specific methods would emerge [from the process of selecting epistemic methods on the basis of practical reasons], although I very much doubt that 'reading the sacred text' would be one'" (2010, pg. 277, my insertion). There it is: we are already confident in advance, despite the claim to respect our interlocutors as argumentative peers and to undertake a rational resolution of the disagreement, that the commitments of our home framework are really the legitimate ones.

The objections I have made to the critics of Fogelin's and Wittgenstein's position already follow from the argument as Fogelin makes it. If we add, as I have sometimes done above, Wittgen-

stein's broader point that sense in general as it is established in each framework does not meet the criteria for sense in the other, it is easy to see that this further confirms Fogelin's conclusion and its applicability to his critics' argumentative resources. If all the relevant concepts, including, for example, those of evidence, logical consequence, and the natures of the most basic features of the objects and issues under debate, mean differently for each side, there is clearly no way to resolve disagreements rationally. And the critics' own familiar concepts are no more immune from a general disagreement as to whether relevant concepts retain the meaning they have in their usual applications than their assumptions are from disagreement about the argumentative function and force of statements as derived from incompatible argumentative or epistemic bases.

Feldman's (2005) position which I discussed above may be considered to be a sort of compromise view among these criticisms of Fogelin's account, in that he accepts that in deep disagreement we cannot rationally decide between the two claims but argues for an alternative form of rational solution to the problem, that of suspending judgment. A different compromise view of this kind is that of van Fraassen (2002), in the context of incommensurable scientific theories. Although van Fraassen does not address Fogelin's account, he offers his own, related argument that deep disagreements cannot be resolved on the basis purely of logic and evidence, since these theories are "incoherent…or worse—meaningless, unintelligible" by each other's standards (pg. 72). He goes on to offer as a solution a transformed understanding of rationality itself, in which it includes shifts in our values effected by emotions so that we come to take seriously possibilities that are implicit in the formulations of the old theory although they have played no role in it. These possibilities then get taken up as primary elements of the new theory (e.g., pg. 140-143). Van Fraassen explains that

> emotional thinking…is certainly thinking transformed by something other than evidence. But in fact, no other form of change is possible when what could be evidence for a rival is not classified

that way simply because the rival is classified as an absurdity. So the pattern applies to conceptual revolution as well (pg. 107).

He notes further that "reason, within a community, is a matter of…strife and reconciliation, and not just of logic" (pg. 142-143).

While the idea of this kind of shift in perspective, however, allows us to understand the way in which we arrived at the new framework from the old, in this account the shift has no basis in or relation to criteria of legitimacy and truth. It is a change which allows us to value one kind of coherence over another, but this has no bearing on whether that coherence ensures that the claims of the new framework whose coherence it is are true. In particular, that the framework is coherent in the light of its new standards gives no indication as to the truth of its claims over and against the incompatible claims of the old framework, which is just as coherent by its own standards. In fact, on van Fraassen's account, from the perspective of the new theory, the old one is still unintelligible since what his theory of an emotional shift explains is precisely how we came to recognize the new kind of coherence given that it excludes (and is excluded by) the old one. Consequently, meaningful debate between the two theories is still not possible.

Although I will argue below for the role of a kind of personal conversion (as van Fraassen expresses it) in resolving deep disagreement, in the account I offer the subjective event is linked to the relevant impersonal criteria for sense and legitimacy in both frameworks.

MacIntyre (1988) offers yet another alternative, this time in the context of what he argues are incommensurable cultural traditions. Like van Fraassen, he offers his own argument that deep disagreement cannot be resolved by rational debate between the conflicting sides but proposes a different kind of rational solution. He argues that while each tradition's criteria of rationality carry no weight for the other, each can nonetheless be provoked by what it encounters in other traditions to criticize itself by its own criteria. Our original problem, however, remains: what provokes a tradition in another, incommensurable tradition in the first place can only be taken up by the provoked tradition in the context of its own framework. As a result, the tradition is in fact necessarily not being provoked by

anything as it is meant in the other tradition, but instead by a re-construal of the other's statements which excludes the other's meanings.

Like Fogelin's critics, then, van Fraassen and MacIntyre fail to recognize that the problems of meaning in deep disagreement also affect the meaning of their own argumentative resources. In van Fraassen's case, the decision as to whether an emotional transformation gives us access to a legitimate (rather than simply understandable) perspective itself depends on the same decision about which conflicting framework propositions are legitimate that the deep disagreement turns on. And again, on his account, the old theory is still unintelligible from the perspective of the new one, so that meaningful debate between them is still not possible. In MacIntyre's case, the decision as to the meaning and value of what is taken to call for reconsideration depends on the same decision about which standards of meaning and value to pursue that it is meant to help resolve.

Before I move on to the examples of the next section, let me briefly address the well-known objection that if two frameworks genuinely make no sense to each other, there cannot be said to be a disagreement between them, deep or otherwise, at all. But while the frameworks mean very differently by what is apparently the same proposition, in doing so they both refer to the meaning or reference (whatever this may turn out to be) of that identifiable linguistic artefact. As MacIntyre (1989), for example, argues with respect to debate between incommensurable standpoints, "each community, using its own criteria of *sameness* and *difference*, recognizes that it is one and the same subject matter about which they are advancing their claim; incommensurability and incompatibility are not incompatible" (pg. 190). Perhaps we can see this more clearly if we consider that in the initial stages of the disagreement it is not yet clear that the disagreement is "deep" and turns on a difference in meaning. In that context, it is not yet clear that the disputants are not meaning and referring to the same thing, and this uncertainty is sufficient to establish the meaningfulness of a joint "something" to which they are both referring and about which they are disagreeing,

even if it is possible that it will turn out not to be a shared
something at all.

4. Some examples illustrating the problems of intelligibility and evaluation

Examples in these debates on the role of "hinge propositions" in
deep disagreement usually focus on readily identifiable, independ-
ent foundational propositions, principles, or starting points (such as
induction, sensory experiences, and value commitments) and the
consequences of trying to debate them. As I have noted, however,
Wittgenstein's and Fogelin's point focuses on the idea that when
propositions are foundational it is because their meanings are
systematically intertwined with, and so themselves partly constitut-
ed by, the meanings of other propositions and a host of various
practices, habits, attitudes, and beliefs, in which they form a kind of
nexus. In the light of that point, the foundational propositions and
principles which are readily and independently identifiable are so
only because it has disappeared from view that their meaning, and
consequently, their foundational role depend on manifold relations
to other concepts and elements of the forms of life that are their
context. This can happen, for example, when they have been
repeatedly worked with in longstanding debates and so have be-
come familiarly recognizable in their stable role as elements of
those debates. That is, they are readily identifiable partly because
they have become, in a sense, stereotyped so as to give the false
appearance of having independent meaning purely in their own
right, and therefore as isolatable propositions. Because of this
illusion, these readily identifiable propositions and principles are
extremely misleading as the focus of examples to explore Fogelin's
or Wittgenstein's point, turning as this point does precisely on the
dependence of the import of these propositions on the system of
other propositions, attitudes, and practices in which they occur.

It will be helpful, then, to give some examples that focus instead
on the point that the systematically interconnected character of
concepts and other elements of forms of life makes some
propositions or principles foundational in the sense that they are the

nexus of a great many of these connections, so that to question them is also to make questionable enough of the rest of how we understand things that the criteria for relevant sense itself fail altogether. That is, these concepts or propositions are fundamental not only as bases for argument or knowledge but as themselves integrally part of the general constitution of sense itself in that context. And they are so not because they are inherently and in themselves more secure inferential underpinnings, but because of their many and diverse lateral connections with other propositions and practices.

It is not an objection to this conception that, as critics point out, foundational or framework propositions can and do change. As Wittgenstein (1969) himself notes, precisely because these propositions are foundational in virtue of their manifold interconnections with other propositions and practices, they can undergo change as a result of many small peripheral changes in the less foundational propositions and practices with they are connected. "I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other" (prop. 97). The foundational propositions are only circumstantially foundational. But when the circumstances are in place, then the relevant propositions are nonetheless in fact foundational and so not meaningfully questionable.[2] And these are the kinds of circumstances in which deep disagreement occurs.

Let me start by re-focusing a standard type of example, disagreement between creationists and evolutionists. In the scientific framework, our carefully exercised senses and reasoning are the privileged sources of evidence, and in fact what it is to be "evidence" at all consists in being warranted by our senses, our reasoning, or a combination of the two. In the relevant religious frameworks, on the other hand, our senses and reasoning are in no way

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[2] Their cogency cannot be meaningfully questioned within their framework, as the meaning of the questions asked in that framework crucially depends on them. And they cannot be questioned from outside the framework, as those questions would then belong to a different system of meanings, and so would no longer be able to address these propositions as meaning what they do within the framework.

reliable as gauges of reality. Instead, they are frail and eminently fallible instruments in a world whose sense and working infinitely surpasses their capacities. What is reliable is faith supported by revelation, even while that faith is mostly uncomprehending of the possibility and structure of what it believes.

Now, first, there can be no straightforwardly rational resolution of issues where these different conceptions of the authority of our senses and reasoning come into play. In the scientific framework, our senses and reasons are the only possible bases for any resolution, while in the religious framework they do not count as bases on their own at all. Second, even before attempts at resolution come into the picture, each framework correctly does not understand the claims of the other as genuinely intelligible in the first place, as those claims are meant within their home framework. What it means to make sense in the scientific framework, a meaning that is intricated with and sustained by the framework's form of life or of general interaction with the world, is precisely to be capable of being accounted for, at least indirectly, on the basis of our sensory and rational access to and means of evaluating the subject at issue. But what it means to have genuine access to sense in the relevant religious framework, a meaning also intricated with and sustained by a general form of life and interaction with the world, is precisely to be granted faith in what transcends our sensory and rational access and evaluation; what these capacities cannot, in principle, more than very marginally apprehend. What centrally constitutes the relevant meaning of things and issues in each conception is denied in the other. So, for example, in the scientific conception physical, things are merely matter in motion. But, in one relevant religious conception physical things are, most importantly, gifts, and we are their steward. In this religious framework, our actions toward things then need to be guided primarily by the spiritual and moral meaning of those things, and only secondarily by their physical meaning (which is itself most essentially an expression of gracious power, and not of physical elements and laws). Consequently, there is no way, in either framework, to attach to the meaning of "legitimate sense" and consequently to that of "senses"

and "reason" themselves much of what relevantly constitutes that meaning in the other framework.

As I have noted, it typically does happen, of course, that in the initial course of the disagreement each side finds an unexceptionable meaning in the other's conception, with which it disagrees; but this is necessarily not the meaning the conception relevantly has for the other but instead is a mistaken construal, an imagination of what the other would have meant had its constitution of sense been compatible with that of the home framework.

It is important to recognize that this is not a case where the other position can reasonably be dismissed as simply irrational. By the criteria of the other position, its conception of the relevant issues does have sense, a sense which can be consistently debated and evaluated up to a considerable point. Holders of the scientific position may want to argue that in the case of the religious position the obvious inconsistencies that these internal debates run into after that point show that the framework does not, in the end, make genuine sense of these topics. But this is exactly what is at issue in the disagreement between these two frameworks: whether or not inconsistency and unintelligibility—say, paradox, mystery, and inherently partial intelligibility—can play some role in the constitution of sense. Or, differently expressed, whether certain kinds of inconsistency and unintelligibility are not part of legitimate sense and sense-making and so of consistency and intelligibility themselves. Since this is what is at issue in this debate, the answer cannot be assumed in advance in order to resolve the disagreement.

Of course, as we explore the other framework, we may come to have reason to decide that the other framework does not really succeed in making sense by its own standards after all. Or we may find the situation is too "gray" for us to decide either way. But, equally, we may find that we cannot reasonably deny sense to the framework.

Given the privileged claim of logic we in Western culture tend to give nowadays to reason in contrast with faith, let me note that the ready appearance of the other position as inadequately con-

sistent or even crudely inconsistent does not only apply to the religious framework from the perspective of the scientific one but in fact applies both ways. What consistency means in the relevant religious frameworks integrally includes a proper submission to the unintelligible, and this is patently lacking in the scientific way of making sense. In this light, the sense that the scientific or rational framework claims to make is self-evidently only very partial and inadequate.

   The second example of deep disagreement I shall offer is that of the difference between dreams as understood in modern Western frameworks and as they were understood in the archaic or early ancient Greek world. For the archaic Greeks, a dream was the kind of entity which can be sent to visit one's sleep from the outside (see, for example, Dodds 1951). While we can understand this as a sort of fiction, in which we substitute for what we understand by dreams a very different kind of entity which can exist independently of our minds, we cannot make sense of a dream, when taken literally as anything we might genuinely understand as a dream, as fitting with this archaic Greek conception. It is, again, not just that we disagree about the nature of dreams: we literally cannot conceive of something that means what "a dream" means as being that kind of entity, any more than we can conceive of a day of the week literally dancing a waltz with an embarrassed air. For us, part of what makes a dream a dream at all is that it is an activity of a consciousness (or at least a brain) that exists separately from the dream. Now, if we did somehow manage to conceive of the dream as, for example, existing on its way to us and so as existing prior to its entering into our awareness (and presumably, while on the way to us, not in any other awareness either), this would make nonsense of everything we understand by the nature of awareness and thinking as activities of a first-personal being, and in which a relation to a particular physical organism plays an intimate role. Similarly, within the archaic Greek conception, our own conception of a dream as constitutively tied to and produced by a particular dreamer can make no sense, as it violates equally constitutive features of what a dream can mean in the context of that form of

life and its beliefs about and attitudes toward body, mind, and natural and supernatural environment.

Given the far-reaching systematic failure of the sense of each conception within the other framework, there is, *a fortiori*, also no possibility of rational comparison and evaluation of disagreeing claims about dreams between the two positions.

5. The emergence of unexpected sense and the virtues of argumentative and epistemic incapacity

Scholars who discuss negotiating disagreement typically acknowledge that openness to substantial differences of viewpoint requires special effort and capacities. Mark Kingwell (1995), for example, proposes that if we are to deal successfully with political disagreement, we need the virtue of civility, part of which is "the disposition to…listen sensitively to what others are saying…in short, to rise above one's own likes and dislikes and consider those of others" (pg. 218). Similarly, Georgia Warnke (1992) argues that we need "to be educated by interpretations other than our own" and cannot "try to limit in advance what we might learn from others" (pg. 157). Neither, however, acknowledges the double difficulty I have defended so far in this essay, that, first, once we have understood the other view, we may not be able to make a coherent comparison between it and ours. Second, however willing we are, the framework we are familiar with does not, in fact, have the resources of meaning to be able to hear what deeply disagreeing others are saying to us in the first place, as what they are saying means within their framework of sense. Kingwell in fact explicitly rejects the possibility of both these problems, in discussing MacIntyre's view that we need to learn other traditions in the way we learn a second language, that is, as ultimately inaccessible through our own resources of meaning (for example, MacIntyre 1988, pg. 374). Kingwell argues that, even so, the possibility of coming to understand another, deeply different tradition and learn from it in ways relevant to our own tradition presupposes "a common commitment to rationality…that extends past traditional boundaries" (1995, pg. 131).

In this respect, Kingwell and Warnke, themselves belonging to widely divergent traditions (Kingwell is a Rawls-inspired political liberal and Warnke is inspired by Gadamer's tradition-respecting hermeneutics), are representative of the literature on negotiating political disagreement and in fact on negotiating deep disagreement generally. Even scholars who acknowledge deep diversity as an important category of disagreement and insist on our openness to such deep differences typically overlook the profound complications involved in our coming to understand these differences in the first place. In the political context, MacIntyre himself simply points out its general possibility on the basis of the parallel of learning a second language. Anthony Laden (2001), who is unusual among political liberals in sympathetically addressing the arguments of proponents of identity politics against the idea of a legitimate common rationality, proposes that we simply "work to understand the importance" of, for instance, an aboriginal tribe's ties to its land and "the reasonableness of demands that might flow from them" (pg. 125). The same thing is to be found in the literature dealing with deep disagreement in the more general context of our contemporary pluralist or multicultural social world (see, for representative examples, Paul 1992; Pearce and Littlejohn 1997).

As I have argued, however, the deepest kinds of disagreement involve incompatible and consequently mutually inaccessible sense, and we therefore cannot acquire this understanding simply by listening receptively. And as Fogelin argues, once we have understood we have no meaningful shared criteria by which to negotiate the disagreement. I believe that there is a solution, and that this lies in our relying on and working with what eventually emerges, in the course of our ongoing efforts to make sense of what we are hearing from the other framework, as our legitimate and profound failure to understand, our recognition that what the other position is presenting genuinely fails to make any possible sense for us. In these contexts, the established failure of sense itself provides the awareness and the means by which we might come to grasp the relevant new form of sense. That is, beyond civility and receptiveness, in these contexts, our incapacity to make sense is

itself, paradoxically, an epistemic competence and an argumentative and epistemic virtue.

Before I explain what I mean by describing this incapacity as a competence, it is important to be clear that the incapacity is the result of a profound failure of sense itself and not just a failure of our personal or subjective ability to work with sense. What is being said to us genuinely does not make sense in the context of all the criteria that legitimately constitute relevant sense in our framework. And because it is a failure of sense as such, it allows us no escape to reformulate the issue in some other way within our sense framework. It emerges as an objective failure of sense as such when we reach the point at which we can recognize that what we are hearing keeps on violating our criteria for sense no matter how we try to reformulate or re-approach it.

It is also important to recognize that, as I mentioned in the previous section, because it is sense as such, as it legitimately is in our framework, which fails, it is certainly possible that what we are hearing is simply nonsense. But we cannot automatically decide in advance that what does not make sense by our criteria does not make sense in another framework whose context makes different criteria workable. Certainly, there are many cases where such a framework is not in question: for example, if someone who patently shares our relevant criteria for sense suddenly fails to make sense, there is every reason to believe they are simply not making sense. But there are many contexts where it is evident that a deeply different cultural or sub-cultural or personally achieved sense-framework is part of the picture. Even then, it may still turn out in the end that what we are hearing does not make legitimate sense even in the context of the different framework, by the criteria of that framework itself; but that too can only be decided once we have come to understand the other framework.

That said, let me explain what I mean by describing the established incapacity to grasp sense in contexts of deep disagreement as a competence. On the epistemic side, this recognition and experience of the failure of sense itself is what allows us to come to recognize the possibility that an incompatible order or framework of sense is at issue. Without this possibility, there is literally no

sense to questioning our criteria for sense, and our only meaningful course is to try to assimilate the sense of what is said to us to our own criteria. But with this possibility, it is meaningful to be receptive to sense which functions according to unfamiliar criteria. The failure of sense, therefore, has a positive function as a necessary first step in coming to understand the other position.

The recognition of a possibility of alternative sense on its own, however, does not yet allow access to that new form of sense, since we are still limited to our own criteria and what they decide as sense. But, part of what constitutes the problem in deep disagreement as Fogelin and Wittgenstein present it is that the failure of sense is comprehensive since the sense of statements is a matter of a far-reaching interconnection of propositions, beliefs, and practices. This very comprehensiveness of the failure of sense is what allows the new sense to emerge beyond the limits of our criteria for sense. Because the failure of relevant sense is comprehensive, it applies to the sense or meaning of the failure of sense itself. That is, it is self-referential. As a result, in this context, the sense of "failure of sense" itself also necessarily fails, so that the failure of sense paradoxically means that it no longer makes sense to say that sense has failed. But this is not to say that sense has simply not failed after all: it is only because sense *has* failed that it does not make sense to say that sense has failed. That is the structure of a self-referential paradox, like the well-known Liar's Paradox: "I am lying."[3] The failure of sense here is truly a failure of sense which nonetheless works in such a way that it restores the possibility of sense. As a result, because "not making sense" truly fails to mean anything we correctly take it to mean in other contexts, and yet in doing so nonetheless also restores the general possibility of its having sense, it opens the possibility that "not making sense" might now mean something other than it has meant, something, that is, other than our criteria have allowed it to mean. Consequently, by the same token, "making sense" too can possibly mean something

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[3] There is good reason to think that this kind of paradox, in which a statement is false if it is true and true if it is false, is valid. See, for example, Priest (2002); Sainsbury (1995).

new, other than our criteria have allowed. And this in turn necessarily opens the possibility of other criteria for sense which can underpin this new meaning. The paradox gives a foundation for this possibility in the logic of relevant sense itself in this context of deep disagreement.

To be clear (or at least to limit the inherent obscurity of an attempt to unpack a self-canceling but nonetheless genuine failure of sense), this topsy-turviness of sense is the case only when a framework of sense fails with respect to another such framework. It is not true of particular failures of sense *within* a framework. There the failure consists in a lack of fit of a particular statement or action with the comprehensive context of the framework, not in the lack of fit of the entire comprehensive context with another entire comprehensive context. In that intra-framework context, the general framework and so the criteria for sense remain unaffected, and the statement at issue simply fails to make sense, with no further consequences for sense as such or in general.

Nonetheless, what I have just said about sense, though restricted to the context of deep disagreement, is of course incoherent. I am saying that a meaning (the meaning of "failing to have sense" or "senseless") may itself mean something different from what it definitely and rightly means. Again, however, we are dealing with a situation not just of failure of sense, but of comprehensive failure of sense, and this means that the sense of coherence, in turn, has failed too. What coherence itself means becomes incoherent—but again not exclusively so, because its sense as coherence fails precisely in consequence of the logical functioning of consistency and so of coherence themselves in this context of a self-referential failure of sense. As a result, the incoherence of coherence here is the product of, and so depends on, the coherent sense of coherence, and so the sense of the incoherence of coherence itself paradoxically involves the sense or meaning of the coherence of coherence. Differently expressed, what coherence means becomes incoherent, but not exclusively so, because for the same reasons what incoherence itself means also becomes incoherent, and in a way which brings the sense of coherence back in again. Incoherence, then,

becomes part of what coherence itself legitimately involves and means, and vice versa.

The moment of comprehensive failure of sense, then, is self-referential in a way which makes it self-canceling, and which consequently re-opens the possibility of sense. In this mix of sense and nonsense, we are not in a position to identify the form this possibility takes, and we will have to re-think it from the start. This is part of the incapacity which allows the possibility of our being successfully receptive to the sense, incompatible with our own, which the other position makes.

Without this failure of sense, we were constitutively or inherently incapable of grasping the alternative form of sense offered to us; with the failure of sense, we are now capable of registering this unexpected sense. More accurately: before, when the context was that our criteria for sense were the only meaningful criteria, there simply was no alternative sense for us to grasp. But now, with the failure of sense, there is possible alternative sense whose character we do not have the resources to anticipate, but which we are capable of registering given enough guidance and correction.[4] It is in this quite plainly understandable way that our incapacity to grasp any relevant sense is, in being accepted and relied on, itself a ca-

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[4] The reference in the first sentence of this paragraph to an incapacity to grasp alternative sense prior to the failure of sense is actually alright. It is true that, before the failure of sense occurred, there was simply no alternative sense to be meaningfully talked about and so to be grasped at all. But with the failure of sense, it does become possible to talk about alternative sense, so that at that point we can usefully, and to that extent, meaningfully, say that we were unable to grasp this new sense at that earlier time, even though at that time in its own context this sense did not exist at all to grasp or not.

In fact, I would argue, more strongly, that after the failing and unsettling of general sense and the emergence of new sense mutually exclusive with the old sense, the meaning of what is referred to by one and the same "then" becomes incompatibly different too, depending on which of the old and new frameworks it is located in. As a result, it can be legitimate and even in both cases unqualifiedly true to say both that *then*, the statement that there was alternative sense to grasp would not have been true or even coherent, and that *now*, the statement that there was this alternative sense was both coherent and true *then*.

pacity to grasp new resources for sense, and so to develop the capacity to grasp new actual or specific sense. When we are dealing with sense within our own framework, an incapacity to grasp it is simply a failure; when we are dealing with sense in a deeply different framework, an acknowledged and accepted incapacity to grasp sense is self-canceling in a way which makes it the capacity to grasp new resources for sense.

On the side of argumentation theory, the same failure of sense opens the possibility of managing the unresolved disagreement in a way that itself makes sense. The failure of sense also leads indirectly to or, perhaps better, precipitates a resource for resolving the disagreement, but I will come to that in the next section. The failure's self-canceling unsettling of sense allows the possibility that yet another kind of unexpected sense will emerge, the sense of a logically workable way of coordinating the two incompatible forms of sense. This is not to say that their sense will become compatible. This sense is constituted by the frameworks at issue, and if the frameworks survive, their sense will survive as it is, and consequently so will their incompatibility. If they do not survive and are instead abandoned for a wholly different shared framework in which the disagreement has a shared sense—which is also a possible outcome—then we have simply abandoned the deep disagreement, and the new issue can be negotiated by ordinary rational means. But what can conceivably emerge are ways of living with that incompatibility which themselves make sense.

In fact, a resolution of the thorniest difficulty in conceiving this possibility has already emerged in the discussion so far. As I have argued, in this context of the interaction of incompatible orders of sense, where relevant sense as such becomes comprehensively uncertain, the meaning of failure of sense itself becomes unexpectedly different and, specifically, becomes compatible with sense and even itself part of sense. This outcome and its logic allow us to make sense of living with the unresolvable incompatibilities of sense that result from conflicting frameworks whenever such frameworks become simultaneously relevant.

This way of living is embodied, for example, in some traditions which accept paradox as a feature of reality, such as Daoism, Zen

Buddhism, and the tradition of amiable humor in modern Western culture, all of which warmly approve what they disapprove and do so precisely because of what makes it a rightly disapprovable fault. In these traditions, our greatest strengths, for example, are our greatest vulnerabilities and absences of self-assertion (reading that statement in either direction); and the foolishness of human beings is what most makes our lives delightful and precious, so that this foolishness is, *qua* foolishness and not at all wisdom, our highest wisdom (see, for example, Hyers 2004; Tave 1960). My point is not that these particular insights are sound (though I believe they are), but that they are examples of how it is possible to live in a way in which much of what makes sense involves certain kinds of failures to live up to that same sense.

The logical conditions for the possibility of coherent ways of living with incompatible orders of sense, then, are already established by the comprehensive failure of sense which was our initial problem, since that failure affects and unsettles its own meaning too. Interestingly, the problem of fundamental incompatibility of sense in this kind of case is so deep that it undermines its own status as a problem and itself emerges as the condition for the solution.

There can be no guarantee that this kind of logically workable management of the disagreement will happen, since, as I have argued, this kind of coordination is not only insusceptible to a straightforwardly rational account but is also initially entirely without sense for the frameworks negotiating the disagreement. But the possibility that new and unforeseeable forms of sense will emerge and, specifically, kinds of sense that incorporate their own failure as part of their structure, at least opens the genuine possibility that this kind of solution can be found.

6. Existential decisions, argumentative and epistemic incapacity, and possible resolutions of deep disagreement

The character of the failure of sense in deep disagreement, and the reasons for it, also indirectly open or precipitate a resource for legitimately resolving the disagreement, that is, for making a legitimate, rather than logically arbitrary, decision in favor of what is

meant in one framework of sense over what is meant in the other. This resource is that of existential decisions. By existential decisions I mean decisions that express the particularity of who we are, and in that sense express our being.

This reference to our being is not as obscurantist or uselessly vague as it may sound to metaphysically skeptical ears. A decision that draws on it is also not a matter of arbitrary subjectivity unrelated to the logically relevant features of the issue at hand, but I will get to that.

First, there are plainly clear and useful meanings to ordinary statements such as "this just is not me, I cannot do/say/wear it," and "I want you to like me for who I am, not for how I look or for how I can benefit you socially." In cases like these, we refer to who we essentially are or, in other words, to our being, and there is no difficulty understanding what we mean. Second, we do often make decisions that are, in some sense, personal ones for which no one can give us definitive advice, but for which careful and responsible weighing of the issues and our responses to them are nonetheless meaningful and, in fact, essential. Such decisions occur, for instance, between different value commitments (say, caring for many strangers in need versus caring for our relatively few immediate friends or family members), between religious and non-religious worldviews, between current and emerging scientific paradigms (as Kuhn 1970 indicates), between different religions, and between different comprehensive philosophical positions (on philosophical positions as inconceivable in each other's terms, and on the self as the only possible locus of their negotiation, see, e.g., Johnstone 1978, pg. 114, 121). These decisions are personal not in the sense that they depend on arbitrary whim, but in the sense that the responsibility for making them cannot be handed over to someone else, but ultimately rests on the person deciding, and on that person alone.

This kind of responsibility is singularly the person's not accidentally, but inherently, so that it literally does not make sense to say that someone else can carry it out. For example, if I am an adult of sound mind, the responsibility for deciding whether to give over my child for adoption is exclusively mine; even if someone else

knows the facts better, advises, and persuades me, I will still rightly be held wholly responsible for that decision. The issue is not that I will come out with a better answer than anyone else, but that the quality or appropriateness of the answer is inherently tied to its coming specifically from me. As Gaita (2004) notes about this sense of "personal" in the case of moral decisions: "If I am deliberating about which is the best route off the mountain and I fail to arrive at an answer, I can pass the problem over to my partner. It is only accidentally my problem. If I am deliberating about what morally to do, then I cannot pass my problem over to someone else. It is non-accidentally and inescapably mine" (pg. 103).

Whatever our view of the metaphysics of selfhood or personal identity, that the responsibility is inherently mine in this way picks out a concept of a self in its own right, the singular reality or being which the responsibility is inherent in. It is *I* who must do this, not anyone else; just as in the case of "you like me for who I am," it is I with respect to being what or who I am, and not with respect to any of my characteristics in particular. This kind of personal responsibility, like that of any moral decision, also often involves concepts like that of not letting ourselves down, or of living with ourselves. And, again, we understand that it is not, because it is essentially personal in this way, arbitrary, but on the contrary inherently requires the most serious attempt to take all the relevant issues carefully into account. These, again, are all familiar concepts and entailments, and not "metaphysically obscure."

I have given some indication, in the context of familiar, everyday concepts, as to why this kind of existential decision is not arbitrarily subjective. The idea that truth and in fact relevant meaning are validly connected with the particular character and concerns of the people engaged in deciding the truth is also maintained by ordinary language philosophers, pragmatists, and, as I shall show below, implicitly by contemporary philosophy of mind and action insofar as its conception of meaning involves Wittgensteinian notions like "form of life" and "how we happen to do things." More specifically, in these views, the impartial criteria for meaning and truth themselves get part of their meaning from a

relation to our particularity as the selves who decide, and our selves exist only in and partly as relations to their environment of meanings and consequently of the criteria for those meanings. These criteria necessarily include logical and epistemic criteria, as fundamental as these are to all our meanings and their relations with each other. As a result, decisions which draw on the truth of the particularity of our selves by that very fact also partly draw or are based on those impartial criteria for truth.

J. L. Austin, for example, argues that,

> descriptions, which are said to be true or false…are selective and uttered for a purpose. It is essential to realize that 'true' and 'false,' like 'free' and 'unfree,' do not stand for anything simple at all; but only for a general dimension of being a right and proper thing to say as opposed to a wrong thing, in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes and with these intentions (1962, pg. 145).

Bernard Williams, similarly, maintains that,

> the point or pointlessness of making a given assertion to a given person in a given situation can help someone in picking up the content of that assertion. For some purposes, such as the theory of deductive inference, the content of assertions can be treated in abstraction from their appropriateness, but basically there is no understanding of the one without the other (2002, pg. 48).

And Dewey argues more generally, for example, that "complete determination would not hold of existences as an *environment.* For nature is an environment only as it is involved in interaction with an organism, or self" (1938, pg. 105-106). That is, what it is to be an objective circumstance is connected with the specificity of the self or person interacting with it.

The relevance of the arguer's particular being to the issues argued about also follows from the same reasons on which Fogelin's point about deep disagreement rests. What makes for the irresolvable situation of deep disagreement is that the meanings of the propositions on which the disagreement turns are constituted by their relations to systems of other propositions, beliefs, attitudes, actions, and practices. That is, part of what constitutes the meanings of these propositions is the nature of the beliefs, activities, and

habits of the particular people whose lives include the use of those propositions. Meanings, in this Wittgensteinian view, are constituted partly by what we each happen to do in concrete, particular situations, by what happens to come habitually and naturally to us in those situations as we live the form of life in which those meanings occur. This is another way of saying that who or what we are, or our particular nature or being, is part of what constitutes the meaning of the issues which we debate. Conversely, our own particular natures, again, are partly constituted in turn as what they meaningfully are by the broader system of meanings, social relations, and practices in which they occur. Consequently, not only are the meanings of the issues intimately connected with our particularity, but our particularity is in turn not a brute fact or a simply isolated subjectivity and is instead itself partly a sub-system of meanings of the same kind as and continuous with those of the social and objective world to which it relates.

Although existential decisions are in one very important sense free acts of our subjectivity, they are not, then, as they are sometimes understood to be, subjective or free in the sense of being arbitrary with respect to the content of the issues being decided about. Instead, they connect intrinsically with the legitimate meanings and so the content of these issues.[5] So, in deciding on a particular religious or scientific or philosophical commitment, the decid-

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[5] While the stark opposition between existential decisions and thoughtful rationality is not in fact true of what is typically maintained in the existing literature on existential rhetoric (see, for example, Gehrke 1998; Scott 1964), which generally argues for the compatibility of the two, this literature does also typically leave itself open to this concern by emphasizing the unqualified freedom of existential choice. While it is necessarily the case that existential decision is radically free, since this kind of decision expresses what belongs only to that person in her own particular right, it is also necessarily the case that its content, and so part of itself as a decision, are given before choice, since without anything given there is nothing concerning which to make a decision. The meaning of "radical freedom" in this context therefore needs to be re-understood as integrated with a sense in which it is not freedom at all. Since this is a matter of the interaction of mutually exclusive orders of sense, I suggest that this is one of those cases where the self-canceling structure of that kind of interaction, for which I have argued, can perhaps allow us to make sense of living with this logical incompatibility.

er's ethical propensities (for instance) may connect more consistently and harmoniously with the ethical gist or drift of one framework than another's. For example, someone contemplating the decision to spend her life meditating in a mountain hut so as, say, to express appropriately grateful appreciation of the cosmos, may find that her own inherent drive toward active intervention in injustice makes this an unlivable option for her, no matter how much rational sense she can see it makes within the system of thought to which it belongs. Here, truth to her own being requires her to take up a different option.

Further, the good sense of the harmony between the decider's temperament and a framework she is considering may be consolidated (or disconfirmed) by the ways the ethical propensities of both person and framework interact effectively (or ineffectively) with the many other aspects of the person's life and of the framework which make up the matrix in which these propensities' meanings are constituted. In the "mountain hut" case, many people whom the decider greatly respects may be struggling to intervene in injustice, and she may feel that she is unconscionably abandoning them and their very meaningful struggle by leaving for the other life. Or, she may have an aged parent who needs care, and for whom grateful appreciation strongly feels to her more deeply appropriate than it does for the cosmos at large.

The content of the issue, then, can relevantly connect and can fit or not fit with specific content in the decider's make-up.

This kind of decision, certainly, is not straightforwardly rational, but it is so not because it is an alternative to rationality, but because it is part of the underpinnings of rationality, and so does not fall straightforwardly under rationality's purview. It is connected with the conditions of sense and meaning and therefore with those of rationality, in that the particularity of persons and their circumstances has an often necessary role in the systematic make-up of the forms of life in and through which all sense or meaning is constituted.

To connect all of this, at last, with my theme of the virtue of argumentative and epistemic incapacity: in the context of deep disagreement, our profound inability to establish sense is the re-

source which allows existential decision to occur. As I have argued, comprehensive failure of relevant sense is a paradox that simultaneously undoes itself and reinstates sense, and in doing so opens the possibility of previously unanticipatable sense. Because of this interaction of sense and failure of the same sense in this context, our inability to settle on and assert sense allows us to be at least somewhat unmoored from our framework's constitution of sense. That is, although the meaning of our own particular being is constituted, like all meanings, only within a framework of sense, this equivocal and self-canceling unmooring from the framework's system of sense allows us to emerge to some degree independently of the framework's matrix of meanings. But we emerge not so stably and thoroughly separated from that matrix that we no longer have any meaning at all as the persons we are. In other words, it allows the particularity of who we are to emerge in its own right, and with some degree of distance from the commitments of our home framework, while still retaining its meaning.

In addition, because this is an unmooring of relevant sense, it brings out specifically whatever of the particularity of our being may be relevant to the issue we are deciding about.

Further, since relevant sense, in general, is unsettled, the unmooring of sense allows our relevant particularity to emerge without our awareness and thinking being structured by the unmitigated interference of preconceptions about the settled meaning of the issue. As a result, we are then able to discover, with some purchase on impartiality or objectivity, what alignment there may be between the fundamental elements of our particularity—the elements that go toward making ourselves and our lives what they are, and consequently go towards constituting the sense of our lives and the issues in them—and the relevant contents of the issue as differently constituted in each disagreeing framework. Where there is a better and worse alignment, as, for example, in the case of ethical drift or gist I sketched above, we can make our decision, or, rather, our decision is made.

It is true that this partial unmooring of sense also happens with all other relevant elements of the framework, and not only with our own particularity. But we, the arguers, are the only entities in-

volved for whom there is a meaning to activities such as disagreeing or deciding about the truth, and so to being true to our own being with respect to those activities. In addition, we have the ability to commit ourselves to and live out our own particularity where we do not have that ability with respect to the particularity of the other elements. If, however, we develop or find, and commit to, a framework in which these activities do have meaning for the other elements of a framework, then we would have to consider how to extend the argument to include their existential decisions too.

In summary, the failure of sense in deep disagreement gives us both access to a resource for making a legitimate decision (the resource of establishing the relevant aspects of our being) and the distance from the issues to exercise that resource without prejudgment (the partial dislocation from our own framework's commitments to the sense of the issue and also from the framework's surrounding preconceptions about it).

In the context of deep disagreement, then, it is an indispensable argumentative and epistemic capacity or virtue to be able at certain points to become and for a time to live with being deeply disoriented with respect to what does and does not make sense; that is, to be deeply bewildered, often glaringly in error, and generally flailing about in the dark. More broadly, I think it is also good for the soul.

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