

# What are Deep Disagreements?

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Volume 44, Number 4, 2024

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1116152ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22329/il.v44i4.8461>

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Publisher(s)

Informal Logic

ISSN

0824-2577 (print)

2293-734X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Arroyo, G. (2024). What are Deep Disagreements? *Informal Logic*, 44(4), 604–635. <https://doi.org/10.22329/il.v44i4.8461>

Article abstract

The scholarship on deep disagreements presents us with a considerable number of seemingly disparate characterizations concerning the nature of these disputes. This paper is motivated by the desire to grasp what these characterizations are. An answer is provided through the method of reconstructive analysis. Two ideal and paradigmatic models of deep disagreements are defined initially. Then, individual characterizations found in the scholarship are examined against the background of such models. Special attention is given to Fogelin's paper, the work that initiates modern discussion on deep disagreements. According to the interpretation provided in the following paper, both models inadvertently coexist in this seminal work.

# What are Deep Disagreements?

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**Abstract:** The scholarship on deep disagreements presents us with a considerable number of seemingly disparate characterizations concerning the nature of these disputes. This paper is motivated by the desire to grasp what these characterizations are. An answer is provided through the method of reconstructive analysis. Two ideal and paradigmatic models of deep disagreements are defined initially. Then, individual characterizations found in the scholarship are examined against the background of such models. Special attention is given to Fogelin's paper, the work that initiates modern discussion on deep disagreements. According to the interpretation provided in the following paper, both models inadvertently coexist in this seminal work.

**Résumé:** Les études sur les désaccords profonds nous présentent un nombre considérable de propriétés apparemment disparates concernant la nature de ces conflits. La rédaction de cet article est motivée par le désir de comprendre quelles sont ces propriétés. Une réponse est fournie par la méthode de l'analyse reconstructive. Deux modèles idéaux et paradigmatiques des désaccords profonds sont d'abord définis. Ensuite, les propriétés individuelles trouvées dans les études sont examinées dans le contexte de ces modèles. Une attention particulière est accordée à l'article de Fogelin, l'ouvrage qui initie la discussion moderne sur les désaccords profonds. Selon l'interprétation fournie dans l'article suivant, les deux modèles coexistent par inadvertance dans cet ouvrage fondateur.

**Keywords:** beliefs systems, deep disagreements, Fogelin, Models of deep disagreements, ultimate beliefs.

## 1. Introduction

The concept of “deep disagreement” was coined by Robert Fogelin in his famous 1985 article, *The Logic of Deep Disagreements*, in which he argues that there is a particular type of disagreement that is inherently rationally irresolvable. Since then, a growing body of literature has primarily focused on discussing Fogelin’s skeptical thesis. However, while there is some consensus that there is currently no single conception of the nature of deep disagreements (Ranalli 2018; Lavorerio 2021; Smith and Lynch 2021), it is not easy to identify exactly what these conceptions are. This point is significant because the viability of the aforementioned skeptical thesis will depend directly on what we understand by the concept. It could even happen that deep disagreements are irresolvable in a certain interpretation of the concept and resolvable in a different interpretation.

The problem is already present in Fogelin’s seminal text, as the author offers at least two characterizations whose connection may not be evident. On one hand, the text provides a definition according to which “we get a deep disagreement when the argument is generated by a clash of framework propositions” (1985, p. 5). On the other hand, a characterization that seems to deny precisely what that first definition maintains and ensures that “when we inquire into the source of a deep disagreement, we do not simply find isolated propositions (‘The fetus is a person.’), but instead a whole system of mutually supporting propositions (...)” (1985, p. 6). Subsequent literature has added some characterizations to those already found in Fogelin’s text. On the one hand, there are positions that conceive deep disagreements as dialectical contexts in which there is little “common ground” between the parties to the disagreement (Dare 2013; Aikin 2019; Carter 2021). On the other hand, approaches for which a deep disagreement refers to contexts in which the parties to the disagreement have different “hinge commitments” (cf. Pritchard 2018; Johnson 2022), but this conception, rather than a unified stance, seems to be the label for different conceptions since there are various interpretations of the nature of hinge commitments (Ranalli 2018). A third group of ideas is represented by the conception, orig-

inally proposed by Michael Lynch, according to which deep disagreements involve a clash of “fundamental epistemic principles” (Lynch 2012; 2016; Kappel 2012; Matheson 2018).

If we stick solely to the definitions and the terms that appear in them, we might get the impression that we are dealing with very different (and perhaps incompatible) ideas about the nature of deep disagreements. However, this impression could be misleading. Take, for instance, the definitions of deep disagreements offered by Michael Lynch and Scott Aikin:

Most disagreements over epistemic principles are relatively shallow. They can be resolved, at least hypothetically, given enough time and so on, by appeal to shared principles. What we might call ‘deep’ epistemic disagreements, on the other hand, concern ultimate source epistemic principles. (Lynch 2016, p. 250)

A regular strategy in what might be called normal argument is that arguing parties trace their reasons to a shared ground of agreed-upon premises and rules of support, and then they test which of their two or more sides is favored by these reasons. But disagreements one might call deep are those wherein shared reasons are not easily found. (Aikin 2019, p. 2)

At first glance, these passages offer very different notions about the nature of deep disagreements. While Lynch stipulates the absence of “ultimate epistemic principles” as a defining feature of deep disagreements, Aikin makes no reference to such principles and considers that what defines a disagreement of this kind is the difficulty that parties have in finding “shared reasons”. This has led to both being portrayed in the literature as adhering to different theories about the nature of deep disagreements (Ranalli and Lagewaard, 2022). However, if we go beyond the explicit definitions and look more deeply into their works, some notable similarities emerge in how each conceives deep disagreements. Both Aikin and Lynch explicitly endorse the view that, in order to rationally resolve a disagreement, it is insufficient to have good normative reasons for one’s own position; rather, these reasons must be acceptable to the other party involved in the disagreement (Aikin 2018; Lynch 2016). Moreover, in Lynch, the problem of resolving disagreements over fundamental epistemic principles is the difficulty, also noted by Aikin in

the quoted passage, in finding dialectically acceptable reasons because the reasons each party has, being circular, do not pass the acceptability test (Lynch 2012; 2016). Keeping this in mind, we can plausibly think that their conceptions are not so different after all. It gives the impression that for both of them, the defining characteristic of a deep disagreement is the difficulty that the parties to the disagreement face in finding dialectically acceptable reasons. Comparatively, that one is concerned with how this difficulty is expressed in the field of epistemology while the other does so in the realm of political disagreements might be a less relevant difference.

The case we have just mentioned could be instructive when delineating the conceptions of deep disagreement present in the literature. Relying solely on definitions of deep disagreement may not be a reliable strategy when trying to determine what the most representative conceptions are. Instead, what might be needed is a comprehensive consideration of the different existing perspectives, taking into account not only the explicit definitions of the concept but also contextual elements, determining which of them are relevant and which are not.

What might be needed for our investigation is the modeling and reconstructive strategy employed at times in philosophy to examine the meaning of a concept within a specific use-field. A well-known example of the use of such a strategy is Carl Hempel's investigation into the scientific concept of "explanation." Hempel does not content himself with recollecting what scientists believe about the essential components of a successful explanation. Rather, departing from and abstracting from paradigmatic instances of explanation, he delineates two ideal forms of explanation in science, which he calls "models" of scientific explanation: the nomological-deductive model and the inductive-statistical model.<sup>1</sup> In essence, according to Hempel, what scientists mean by "explanation" is the demonstration that a

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<sup>1</sup> Hempel developed and presented his conceptions of the concept of scientific explanation in various texts throughout his philosophical career. A comprehensive and accessible exposition for the non-specialized reader is provided in (Hempel, 2022). In that work, Hempel states that his method shares similarities with different techniques used both within and outside of philosophy, such as Carnap's elucidation, rational reconstruction, and theoretical modeling.

fact (or, more appropriately, the proposition describing a fact), referred to as the explanandum, can be inferred from other propositions, termed the explanans, wherein at least one scientific law must be present. However, the models vary based on the type of presupposed law (whether deterministic or statistical) and the manner in which the explanandum is derived from the explanans (whether deductively or inductively). Issues such as the content of the presupposed laws (whether they concern natural or social events) or the repeatability of explained facts are considered non-essential for shaping a type of explanation. Once formulated, the models allow Hempel to allocate explanations that might initially appear quite distinct into the same type. They also enable him to allocate explanations that might initially seem very similar to different types.

Additionally, there are procedures in the practice of science that are considered explanatory but do not meet the conditions stated by the models or do not fulfill them as completely as paradigmatic cases. For instance, in many explanations in the social sciences, providing an acceptable formulation of the presupposed laws can be challenging. However, according to Hempel, the models allow us to understand that if these procedures are considered explanations, it is precisely because they “approximate”, even imperfectly, the ideal cases of explanation. Hempel refers to them as “sketches” of explanation. The models empower Hempel to prescribe the direction in which these sketches should be developed to qualify as full-fledged explanations.

In a similar way, in this paper I identify two ideal or paradigmatic forms that I call “models of deep disagreement.” The “logical model” conceives deep disagreements as contexts where there is a conflict of propositions (or “beliefs”) that have the peculiarity of not being rationally assessable. The question of whether such beliefs exist and which of our beliefs are ultimate has interested philosophers since the very origins of the discipline, and as shown in the text, there are different ways to make the case of ultimacy. On the other hand, the “dialectical model,” unlike the logical model, is holistic and conceives deep disagreements as clashes of belief systems. In the dialectical model, there are no propositions that hold a special status concerning the possibility of justification. All our beliefs are, in principle, rationally justifiable. The problem with deep disagreements in

this model is that the reasons we offer for or against a disputed issue fail the test of being dialectically acceptable. We will see how, with the help of these models, definitions and characterizations of deep disagreements that may seem very disparate at first glance can be classified into the same category. We will also see that these models can shed light on particularly ambiguous characterizations of the concept.

Finally, as with Hempel's models, it should not be expected that all characterizations of deep disagreements found in the literature will equally satisfy the conditions of the respective model. Some of them should be understood as approximations or imperfect instances. However, we can identify with the aid of the model which conceptual elements should be added to the characterization to achieve a perfect correspondence with the model. The use of this methodology will be justified if it proves fruitful in revealing intriguing connections between seemingly divergent characterizations, highlighting noteworthy disanalogies between seemingly identical approaches, and facilitating, in Wittgenstein's terms, a "synoptic view" of the most relevant conceptions concerning the nature of deep disagreements.

I will proceed as follows. Section 2 outlines the logical model of deep disagreement, while Section 3 focuses on the dialectical model. Moving to Section 4, I examine a series of features and distinctions commonly asserted by specialized literature regarding deep disagreements, demonstrating that not all of them align (or naturally fit) with both models. In Section 5, I illustrate how the most representative conceptions of the nature of deep disagreements can be seen as approximations to our two models, with special attention given to Fogelin's text, revealing the inadvertent coexistence of both models in his work. Finally, in the concluding section, I assess the challenges faced by adherents to both models in proving the existence of real instances of deep disagreements.

## **2. The logical model**

The core idea of the first model is that of a belief that is beyond rational evaluation. I will refer to a belief of this kind as an "ultimate belief." That a belief is ultimate means that we cannot provide sound

reasons to justify or refute it. It is important to clarify that the term “cannot” should be understood here in a logical sense. It is not a matter of, due to some circumstantial factor, being unable to find reasons that support or undermine it. In an ultimate belief, the possibility of justification or refutation is excluded. Given that the problem of the rational justification of beliefs is one of the central topics in philosophy, and since ultimate beliefs constitute a limit to the possibility of rational justification, the existence of such beliefs has been a traditionally discussed subject in the field of philosophy. If we pay attention to the numerous cases of ultimate beliefs that philosophers have believed to identify throughout the history of the discipline, we will see that there are at least two ways to support the ultimate nature of a belief. One of them is more common and is reflected in canonical texts of the philosophical tradition. Therefore, I call it the “orthodox” strategy. The other is relatively more recent, and I will label it the “unorthodox” strategy.

The orthodox strategy begins with a *racconto* of potential arguments, both in favor and against the belief to be declared ultimate. It then demonstrates (or attempts to demonstrate) that none of these arguments provides sound reasons in favor or against the belief. This leads to the conclusion that it is impossible to provide sound reasons either for or against the belief. We can illustrate its *modus operandi* with a couple of examples taken from the history of philosophy. Let’s suppose that a scientific theory is refuted by an experiment. There are two possible decisions here: either the theory is completely discarded, and a new theory is posited in its place, or the theory is maintained, and harmony with observation is restored by modifying some of its auxiliary hypotheses. The position advocated by Pierre Duhem in “The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory” asserts that neither of these antithetical decisions can be rationally justified. Duhem examined some of the reasons that a scientist might put forth to justify her decision and concluded that either these reasons are not accessible, or if they are accessible, they do not constitute reasons at all. For example, a scientist might aim to individually test each hypothesis of the system before making a decision. However, according to Duhem, this is not possible: “Physics is not a machine which lets itself be taken apart (...) It is an organism in which one part cannot be made to function except when the parts that are most remote



from it are called into play” (2021, p. 187). Another scientist might refer to the fact that the theory has been refuted by observation to justify their decision, but according to Duhem, a failed experiment does not tell us exactly where the error lies: “When certain consequences of a theory are struck by experimental contradiction, we learn that this theory should be modified but we are not told by the experiment what must be changed” (2021, p. 216). A third scientist might try to justify her decision by appealing to criteria of choice such as elegance or simplicity. For example, she could argue that we should abandon the theory altogether because resorting to continuous adjustments and *ad hoc* hypotheses leads us to a theory lacking in simplicity. But for Duhem, this type of reasoning lacks any value because “considerations of elegance, simplicity, and convenience (...) are essentially subjective” (2021, p. 288). From here, Duhem concludes that there are no sound reasons to prefer one solution over the other. To avoid falling into a “anything goes” conception, Duhem posited the existence of an elusive faculty he called “good sense” (*bon sens*), which allows a scientist to “see” what the correct decision is in each case without the need to appeal to reasoning.<sup>2</sup>

A second possible example of an ultimate belief is found in the famous story that Sartre (2009) recounts in *Existentialism is a Humanism* about the young man who, during the Second World War, had to decide whether to stay with his sick mother or enlist in the resistance. Sartre tells us that the young man sought advice from him, but contrary to the expectations of his readers and undoubtedly against the expectations of the story’s protagonist, Sartre denies that it is possible to find a reasoned decision for his dilemma. Sartre tries to justify his position by examining different paths that the young man could take to reach a reasoned decision. He could appeal to the Christian commandment to love one’s neighbor more than oneself. But, Sartre wonders, who are those whom the young man should love more than himself? His sick mother or the soldiers who risk their lives daily in the resistance? Kantian morality, to mention another possible path of justification examined by Sartre, urges us not to treat others as means but as ends in themselves. However, once

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<sup>2</sup> There are interpretations in which Duhem holds a more moderate position. For a radical interpretation like the one presented here, see Martin (1991).

again, the young man's decision necessarily requires taking someone as a means. If the student decides to join the resistance, it would be his mother who is being valued as a means, and conversely, if he decides to stay with his mother, those who fight on his behalf would be considered as a means. From the failure to find a justification for either option in the dilemma, Sartre concludes that such justification does not exist and instructs his student to rely solely on his "feelings" regarding what should be done.<sup>3</sup>

What I call the unorthodox strategy is based on the principle, stated by Aristotle in *Prior Analytics* (I, 1-2), that the justification of a belief requires premises that are more certain or better known than the belief being justified. Let's call this proposition the principle of doxastic preeminence. From this principle, it follows that if there were a proposition that we believed with the highest possible degree of certainty, that belief could not be justified or refuted. In fact, there would be, *ex hypothesi*, nothing more certain to appeal to that could support or contradict it. Based on this principle, Wittgenstein suggests in his last manuscript, *On Certainty*, that many everyday beliefs would be beyond rational justification and doubt. One of his examples is the belief, held by any reasonable person in normal contexts, that one has two hands: "My having two hands is, in normal circumstances, as certain as anything that I could produce in evidence for it" (Wittgenstein 1969, §250). If this is correct, then having my hands in front of my eyes would not count as evidence in favor of the belief, "for my having two hands is not less certain before I have looked at them than afterward" (1969, §245). For the same reason, not being able to see one of my hands would not count as counterevidence either. As Wittgenstein points out, "That I have two hands is an irreversible belief. That would express the fact that I am not ready to let anything count as a disproof of this proposition" (1969, §245). The major point of contrast between this approach and the orthodox one is that the second focuses on the content of the belief to try to show that it cannot be validly derived from any of the beliefs the agent could reasonably hold. The degree of prior confidence that the agent places in the belief is irrelevant to this approach.

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<sup>3</sup> This interpretation of Sartre's position closely follows the reading that Fogelin provides of this story (2003).

The unorthodox strategy, on the other hand, focuses on the degree of belief regardless of its content. It is because the agent is maximally certain that their belief is beyond justification or refutation.

According to the first model of deep disagreement to be discussed in this work, a deep disagreement is a disagreement about ultimate beliefs. A non-deep (superficial) disagreement is one that concerns non-ultimate beliefs, that is, beliefs that fall within the bounds of rational evaluation. Since the difference between a deep and a superficial disagreement is determined here based on the logical possibility or impossibility of providing reasons for the disputed belief, I term this model the “logical model” of deep disagreement.

At this point, it is important to introduce a distinction that I will use later in various passages of this text. It is the distinction between primary and secondary disagreement. I will refer to a disagreement as “primary” if it constitutes the central issue of the debate, that is, if it is the disagreement that, ultimately, the parties aim to resolve through the exchange of arguments. As is often the case, however, in the attempt to resolve the primary disagreement, other disagreements may arise, which will interfere with the resolution of the primary disagreement. I will call this second type of disagreement “secondary.” The distinction allows us to differentiate, in the first place, between two types of logical deep disagreements: deep primary disagreements and deep secondary disagreements. A purported example of a deep primary disagreement is the dispute between Biot and Fresnel in the late 18th century regarding the corpuscular theory of light. As Duhem points out, while Biot, following several refutatory experiments, believed that the corpuscular theory could be salvaged by introducing adjustments and auxiliary hypotheses, Fresnel believed that Newton’s theory should be abandoned in favor of the wave theory (Duhem 2021, p. 218). Yet, it is conceivable that the primary disagreement pertains to a matter within the realm of rational assessment and the deep disagreement emerges at the level of secondary disagreements. A possible example of this type is presented by the debate surrounding the morality of abortion. The view that the morality of abortion is beyond rational evaluation is indeed an extremely radical view that, to the best of my knowledge, no one in the scholarship on abortion holds. However, there are scholars

who believe that some of the presuppositions on which the arguments for and against abortion operate are beyond rational evaluation, such as the assumption that the fetus is a person (and its denial) (Wertheimer 1971). If this is right, then if two people disagree about the personhood status of the fetus in the context of the abortion debate, they would be engaging in a deep secondary disagreement. I will revisit this distinction once I have introduced the second model of deep disagreement that I consider prevalent in the literature.

### 3. The dialectical model

What I will hereafter refer to as the “dialectical model” is based on two assumptions. The first is that, although having strong reasons in favor of a contested belief is, as the logical model asserts, a necessary condition for the rational resolution of the debate, it is not a sufficient one. For a rational resolution to occur, it is also required that the other party to the disagreement acknowledges the evidential value of those reasons. This is a matter often emphasized by those who adhere to this second model:

Arguments are successful at resolving disagreement only if they are composed of premises and inferential connectives acceptable to both parties. One does not argumentatively resolve a disagreement if one has reasoned from premises one’s interlocutor does not find agreeable or makes inferences the interlocutor does not find acceptable. A criterion like *soundness*, which is fixed only on the truth of the premises and the valid support they provide the conclusion, is a laudable objective for reasoning when only focused on an item of inquiry. But in argumentation, the exchange of reasons between speakers and reasoners, we hold each other in view, too. (Aikin and Burnside, 2024)

Following Aikin and Burnside, let’s refer to reasons that possess the property of being accepted by the parties involved in a disagreement as “dialectically acceptable reasons.” A natural way of conceptualizing the nature of deep disagreement arises from this notion: deep disagreements occur in contexts where the parties systematically fail to present dialectically sound reasons for or against a disputed issue. However, to appreciate that a key element is missing here, we must consider a possible objection against representing deep disagree-

ments in this way. Essentially, the objection is that if one of the parties in the disagreement systematically fails to provide acceptable reasons that are otherwise perfectly solid when evaluated from a neutral standpoint, this can only be attributed to the insufficient knowledge about the disputed issue or to the intellectual vices of the other party (such as gullibility, dogmatism, prejudice, or negligence). But, the objection continues, a disagreement deserving to be labeled as ‘deep’ must originate from “intrinsic and structural properties of the debate” (Martin 2019, p. 4), not from subjective and circumstantial factors as just mentioned.<sup>4</sup> So, there is no hope for a ‘logic’ of deep disagreements if they are understood as contexts in which the parties systematically fail to provide dialectically acceptable reasons.

A possible way of responding to this objection is in terms of the notion of a “belief system.” According to this proposal, a potential explanation for the difficulty faced by the parties of some disagreements in finding dialectically acceptable reasons is the fact that they operate within different belief systems. When two belief systems collide, categories such as “dogmatic” or “negligent” seem to be less suited for explaining the refusal of the parties to accept the reasons of the other. A person is considered dogmatic when they stubbornly defend positions that are not supported by other beliefs they also hold. Negligence in reviewing evidence occurs when someone does not give due attention to beliefs that contradict their views. However, when the opponents in a debate operate within a different belief system than ours, it will be challenging to find in their cognitive environment beliefs that, if examined more closely or in a less interested context, would lead them to reconsider their views. It may even be that they hold a different view than ours on the primary issue precisely because they are rigorous and careful, desiring to be consistent with things they have accepted previously.

A notable purported example of a deep disagreement in this dialectical sense is the conflict between Galileo and Cardinal Bellarmine, as described by Richard Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror*

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<sup>4</sup> Fogelin seems to endorse this point when he asserts that the “parties may be unbiased, free of prejudice, consistent, coherent, precise and rigorous, yet still disagree. And disagree profoundly, not just marginally” (1985 p. 5)

*of Nature*. “For Bellarmine, states Rorty, Copernican theory was really just an ingenious heuristic device for, say, navigational purposes and other sorts of practically oriented celestial reckoning” (Rorty 1979, p. 329). For Galileo, it was a true and accurate description of the celestial order. Now, one of Rorty’s purposes in asserting that what lay behind this difference of opinion was a genuine clash of epistemic “grids” (p. 330) is, in the first place, to emphasize that, contrary to common assumptions, Bellarmine’s reluctance to accept the evidence presented by Galileo in favor of the empirical adequacy of the Copernican theory cannot be solely attributed to his dogmatism and biased attitude against the Copernicus theory. The grid that renders Galileo’s empirical evidence and arguments against Ptolemaic astronomy conclusive “emerged in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was not available to be appealed to in the early seventeenth century, at the time that Galileo was on trial” (1979, 330).

The example allows us to highlight other distinctive features of a logical model of deep disagreements. When we depict a disagreement as a clash of belief systems, we often imply that the systems in question are not inherent to the individuals engaged in the disagreement but rather have their origins in the particular culture, social group, or community to which they belong (Groarke and Tindale, 2001; Gough 2007; Kraus, 2010). Belief systems transcend those who adhere to them, and as J. L. Usó-Doménech and J. Nescolarde-Selva (2016) point out, they usually have a lifespan longer than that of their committed believers. Moreover, those who adhere to a belief system may only be acquainted with a part of it, and a significant portion of their knowledge may be tacit and not entirely conscious. These are claims that Rorty endorses (or would be ready to endorse) regarding the disagreement between Galileo and Bellarmine. While he individualizes the disagreement through the figures of Galileo and Bellarmine, as the last quote makes clear, what is at stake for him in this disagreement are intellectual traditions that go far beyond these historical figures.

Secondly, and as has been noted at times, for it to be legitimate to qualify a representational system as a “belief system” it must not only contain factual propositions (belief systems are more than just

theories). A structure of representations deserving the name of a ‘belief system’ must encompass ontological assumptions, commitments to certain fundamental values, ideas about what is good and bad, and also what Aberlson (1979) calls representations of “alternative worlds”—beliefs about how the world is and how it should ideally be. Thus, a disagreement deserving the label of “deep” (in the dialectical sense of the concept) should not only involve factual beliefs. This element of the dialectical model is also present to some extent in Rorty’s description of the disagreement between Galileo and Bellarmine. He contends that when Galileo opposed the notion that Copernican theory was merely an “ingenious heuristic device,” he was, in reality, rejecting “a whole complex of mutually reinforcing ideas” (328) concerning, among other aspects, the standards of evidence to be applied in science, the ontological presuppositions that underpinned these criteria, and the methods to be used for reconciling disparities between empirical observations and Scripture.

If we represent belief systems in terms of sets, we might assume that for there to be a deep dialectical disagreement, the conflicting belief systems should be disjoint, meaning they do not contain any shared beliefs. However, this is not necessarily the case.

Indeed, it appears that for the conflict to be characterized as a disagreement at all, the disputing parties must share at least certain semantic beliefs, particularly regarding the meaning of the terms used to express the primary disagreement. If not, there wouldn’t be a genuine disagreement but rather a mere verbal dispute or something resembling a case of semantic incommensurability between them. Rorty’s depiction of the conflict between Galileo and Bellarmine also illustrates this point. While Rorty argues that the dispute between Galileo and Bellarmine involves a significant number of issues, in contrast to philosophers like Thomas Kuhn, he does not characterize their differences as so profound that communication between them becomes impossible.

We can consider that belief systems are, to some extent, stratified, and that some beliefs hold more centrality or importance than others in the system. Following Quine (1951), we could establish a belief’s position in the system based on the number of beliefs it supports. “Central” beliefs will be those that provide support to many others and whose revision, consequently, would lead to many disruptions

in the system, even its disintegration. Peripheral beliefs will be those that do not support other beliefs or support very few, and whose revision, therefore, would not cause significant disturbances in the system. However, if we aim to maintain the specificity of the dialectical model and prevent it from collapsing into the logical one, we must be cautious not to reconstruct central beliefs as if they were beyond rational justification. If the central components of the systems could not be rationally assessed, conflicting belief systems might have their roots in incompatible ultimate beliefs, and the depth of disagreement would be determined, ultimately, not by their systematicity but by the impossibility of rationally discussing such beliefs. To preserve the identity of the dialectical model, it is necessary that once the parties to the disagreement identify certain basic beliefs as the origin of the primary disagreement, they can continue to rationally discuss them. Put simply, the property of being basic must be reconstructed as a relational property. Whether a proposition is basic or not should be determined by the number of propositions it supports in the system. Regarding its justification, it should be treated like any other. For example, the belief that the Bible is the word of God, even though it may be considered fundamental in Bellarmine's belief system, should be open to rational discussion for the disagreement with Galileo to qualify as deep in a dialectical sense.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, one could have the impression that the dialectical model, in contrast to the logical one, is inherently relativistic. In fact, this was Rorty's position. One of his objectives is to show that there is no "permanent neutral framework of all possible inquiry, an understanding of which will enable us to see, for example, why neither Aristotle nor Bellarmine was justified in believing what he believed"

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<sup>5</sup> The dialectical model, like the logical model, is suggested in Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*. For example, Wittgenstein notes that reasons can be given for some 'hinge propositions.' He imagines a discussion with a tribe who believes they have reached the moon, contrasting this with our view (in the 1950s) that 'no one has ever been on the moon.' While both sides hold different hinge propositions, Wittgenstein contends that both sides can offer reasons supporting their respective hinge propositions. Concerning our standpoint, he observes that "our whole system of physics forbids us to believe it. For this demands answers to the questions "How did he overcome the force of gravity?" "How could he live without an atmosphere?" and a thousand others which could not be answered" (1969, §108).



(1979, p. 211). Although the discussion of this point would take us too far, let me note that this is not necessarily the case. There is no inconsistency in describing a disagreement as dialectically deep and, at the same time, asserting that one of the conflicting systems is objectively correct.

#### **4. The logical and the dialectical model compared**

There is a series of claims made in the scholarship about the nature of deep disagreement that I want to consider next to demonstrate either that they are not consistent with both models examined so far, or that if they are consistent, they must be understood nonetheless as meaning different things.

Let us begin with the assumption of “locatedness.” Assuming that deep disagreements are located means that, ultimately (like normal disagreements), they consist in two agents believing inconsistent propositions (Lavorerio 2021). From what has been said so far, it is easy to see that this assumption holds true only for deep disagreements of the logical type. Logical deep disagreements consist of a clash of beliefs for which the possibility of justification or refutation is excluded. While it may seem natural to identify a dialectical deep disagreement with the primary disagreement itself (for example, asserting that Copernicans and Ptolemaics deeply disagreed about the empirical status of Copernican theory), this is done mainly for convenience and understanding. The true depth of the disagreement lies in the clash of the opposing belief systems. The primary disagreement can be likened here to the tips of two icebergs. Although the collision appears to involve two small masses of ice, it is beneath the surface that the real impact occurs.

Another commonly asserted claim is that deep disagreements can vary in their degrees of depth (Duran 2006; Henderson 2020). If, as suggested earlier, we think of belief systems in terms of sets, the depth of a dialectical disagreement will be determined by the number of beliefs found at the intersection of both sets. The fewer beliefs in the intersection, the deeper the disagreement. As mentioned previously, the disparity can be so profound that even the concept of disagreement can become problematic in describing it. However, the idea of a degree of depth has no place in a logical model. Given that

the distinction between deep and non-deep disagreement hinges on the distinction between ultimate belief and non-ultimate belief, and the latter constitutes a sharp one (there are no “more or less” ultimate beliefs), the deep/swallow distinction must also be sharp.

Another trait sometimes attributed to deep disagreement is the so-called ripple effect (Ranalli 2018, p 2; Lavorerio 2021 p. 418). The idea is that two people who deeply disagree on one issue will also disagree on many other matters related to their deep disagreement. However, considering that these other disagreements must be the cause or consequence of the deep disagreement (where the disjunction is understood inclusively), it is clear that a dialectical disagreement can have a domino effect in both directions. Galileo and Bellarmine deeply disagreed about the status of Copernicus’ theory because they disagreed on many other issues, and this disagreement also had the effect of causing disagreements on many other topics. But in a logical model, there cannot be prior disagreements that explain the occurrence of the deep disagreement (this is what the ultimate status of the involved beliefs consists in). Therefore, if there is a domino effect, it can only be, so to speak, prospective.

One of the most debated issues in the literature is whether deep disagreements are resolvable through rational means. However, it must be kept in mind that the term ‘rational resolution’ carries very different meanings in both models. In a logical model, whether a disagreement is rationally resolvable or irresolvable means that, considered from an external and supposedly neutral standpoint, it is possible (or not possible) for the parties to provide sound reasons for or against the disputed proposition. If the parties in a deep disagreement, declared rationally irresolvable, nevertheless reach an agreement through the exchange of arguments, these arguments must be fallacious when examined from the external and supposedly neutral viewpoint in which the philosopher who makes the claim of ultimacy is situated. In a dialectical model, by contrast, that deep disagreements are rationally resolvable (or irresolvable) can only mean that it is possible (or not possible) for the parties to provide dialectically acceptable reasons that promote agreement on the primary issue. If the parties in a dialectically deep disagreement, declared rationally irresolvable, still manage to reach an agreement through the exchange of arguments, it must be possible to demonstrate that these

arguments are not acceptable within the belief system of one of the parties.

Starting with the seminal work of Fogelin, a tradition in the scholarship on deep disagreement assumes that, concerning the question of resolvability, there are only two alternatives: either all deep disagreements are rationally irresolvable, or all of them are rationally resolvable. Call this the universality trait. It is difficult to see how the universality trait could be verified in the case of dialectical deep disagreement. Whether there are dialectically acceptable reasons at the disposal of the parties involved in a dialectical deep disagreement for reaching an agreement on the primary issue will strongly depend on how their respective belief systems are shaped. Some deep dialectical disagreements could be rationally irresolvable, while others may not. In contrast, the universality trait is verified in the case of logical deep disagreements. In fact, the very definition of deep disagreement in a logical model seems to commit us, in an almost trivial manner, to the thesis that all deep disagreements, whether primary or secondary, are rationally irresolvable in the sense previously indicated. If a deep disagreement is, by definition, about ultimate beliefs, and if ultimate beliefs are, by definition, those that cannot be justified or refuted by sound reasons, it follows that there cannot be sound reasons that could lead the parties of the disagreement to change their respective beliefs.

But we must note at this point that there is a possible scenario in a logical deep disagreement whose resolvability or irresolvability cannot be established based on mere definitions. If the deep disagreement is one of the secondary disagreements, does it follow that the primary disagreement is also irresolvable? Using our previous example, does the fact that the personhood of the fetus is rationally irresolvable entail that the morality of abortion is also so? The answer to this question can hardly be affirmative. Participants in the abortion debate, for example, could eventually find a way to resolve the primary issue without necessarily resolving the secondary issue beforehand. In fact, the famous thought experiment proposed by Judith Thomson in her article *A Defense of Abortion* (Thomson 1971) precisely aims to do that: offer a pro-abortion argument that does not rely on the premise that the fetus is not a person. In summary, alt-

though the question of whether deep disagreements are rationally resolvable can be answered in universal terms, the resolvability of primary disagreements that contain deep secondary disagreements cannot be answered in the same way. The response will depend on whether there are or are not, in each particular case, sound arguments about the primary issue that do not depend on disputed ultimate beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, some theorists have argued that while the resolution of the primary disagreement may be the ultimate goal in a deep disagreement, making progress in that direction can also be a commendable objective (Lugg 1986; Phillips 2008; Martin 2019; Henderson 2020). Based on what has been discussed so far, it should be clear that this possibility is intelligible within a dialectical model but not in the context of a logical model. Given that a dialectical disagreement is, in reality, a set, more or less extensive, of interconnected disagreements, we can imagine that in a specific case, the parties to the disagreement may manage to resolve some of these disagreements without having, nevertheless, reached the resolution of the primary disagreement. This possibility is ruled out in a logical model: since ultimate beliefs are beyond the reach of reasons, no progress could be made in the rational resolution of a clash of such beliefs.

## **5. Common characterizations of deep disagreements examined against the background of the dialectical and the logical model**

The perspectives that come closest to a logical model in recent literature are those that conceptualize deep disagreements as clashes of “hinge commitments” — commitments that, according to Wittgenstein (1969), form the foundation of our epistemic practices and are

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<sup>6</sup> This point was early emphasized by Lugg (1986) regarding the debate on the fairness of affirmative action quotas, which is the second example of deep disagreement mentioned by Fogelin. Fogelin seems to argue that one of the secondary disagreements in this debate, namely, whether only individuals bear rights or if social groups can also bear them, is rationally irresolvable. But, as Lugg points out, “even granting that the debate reduces to a fundamental clash of views concerning the cogency of appeals to the rights of groups (as Fogelin plausibly argues), there remains the possibility of settling the issue one way or the other by mounting arguments that are neutral with regard to the question of group rights” (1986, p. 48).

beyond rational evaluation (Pritchard 2018; Johnson 2022). While these perspectives may incorporate the notion that deep disagreements entail the conflict of different “epistemic systems” (Pritchard, 2018), it is evident that the respective systems are just the prospective ripple effect mentioned in the preceding section. In other words, they disagree on many matters because they disagree on certain fundamental propositions. Therefore, the real challenge in resolving their disagreement lies not in the systematic aspect of their disagreement but in the impossibility of rationally discussing their respective hinge commitments. There can be different degrees of approximation to the logical model here. For instance, while in one variant, hinge commitments are beyond rational evaluation *tout court* (Johnson 2022), in another, hinge commitments are not directly rationally evaluable, but there is the possibility of an indirect rational evaluation (Pritchard 2018).

The dialectical model is instantiated, also with varying degrees of approximation, by several perspectives on the nature of deep disagreements that we have mentioned throughout this article (Phillips 2008; Aikin 2018, 2019; Henderson 2020; Carter 2021). This is a tradition in which the idea of commitments lying outside of rational evaluation is explicitly rejected (Phillips 2008; Martin 2019) or completely ignored (Aikin 2018, 2019; Henderson 2020; Carter 2021). The emphasis here is on the manifest difficulty that participants in disagreements face in presenting arguments based on dialectically acceptable reasons. This difficulty is often explained by the litigants belonging to different “frames of reference,” “frameworks,” “grids,” or “worldviews,” all notions related to the concept of a “belief system.”

The conception originally advocated by Michael Lynch (2012, 2016) might seem more challenging to categorize. In Lynch, deep disagreements are dissents on fundamental epistemic principles (hereafter, FEPs). Epistemic principles are those that tell us which methods of belief formation we should trust. However, what defines an FEP is that it cannot be justified without appealing to the principle itself, meaning an FEP cannot be epistemically justified in a non-circular manner. For example, as Hume demonstrated, the principle of induction cannot be justified without appealing to the principle of induction itself. Lynch argues that at the root of some social debates,

there is a disagreement about FEPs. For example, Lynch traces the disagreement between creationists and naturalistic geologists regarding the age of the Earth (2012, p. 53) to a clash of different FEPs. Namely, the one that asserts that studying the Bible is the method to know facts about the distant past and the one that declares that the method to be followed is inference to the best explanation (2012).

Now, given the absence of a non-circular justification for FEPs, we might be inclined to believe that for Lynch they qualify as a type of ultimate belief, and therefore, that their definition of deep disagreement instantiates a logical model. However, a cursory glance at his texts is enough to understand that this impression is misguided. Firstly, Lynch builds his position in explicit opposition to the idea that there are commitments beyond rational evaluation (2012, Ch. 1). While there may not be non-circular epistemic justifications for fundamental principles, practical reasons for them still exist. We cannot provide a detailed description of this issue here, but it suffices to note that Lynch believes these reasons become apparent when we employ a decision-making method called “the method game,” a thought experiment inspired by Rawls’ “veil of ignorance” (2012, Ch. 5). Therefore, if Lynch’s conception is representative of either of our two models, it should be the dialectical model.

One aspect of his philosophy that suggests an affiliation with the dialectical model is the emphasis placed on the idea that rationally resolvability means that it is possible for one of the parties to persuade the other by means of dialectically acceptable reasons (he calls them “irenic reasons”):

As I’ll understand the notion here, you rationally persuade someone of some proposition when you move her to change her commitment-state on the basis of a reason that would make sense internal to her perspective. That is, to rationally persuade you of P, it is necessary that I persuade you on the basis of an irenic reason. (2016, p. 252)

For Lynch, the issue with the epistemic reasons supporting our FEPs is not their circularity but rather that they would fail the test of being dialectically acceptable in a debate with a creationist. Now, for the “dawning of the aspect” of the dialectical model to be possible, we should argue that, given the configuration of the belief system of the creationist, we would also encounter challenges in rendering the

practical reasons for our privileged FEPs dialectically acceptable. This is a relatively unexplored point in Lynch's texts. In fact, Lynch gives the impression at times that the practical reasons we would offer for preferring inference to the best explanation over consulting the Bible would also be robust "internal to the perspective" of the creationist. However, some texts in the literature suggest that perhaps Lynch was too optimistic about this (Kappel 2012; Lavorerio 2021). According to this part of the bibliography, there might be reasons within the belief system of a creationist to resist the practical reasons we could offer in favor of our FEPs even assuming that they are objectively sound reasons. If so, disagreements about FEPs could qualify as deep in a dialectical sense.<sup>7</sup>

I will conclude this section by analyzing the text that marks the beginning of the modern discussion on deep disagreements. Which of the two models discussed so far is better represented in Fogelin's seminal article? Many readers have lamented the lack of clarity in the article regarding the nature of deep disagreements (Lugg, 1986; Feldman, 2005; Martin, 2019). However, I believe that our two models will also shed light on this point. Unlike the response given regarding the previously mentioned cases, the answer in this case is not to align Fogelin's concept with one or the other of the models but to show that the text contains two different concepts of deep disagreement. Fogelin inadvertently moves between characterizations of the nature of deep disagreements that are not only ambiguous but also potentially inconsistent.

Of the two models discussed in this work, it is the dialectical one that is represented more clearly. So, for example, in the last footnote of his article, he states: "In this essay I have concentrated on the deep disagreements that arise because of conflicts between belief structures" (1985, p. 8). Similarly, taking the example of abortion, in another passage, he declares that "when we inquire into the source of a deep disagreement, we do not simply find isolated propositions

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<sup>7</sup> Kappel points out, for example, that the creationist might agree that, under the veil of ignorance imposed by the method game, she would prioritize scientific methods in the parallel world W. However, she would likely disagree that this compels her to prioritize the methods of science in this world because the creationist has reasons to believe that, in this world, the Bible is the most reliable source for understanding truths about the distant past (Kappel, 2012 p. 25).

(“The fetus is a person.”), but instead a whole system of mutually supporting propositions” (1985, p. 5). Following these ideas, we can interpret the distinction between normal and abnormal argumentative contexts, which Fogelin uses to mark the distinction between shallow and deep disagreement (p. 3), as equivalent to the distinction between disagreements in which the individuals operate within belief systems that have a great number of beliefs in common (and which eventually can be the same) and disagreements in which this overlap is largely missing.

However, Fogelin’s text provides us with a potentially disruptive characterization for the systemic conception we have just outlined. It is the characterization that a deep disagreement consists of a “clash of structural propositions” (ibid. p. 94) (or, if you prefer, “structural beliefs”). We could try to accommodate the notion of “structural belief” in the just described dialectical conception, assuming that Fogelin refers here to beliefs that are fundamental to the respective belief systems but are also susceptible to rational discussion. Indeed, part of what Fogelin says about the case of abortion in the previously cited passage suggests that for him, structural propositions are indeed within the realm of reasons. In that passage, he suggests that the personhood of the fetus is a structural belief of anti-abortionists, and yet he also seems to suggest that the belief system of the anti-abortionist contains other beliefs that support it, for example, the belief that personhood is acquired by possessing an immortal soul, and that the immortal soul enters the body just after conception.

Although this interpretation has been endorsed by some readers of Fogelin’s text (Martin 2019; Lavorerio 2021), there are passages that challenge this reading. In the first place, there are passages in the text where Fogelin expresses himself as if there were, in fact, no arguments or evidence for or against structural beliefs. In one passage, Fogelin argues, for example, that disagreements about structural propositions are “immune” to appeals to facts and moral values, a claim that he exemplifies again with the case of abortion, but now in a seemingly opposite sense to the previous one: “The central issue of the abortion debate is the moral status of the fetus and that cannot be settled by an appeal to biological facts or by citing moral principles already limited to moral agents or patients” (1985, p. 5). A natural interpretation of this sentence suggests that the conviction that



a fetus is a person and the conviction that it is not, are radically underdetermined by all known biological facts and accepted moral rules. Essentially, Fogelin appears to be putting forth the same type of argument advanced by Duhem and Sartre in our initial examples. The expression “that cannot be established...” reinforces this interpretation because Fogelin appears to be adopting the necessary (allegedly) neutral point of view. Under this interpretation, what he is saying is that, regardless of the beliefs held by participants in the debate, there are no sound reasons either to affirm or to deny that the fetus is a person.<sup>8</sup> If this reading is correct, the above-discussed passage of Fogelin’s text, in which he mentions some “reasons” the anti-abortionist has for believing in the personhood of the fetus, should be reassessed. Seen from the external and supposedly neutral standpoint from which Fogelin now assesses the debate, they are not properly speaking reasons but part of the motivations (“form of life”) that led them to believe such a thing.<sup>9</sup>

An additional reason to suppose that Fogelin also posits a logical model of deep disagreement is the fact that the text suggests a reductive analysis of the disagreement on abortion and on the disagreement about negative discrimination quotas, his other example of deep disagreement. I consider an analysis ‘reductive’ when it posits that all secondary disagreements in a debate stem from a single disagreement. An interpretation of this sort encourages participants in a debate to concentrate their efforts on resolving this single disagreement because, if successful, it would ensure the resolution of the remaining secondary disagreements and, consequently, the resolution of the primary disagreement as well. The best-known example of a reductive analysis of the abortion debate is the perspective advocated by Mary Anne Warren in her classical article *On the moral and legal*

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<sup>8</sup> In fact, this passage of Fogelin’s text vividly recalls a passage from the aforementioned text by Wertheimer, which advances the view that beliefs regarding the personhood question are radically underdetermined: “But, discomfoting though it may be, people, and not just Catholics, can and sometimes do agree on all the facts about embryos and still disagree as to whether they are persons. Indeed, apparently people can agree on every fact and still disagree om whether it is a fact that embryos are human beings” (Wertheimer 1971, p. 75)

<sup>9</sup> For two authors who interpret the “framework propositions” as being fundamental, see Davson-Galle (1992) and Matheson (2021).

*status of abortion* (Warren 1973). Warren argues therein that the different secondary disagreements regarding the morality of abortion boil down to the disagreement about the fetal personhood status. This is because all compelling arguments in favor of the morality of abortion require the premise that the fetus is not a person, and all compelling arguments against it presuppose that it is.

While a detailed commentary on Warren's text is beyond our current scope, let's briefly comment, in order to better understand the functioning of a reductive analysis, her view on two prominent pro-abortion arguments. Advocates for abortion commonly ground their position on the principle of bodily autonomy, asserting that adults possess the right to make decisions about their own bodies. Extending this principle, they argue that, given the physical connection between fetuses and women's bodies during pregnancy, women should also have the right to make decisions about the fetus. However, as Warren contends, for this argument to be rationally persuasive, it necessitates the premise that fetuses are not persons. She argues, "the right to control one's body, which is generally construed as a property right (...) does not give me the right to kill innocent people whom I find on my property" (1973, p. 44). An additional argument in favor of abortion considered by Warren is the argument based on the terrible side effects stemming from the prohibition of abortion. However, as Warren argues, this argument also needs, to be convincing, the premise that fetuses are not persons: "the fact that restricting access to abortion has tragic side effects does not, in itself, show that the restrictions are unjustified, since murder is wrong regardless of the consequences of prohibiting it" (1973, p. 44).

Returning to Fogelin's text, let's note that a reductive analysis of both the abortion debate and the affirmative action debate is clearly suggested in the text. Regarding the abortion debate, he states, "the *central issue* of the abortion debate is the moral status of the fetus" (2019, p. 95; emphasis mine). Concerning the second debate, Fogelin argues that "The anti-quota argument *rests on* the assumption that only individuals have moral claims. The pro-quota argument *rests upon* the assumption that social groups can have moral claims against other social groups" (1985, p. 7; emphasis mine). But why is a reductive analysis an indicator of a logical model? Because Fogelin aims to prove that both disagreements are rationally insoluble, and

adopting a reductive analysis is the shortest path to achieving that goal: if the entire abortion debate reduces to the question of the personhood of the fetus, and the entire affirmative action debate reduces to the question of whether social groups can bear rights, and since, for Fogelin, both issues are rationally insoluble, it follows that the debates on abortion and affirmative action are also rationally insoluble.<sup>10</sup>

## **6. Do deep disagreements exist?**

So far, I have described in the abstract the central components of two alternative models of deep disagreement and how these components are present in different conceptions of the nature of deep disagreements found in the literature. However, at no point have I committed to the factual existence of both types of disagreement. While I have discussed purported examples of both variants, these instances were primarily presented to facilitate exposition. I will not go into a detailed analysis of this complex issue as the primary focus of this work is conceptual in nature. But, a brief review of the obstacles the adherents of both models could face in trying to establish the factual relevance of both models could enhance our understanding of some of their central attributes.

Let's begin with the logical model. An often-cited argument against the thesis that there are certain beliefs about which it is impossible to argue rationally is the fact that people do, in fact, engage in arguments about such beliefs (Feldman 1995, Lugg 1986, Siegel 2019). For instance, countering Wittgenstein and Reid's position that belief in the existence of the physical world is an ultimate belief, Siegel points out that Bishop Berkeley "famously argued against the existence of physical objects, urging instead a version of idealism

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that, in Warren's case, the reductive claim is not, unlike Fogelin, in service of a skeptical thesis, as she believes that the question of the moral status of the fetus is rationally decidable based on a concept of personhood shared equally by both pro-life and pro-choice groups. For her, a logical deep disagreement would only arise if someone were to challenge this fundamental concept. If that were to happen, "we would probably have to admit that our conceptual schemes were indeed irreconcilably different, and that our dispute could not be settled" (1973, p. 56). Fortunately, Warren does not expect this to occur "the concept of a person is one which is very nearly universal (to people)" (1973, p. 56).

according to which apparently physical objects are really ‘mental.’” Additionally, Siegel notes that “many others have joined Berkeley in defending one version or another of idealism and arguing against that particular hinge proposition.” What is more, “teachers of courses in the history of philosophy or metaphysics might well assign the evaluation of Berkeley’s arguments as a paper topic or offer it as a question in an essay exam” (2019 pp. 7-8). Something similar could be said about the belief in the personhood status of the fetus and its denial. There are numerous arguments in the literature on abortion for and against both propositions (cf. Boonin, 2002).

Although this type of argument is not conclusive, as people could mislead themselves in believing they are arguing rationally about the topic in question, it has the effect of imposing a burden on the defender of the ultimate status of the belief. The skeptical philosopher must demonstrate that the strength of each argument put forth for and against it is only apparent. To attain this objective, several obstacles must be overcome. Firstly, the number of reasons commonly put forth in favor and against the belief under analysis could make the challenge of analyzing them one by one formidable. But it’s not just about the number of arguments to be analyzed. The assessment made by the skeptical philosopher about particular arguments may not be shared by his audience. The philosopher might eventually evaluate as flawed arguments that the critic of ultimate beliefs deems as perfectly reasonable.

If the belief is categorized as ultimate and of the unorthodox type, the philosopher would be exempt from these obligations. As we saw in the text, according to the principle of doxastic preeminence, someone being maximally certain about a proposition a priori excludes the possibility of providing strong reasons for and against it. But there are other burdens that the philosopher must assume in this case. Firstly, it is the very principle of doxastic preeminence that should be defended against potential attacks. Some critics have recently argued that less certain beliefs can justify more certain beliefs (Ranalli, 2020; Siegel, 2021; Johnson, 2022). If these criticisms were correct, they would preclude the possibility of there being real cases of logical deep disagreements of this second variant, as one might think that, in principle, any belief could be *derived* from some other less certain belief (Wittgenstein, 1969, §1).

Secondly, it could be conceded that possessing certain beliefs with an optimal degree of certainty, as Wittgenstein argues in some passages (1969, §§341-343), is a prerequisite for any rational practice. However, those who adopt this variant of the logical model must articulate criteria to determine when commitment to a “hinge” is legitimate and when it is not. Otherwise, the model could validate the adoption of “repugnant hinges” (Ranalli, 2022), such as the moral acceptability of slavery, and turn disagreements that are merely the result of dogmatic or perverse beliefs into deep ones.

The theoretical assumptions on which the dialectical model rests may appear less contentious than those of the logical model. Thus, proponents of the dialectical model may have less difficulty showcasing specific instances of this type of disagreement. This may be true. At first glance, the conviction that there are (or there have been) disagreements that involve whole systems of beliefs may seem highly intuitive. The problem here is to establish precisely which cases these are. For example, as we have seen, Rorty claimed that the dispute between Copernicans and Ptolemaics constituted a clash of this kind. However, this claim has been challenged by some of his critics:

Bellarmino uses exactly the same epistemic system we use. About the heavens, though, we diverge—we use our eyes, he consults the Bible. Is this really an example of a coherent fundamentally different epistemic system; or is it just an example of someone using the very same epistemic norms we use to arrive at a surprising theory about the world—namely, that a certain book, admittedly written many years ago by several different hands, is the revealed word of God and so may rationally be taken to be authoritative about the heavens? (2006 p. 103-104).

If Boghossian is correct, there is not really a deep dialectical disagreement between Galileo and Bellarmine, as such a disagreement requires the confrontation of two different belief systems. Instead, the disagreement between them is merely a case in which one of the

parties, acting in an intellectually vicious way, derives a ‘surprising theory’ from the systems in which he operates.<sup>11</sup>

To respond adequately to this type of criticism, those who adhere to a dialectical model of deep disagreement should progress in specifying criteria that allow us to discriminate between cases where disputants share the same belief system and cases where they adhere to different systems. Simultaneously, the analysis of cases of deep disagreement would require a level of specificity and detail about the involved systems greater than what is typically found in the literature on deep disagreements.

## 7. Conclusion

As we have seen in this paper, the scholarship on deep disagreements presents us with a considerable number of seemingly disparate characterizations concerning the nature of these disputes. This paper was motivated by the desire to grasp what these characterizations are. Despite previous attempts in the specialized literature to address this question, they lack the clarity that comes from visualizing individual exemplars as instantiations of more general types. To attain this understanding, we initially delineated two ideal types of deep disagreements—one grounded in the concept of ultimate belief and the other in the concept of a system of beliefs. Following this, we endeavored to ascertain how prevalent characterizations of deep disagreements align with each of these models. As observed, some characterizations closely match the ideal type, while with others, the alignment is only approximate.

If the perspective we have advocated is correct, it is not possible to integrate both models into a single one. This is because if a disagreement pertains to beliefs that are beyond rational assessment, the systematicity of the debate becomes an expected yet incidental characteristic. If systematicity is to be considered an essential trait of deep disagreements, it is imperative to negate the existence of ultimate beliefs. This is crucial for comprehending the interpretation we

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<sup>11</sup> According to Adam Carter (2021, p. 104), there might be the possibility of a similar diagnosis for certain recent disagreements in the political sphere (his examples being the debate around Brexit and Trump), disagreements that we might charitably be inclined to categorize as deep in a dialectical sense.

have put forth for the text that inaugurates modern discussions on deep disagreements. If the analysis that has been advanced here is correct, there are not, in contrast to what has been commonly assumed, one single concept of deep disagreement in Fogelin's text, but two different ones. One could say that to a certain extent, the subsequent literature has done nothing but reproduce this original equivocation.

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