The Fundamental Model of Deep Disagreements

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Abstract

Deep disagreements are persistent and systematic disputes that are particularly hard to resolve. The parties defend their positions rationally, but their arguments fail to move the other. This article is concerned with how the epistemological literature construes deep disagreements. Most theories of deep disagreements in mainstream epistemology share some core commitments and think of the phenomenon similarly. Therefore, I will treat their views as one unique (albeit heterogeneous) group: *The Fundamental Model*. The Fundamental Model understands deep disagreements as *fundamental epistemic differences* between the parties (e.g. principles, perspectives, sources, hinges, norms, etc). This article offers reasons to be wary of theories included in the Fundamental Model. I first provide three desiderata that any theory attempting to make sense of deep disagreements must meet. Then, the Fundamental Model is judged on how well it meets these desiderata. The upshot is that the way most epistemologists think of deep disagreements yields significant problems. Namely, the Fundamental Model struggles to explain the array of argumentative strategies found in deep disagreements. It struggles to account for the variety of deep disagreements. And it fails to provide a plausible resolution strategy. These should make us reconsider using this model as unreflectively as they do in the epistemological literature.

Introduction

Deep disagreements are persistent and systematic disputes that are particularly hard to resolve. The parties defend their positions rationally, but their arguments fail to move the other. My

concern in this article are *theories of deep disagreements*; I am interested in how the epistemological literature construes them. Most theories of deep disagreements in mainstream epistemology share some core commitments and think of the phenomenon similarly. Therefore, I will treat their views as one unique (albeit heterogeneous) group: *The Fundamental Model*. The Fundamental Model understands deep disagreements as *fundamental epistemic differences* between the parties; hence the name. Fundamental epistemic differences can be cashed out in terms of principles (Boghossian 2006; Lynch 2010, 2012), perspectives (Hales 2006, 2014), sources (Hazlett 2014), hinges (Pritchard 2011), norms (Siegel 2011, Carter 2018), etc.

I am sceptical of the direction that theorising about deep disagreement is taking. This article aims to provide some reasons to be wary of epistemologists' treatment of the phenomenon. With that goal, I first provide three desiderata that any theory attempting to make sense of deep disagreements must meet. The Fundamental Model is judged on how well it meets these desiderata. The upshot is that the way most epistemologists think of deep disagreements yields significant problems. Namely, the Fundamental Model struggles to explain the array of argumentative strategies found in deep disagreements. It struggles to account for the variety of deep disagreements. And it fails to provide a plausible resolution strategy.

In short, epistemologists think that deep disagreements are rooted in the parties' fundamental epistemic differences[1]. I believe that this characterisation is problematic, and I aim to explain why. My goal in this article is modest; I want to draw a rudimentary metaepistemological landscape, in which theories of deep disagreements can be evaluated. Furthermore, I want to flag some shortcomings of the fundamental model in order to motivate a moderate scepticism towards views based on a fundamentalist structure.

In section (i), I characterise deep disagreements in a theoretically neutral way, by indicating some features that come up repeatedly in the literature. The next section introduces what I take to be the most prevalent group of views of deep disagreements in epistemology: The Fundamental

[1] Which is why Kinzel and Kusch call these "fundamental disagreement" (2018,45).

Model. In (iii), I present three desiderata any theory of deep disagreements should meet. The rest of the paper analyses how the Fundamental Model deals with the desiderata.

i. Deep Disagreements

In a classic paper, Robert Fogelin (1985) introduced the phrase 'deep disagreements'. The notion of deep disagreements became widespread first in argumentation theory and informal logic[2], and more recently, in analytic epistemology. Although Fogelin defines deep disagreements as rationally irresolvable disputes between contradicting framework propositions, both their resolvability and their sources are up for debate. To characterise deep disagreements in a theory-neutral way, we can point out the features most associated with them.

The most salient characteristic of deep disagreements is that they are *persistent*. Note that persistency doesn't imply irresolvability. As far as I know, the only philosopher who proposed that deep disagreements are beyond rational resolution is Fogelin (1985). Not all disputes that have resisted resolution for long are deep, but deep disagreements are particularly hard to adjudicate.

With the prevalence of cognitive bias, fallacious arguments and epistemic vices, most of our disagreements (deep or otherwise) are bound to involve some of these shortcomings[3]. However, these cognitive deficiencies, even if present, are not responsible for the intractability of deep disagreements. In other words, even if the parties were reasoning perfectly, the disagreement would remain.

The persistence of deep disagreements is connected to another remarkable feature. While in normal[4] disagreements, it is somewhat clear what kind of evidence would resolve the dispute, in deep ones this is far from obvious. It is a hallmark of deep disagreements that parties do not disagree only about the truth-value of a proposition, but also about what kind of method, evidence

[2] For a useful review of the literature see Finocchiaro (2011)
[3] See Carter (2016) Chapter 4.
[4] Following Fogelin (1985), I use the phrase "normal disagreements" to refer to non-deep disagreements.

or principle would adjudicate the dispute[5]. Because the standards of evidence are also in dispute, deep disagreements generally lack an agreed-upon method of resolution.

Furthermore, deep disagreements are *systematic*. Whereas a normal disagreement is limited to a specific area, in deep ones, exploration of the conflict brings about a cluster of interrelated disputes. Thus, when disagreeing about one issue, the parties soon realise that their dispute expands over connected issues, a kind of "ripple-effect" (Ranalli, 2018: 2)[6].

A common conjecture of the circumstances where deep disagreements germinate is that they arise when there is a clash of *worldviews*. Parties' views of crucial dominions (like metaphysics, or morality) are significantly different. Thus, it should come as no surprise that most of the examples found in the literature are between secular and religious (notably, Christian) worldviews.

Persistent and systematic disputes between different worldviews will most likely become heated. Most of the examples of deep disagreements in the literature involve controversial topics which tend to generate intense feelings and heated discussions. Deep disagreements are not necessarily polemic, but given the other features that they have, they usually are. Deep disagreements, when widespread, also tend to be polarising.

To sum up, according to the growing literature on deep disagreements, they present the following characteristics:

- they are persistent, long-standing
- they present no clear path towards resolution
- they are systematic: they show a ripple-effect
- often get heated, involve controversial topics, can lead to polarisation
- they involve different worldviews[7]

[5] See, for example, Kappel (2012), Carter (2018) and Hales (2014).
[6] See also Goldberg (2013, 1192).
[7] This list bears some similarity to the one Ranalli (2018) proposed as a list of desiderata for a theory of deep disagreements. This is to be expected given that we review the same (or very similar) literature.

Examples of deep disagreements explored in the literature are the controversies surrounding creationism (Lynch 2010, Pritchard 2011), abortion (Fogelin 1985), euthanasia (Adams 2005), the existence of God (Feldman 2007), the existence of miracles (Hazlett 2014), and the feud between Bellarmine and Galileo (Boghossian 2006, Pritchard 2011).

ii. The Fundamental Model

Theories of deep disagreements vary, sometimes significantly. However, most treatments of deep disagreements in mainstream epistemology share some core commitments and think of the phenomenon similarly. Therefore, I gather these theories in one group: *The Fundamental Model* (FM for short). All the theories included in this model conceptualise deep disagreements in lines of fundamental epistemic differences between parties. Because of this, they all show three crucial features which justify their grouping: *Propositionality*, *Layeredness* and *Symmetry*.

Propositionality

The views included in the Fundamental Model conceive disagreements (deep or otherwise) as differences in doxastic attitudes towards the same proposition. A straightforward example of this is Feldman. "Let's say that two people have a disagreement when one believes a proposition and the other denies (i.e., disbelieves) that proposition" (Feldman 2007, 144). Thus, when he reports on the religious disagreement among his students, he claims that theists and atheists "disagree about the truth of the proposition that God exists" (Feldman 2007, 142). While Feldman concentrates on the proposition "God exists", in Steven Hales's example, parties disagree over whether humans have souls (Hales 2014, 79). And Allan Hazlett invites us to "consider the proposition that God protected the tilma in 1921" (Hazlett 2014, 11).

Layeredness

The second feature of this model is its *layeredness*. With this term, I refer to the idea that a more fundamental layer in the doxastic process causes the disagreement. For example, to Hales (2006,

2014) deep disagreements occur when disputants use different epistemic methods. "Irreconcilable differences are to be located at the level of independent methods of generating noninferential beliefs which are then used as basic data for building theories that one holds in reflective equilibrium" (Hales 2014, 63).

For Lynch and Boghossian, deep disagreements are grounded in the parties' different fundamental principles, which state the reliability of sources of information used to form justified beliefs. According to Hazlett, the culprits of deep disagreements are the different testimonial sources the parties are warranted to trust to form justified beliefs. Meanwhile, Pritchard sees deep disagreement as the result of parties' opposing hinge commitments.

Symmetry

Finally, there is *symmetry*. With this term, I want to convey how all these authors present the parties' positions as having *the same epistemic structure*. The parties to a deep disagreement may have different fundamental epistemic resources, and thus, different beliefs. But, according to the FM, the disputants exhibit the same epistemic process of justifying a belief: An epistemic resource (a principle, an entitlement, a hinge) justifies using a source of information (the Bible, a blind-reviewed journal) which in turn justifies a belief.

> There is a **symmetry** of argumentation in epistemic disagreements. This is because while we don't share the same evidence in cases of deep epistemic disagreement, our epistemic principles are themselves subject to evidence that has **the same structural character** (Lynch 2010, 267).

In elaborating their examples, the epistemologists of the FM purposely and ostensibly draw a parallelism between the disputants. As a way of example, this is how Hazlett (2014) introduces his hypothetical disputants:

> Julia and Maria were raised in, and continue to be members of, different communities: Julia belongs to a community of Roman Catholics; Maria belongs to a community of secular humanists … Julia spends much of her time with other Catholics, her extended

> family and her intimate friends are Catholics, and she puts a high degree of trust in their testimony, i.e. she is disposed to believe what they believe. Julia spends much of her time with other humanists, her extended family and her intimate friends are humanists, and she puts a high degree of trust in their testimony, i.e. she is disposed to believe what they believe (Hazlett 2014, 10-11).

In the next subchapter, I argue that representing deep disagreements in the lines of *propositionality, layeredness* and *symmetry* brings problems for the FM. These should make us reconsider using this model as unreflectively as they do in the epistemological literature.

iii. Three Desiderata

I now turn to three proposed desiderata that any theory attempting to make sense of deep disagreements must meet. A theory of deep disagreements must:

1. be consistent with the way (actual and imagined) deep disagreements are carried out *argumentatively*;
2. explain the *source* of deep disagreements;
3. suggest a plausible *resolution strategy* or an explanation for why no resolution is possible.

I do not mean this list to be exhaustive; we could add other desiderata[8]. But it looks like a suitable place to start evaluating theories of deep disagreements.

First, a theory of deep disagreements should be consistent with the way that they are carried out argumentatively. That is, it must be empirically adequate, where the evidence is how people actually argue in cases of deep disagreements. The sources of evidence are abundant, ranging from books, magazine articles, blogs, YouTube videos, Reddit threads and many others. Epistemologists may protest this requirement, as they are usually concerned with the normative

[8] Ranalli also develops a list of desiderata for theories of deep disagreements. However, his desiderata are the features of the phenomenon that an appropriate theory must capture or accommodate (Ranalli 2018).

aspects of epistemic activities, rather than their description. This preference may explain why most epistemologists use toy examples, instead of engaging with case-studies from actual argumentative exchanges[9]. But, regardless of its scope, theories of disagreements predict how argumentative exchanges will develop, and inaccurate predictions are problematic for any theory.

Second, a theory of deep disagreements must give a plausible answer to what Ranalli calls *the Constitution Question*. "What do the disputants disagree over in cases of deep disagreement—that is, what are the objects of their disagreement?" (Ranalli, 2018b: 4). In general, theories of deep disagreements are theories of why they arise, i.e., *their source(s)*. Thus, it is a desideratum for a theory that the posited source is plausible.

Finally, a theory of deep disagreements should offer a way out of the dispute, a *resolution strategy*. Alternatively, it should explain why such a resolution is impossible (as Fogelin, 1985, does). Theories of disagreements should address resolution (or lack thereof), even in a hand-waving way. Most theories do, in fact, address resolution. Thus, analysing whether these are plausible is only fair. A theory of deep disagreement with an implausible resolution strategy does not stand in good ground.

Having presented the Fundamental Model and the desiderata for theories of deep disagreements, I now turn to examine how the FM deals with these desiderata. The upshot is that the FM falls short of meeting the desiderata and faces shortcomings it needs to address. Far from being unsurmountable problems, I will raise *challenges* that the epistemologist of the FM can face.

iv. Argumentative Exchanges

The first desideratum was that a theory of deep disagreements should be consistent with the way they develop argumentatively. So, which predictions does the FM make regarding the

[9] There are exceptions. Adams (2005) studies an actual disagreement, the Schiavo case, but not in the context of advancing an epistemological theory. Kinzel & Kusch (2018) study a historical, scientific disagreement precisely because they defend de-idealizing disagreements.

argumentative exchanges of a deep disagreement? And how do these predictions fare with the evidence? To answer these questions, we can compare the predictions of the FM with an actual argumentative exchange. As a real-life case of a deep disagreement over evolution, we can take the debate between Ken Ham and Bill Nye. In 2014, Bill Nye, a well-known American science communicator and mechanical engineer, visited the Creation Museum in Kentucky, USA, to debate with creationist author, Ken Ham, about the plausibility of creationism [10]. As a representative of the FM, we can see how Michael P. Lynch describes the disagreement over creationism:

> Cain and Abel, let's imagine, are having coffee and arguing about the age of the Earth. Abel asserts with great confidence that the Earth is a mere 7,000 years old. Cain, amazed, points out that Abel's claim is not justified by the evidence of the fossil record, the best explanation of which is that the Earth is far older. 'Inference to the best explanation from the fossil and historical record can work sometimes' Abel concedes, 'but the best method for knowing about the distant past is to consult the Holy Book; it overrides any other competing evidence'. Cain scoffs and rejects the book as an unreliable source for knowing about the distant past; the only reliable method, he insists, is to employ a combination of abduction and induction from the fossil and historical record' (Lynch 2010, 263).

Lynch construes deep disagreements as a conflict in fundamental epistemic principles (FEPs), which inform us of the reliability of sources. In this case, Abel takes the Bible as a fundamental source of evidence regarding the origin of the Earth ("it overrides any other competing evidence"), whereas Cain does not. But if deep disagreements occur because a party takes a source of evidence as fundamental and their counterpart does not, then the argumentative development of their dispute should reflect this difference. The FM predicts that most of Cain's arguments would revolve around discrediting the Bible as an authoritative source since it is here where the disagreement ultimately resides. Alternatively, Abel's argumentative efforts would be devoted to defending the Bible as the authoritative source he thinks it is. Because for Abel the Bible overrides any other competing evidence, he would confidently dismiss all evidence presented by Cain which contradicts the Bible. After all, Abel's FEP indicated that reading the Holy Book is *the most reliable*

[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6kgvhG3AkI

method for knowing about the distant past (Lynch 2010, 265). Thus, the predictions of the FM regarding argumentative exchanges of deep disagreements are:

1. The arguments advanced would revolve around the merits of a source of information or method for acquiring beliefs.

2. The party that defends a source as fundamental would confidently dismiss all contradictory evidence.

However, the dispute over the age of the Earth (as well as other faith-based controversies) does not always revolve around the legitimacy of the Bible as a source of evidence. The credibility of the Bible *is* a factor (and, as such, a target of many arguments), but it is hardly the only one, or even the central one. For instance, Bill Nye defends the evolutionary theory, not just by poking holes in the Bible as a source of evidence but mostly by showing how well-supported the theory of evolution is. He does so because he assumes that such a strategy can move creationists without the need to first delegitimise the Bible as authoritative on the origin of species. Although this could be a consequence of his argumentation. But if the FM is correct, this strategy would be misguided and doomed to fail. Because the Bible has overriding power over other kinds of evidence, that party will dismiss whatever contradicts it. Thus, arguing any other way than delegitimising the fundamental source (be it a sacred book or the scientific method) would be pointless.

A defendant of the Fundamental Model might claim that if arguments do not revolve around the Bible's legitimacy, it is because the parties are missing the point of the disagreement. Perhaps most people involved in deep disagreements do not realise that their dispute hinges on the legitimacy of fundamental sources. This would explain why they are so persistent and hard to resolve. But we encounter very competent and informed arguers involved in these controversies, who use argumentative strategies other than attacking or defending sources of information. Thus, the FM posits an error theory that is for me hard to accept.

Prediction number 2 also gets in trouble when considering actual cases of deep disagreements. For instance, Ken Ham does not dismiss all the evidence that contradicts the Bible; *he engages*

with it. He either reinterprets the evidence to make it fit his position or relativises it as a competing interpretation by a different religion (the religion of evolutionism). Because the FM puts all the burden of the disagreement on the reliability of sources, it predicts that someone like Ham would defend the information in the Bible *come what may*. The FM *entails* that the creationist will believe the Genesis *just because* it is in the Bible, even if he finds it (or parts of it) implausible, nonsensical or unsupported by scientific evidence. This couldn't be further from the truth. For Ham, the story of Genesis *seems right*, intuitive and, if we know how to interpret it, all the evidence points to it. Creationists generally find the creation hypothesis sensible, while also judging the old Earth theory to be absurd. Remember that for Lynch, the scientist, but not the creationist, holds the following FEP: Inference to the best explanation of the historical and fossil record is the most reliable method for knowing about the distant past. But Ham would completely agree with this principle! Ham's case (at least in the context of debating a scientist) is that the historical and fossil record *does not support an old Earth*[11].

In conclusion, the evidence does not support the predictions made by the FM. When we study actual argumentative exchanges of deep disagreements, we don't find a clash of different epistemic fundamental sources. Parties to a deep disagreement are not just defending different sources of information, but *advocating utterly different ways of making sense of a phenomenon*.

v. Sources of Deep Disagreements: The Case of Irreducible Complexity

The second desideratum pointed out that theories of deep disagreements must give adequate accounts of the source(s) of the disagreement. Following Ranalli (2018), we can divide theories of deep disagreements into two camps: The *Wittgensteinian theory* and the *fundamental epistemic theory.* The former is exemplified by Duncan Pritchard, while the latter by Michael P. Lynch. Regarding the sources of deep disagreements, both theories posit the following:

[11] Chiefly because Ham is sceptical of the reliability of the carbon-dating methods used by geologists and palaeontologists.

Fundamental Epistemic Principles Theory: deep disagreements are conflicts in the parties' *fundamental epistemic principles*.

Wittgensteinian theory: parties' holding different *hinge commitments* cause deep disagreements.

Even though both theories answer the question of sources differently, they both run into the same problem: their theories are not comprehensible enough. Even if some, perhaps most, cases of deep disagreements can fit the models laid out by these theories, others cannot. There is, at least, one paradigmatic case of deep disagreement to which both camps fail to offer a suitable explanation. I am talking about the disagreement over *Intelligent Design* in the scientific community. I want to focus on a particular strategy to defend intelligent design: *the argument from Irreducible Complexity* (henceforth, IC). This argument was first presented in the 1996 book, *Darwin's Black Box*. Its author, Michael Behe, defines *irreducibly complex systems*:

> By irreducibly complex I mean a single system composed of several well-matched, interacting parts that contribute to the basic function, wherein the removal of any one of the parts causes the system to effectively cease functioning (Behe, 1996: 39).

Behe argues that irreducibly complex systems in nature pose a severe problem for Darwinian evolution (i.e. natural selection). According to Behe, an organism showing IC cannot have any possible evolutionary precursor, making it a counterexample to Darwinism. Why does the fact that a biological system exhibits IC prevents it from having a viable evolutionary precursor? Because, Behe claims, removing one element of an IC system precludes it from performing its function, as all the elements of the system are indispensable for the function's successful execution. Thus, an evolutionary precursor lacking a part of the system is not viable; hence it would not have been selected.

There is a lot to unpack about the IC strategy (I will come back to this shortly). But my purpose now is not to assess the argumentative merits of Behe's position, or to provide an in-depth analysis of the debate. My aim here is to judge how the FM explains the sources of this disagreement.

According to Lynch, deep disagreements arise from the differences in the fundamental epistemic principles (FEPs) the parties use. In his rendering of the disagreement over the age of the Earth, Abel, the creationist, upholds the following FEP: "Reading the Holy Book is the most reliable method for knowing about the distant past" (Lynch 2010, 267). It is possible to interpret the current debate in the same lines. In this interpretation, the defendant of Intelligent Design (ID) would hold a FEP like:

> ID: Reading the Holy Book is the most reliable method for knowing about the origin of biological species.

But there is no textual evidence that Behe upholds this FEP. While he and most proponents of ID are people of faith (mostly, Christian), they do not come to their thesis of an intelligent designer through the writings of the Bible, nor individual divine intuition. The methods that scientists on both sides of the aisle use are the same; namely, inference to the best explanation from biological evidence, gathered through controlled observation and experiments in the laboratory. The advocates on each side disagree on many points, but the methods upon which they gather evidence is not one of them. Instead of having conflicting FEPs, the two sides of the debate are guided by the same FEP; That the most reliable way to know about the origin of biological species is through inferences to the best explanation of the scientific (i.e. biological, biochemical, genetic, paleontological, etc.) evidence. Parties agree on the facts involving actual biological systems (e.g. the blood-clotting cascade) but disagree on how convincing the evidence for a viable hypothetical evolutionary precursor is[12].

A defendant of the fundamental epistemic principles theory could argue that if a disagreement does not involve opposing FEPs, then it is, by definition, not deep. In this case, my criticism that Lynch's theory cannot account for the debate over ID is moot; simply, this disagreement is not deep. The same could be said, *mutatis mutandi*, about any other theory. Everyone has the prerogative of restricting the applicability of their theory. However, this does not satisfy me. If a

[12] This criticism also applies to Hales (2006, 2014) who posits different methods to get basic beliefs as the source of deep disagreements.

paradigmatic case, like the debate over ID, is not a deep disagreement according to a theory, I consider this to be a flaw of the theory.

A theory that posits conflicting FEPs as the source of deep disagreements struggles to explain their variety. This is because not all deep disagreements consist of differences in the way we get evidence. Ranalli (2018) notes that some deep disagreements involve non-epistemic normative principles (e.g. moral) or metaphysical claims that are not normative. Therefore, Lynch's theory (and any other FEP theory of deep disagreements) struggles to explain most scientific and philosophical deep disagreements where the parties are likely to hold the same fundamental epistemic principles.

For this reason, Pritchard's theory of hinge commitments seems much more promising. Pritchard's view does not propose a normative principle as the source of deep disagreements, but a *hinge proposition*. Hinge propositions are (or appear to be) empirical. According to *On Certainty,* hinge propositions are unusual because they *have the form of empirical propositions* (i.e. 'a state-of-affairs is the case') but function as norms of description (Wittgenstein 1969 #167).

The parties involved in the ID debate disagree about many propositions which could potentially function as norms of description for further empirical claims. For example, a common criticism from the proponents of ID is that Darwinists have such faith in their "naturalistic worldview", that they reject design in principle, not based on evidence. Thus, I propose a candidate for a hinge commitment which Darwinists widely hold, while proponents of ID do not:

HC1: Hypothesising a designer of nature is not scientific.

Some evolutionists seem to hold something in the neighbourhood of HC1. Thus, it may be the source of their deep disagreement with the ID proponent. However, not all Darwinists reject the designer hypothesis in principle, nor do they deem it unscientific. I am thinking specifically, but not exclusively, about theistic evolutionists. Thus, the deep disagreement continues even if the opponents of ID do not hold HC1.

We could posit a different hinge commitment, one from the ID side. Perhaps the core of the disagreement over IC is not the naturalistic assumption, but assumptions about Darwinian evolution. So, what do the defendants of ID assume about Darwinian evolution? Behe proposes IC systems as counterexamples to Darwinian evolution because they lack viable evolutionary precursors. He claims this because "the removal of any one of the parts [of the IC system] causes the system to effectively cease functioning" (Behe 2006, 353). It is, thus, assumed in the argument that a possible evolutionary precursor of an organism must 1) be composed by the same parts of its predecessor, except for one, and 2) (somehow) perform the same function and, hence, be a viable organism. Therefore, proponents of this argument see the evolutionary process as a *successive addition of parts ensuring functional continuity*. Then, a candidate for the hinge commitment that underpins the deep disagreement is HC2:

> HC2: In Darwinian evolution, the origin of complex organisms is explained *exclusively* through numerous successive *additions* of parts from viable organisms performing the same function.

It is plausible that Behe and other proponents of ID assume something along the lines of HC2, but is it a hinge commitment? HC2 has the form of an empirical proposition as well as the potential of shaping beliefs about evolution. One may even go as far as saying that proponents of ID do not doubt it. But is it *certain* for them? A way to assess whether HC2 is a hinge commitment is to ask whether it codifies the *Über Hinge Commitment*; that we are not radically and fundamentally in error in our beliefs (Pritchard 2018b, 4). I do not see how it could, as HC2 is too specific to play the role Pritchard wants hinge commitments to play. And this is the problem with his theory: a proposition that captures the crux of the disagreement will be too specific to be a hinge commitment. Besides, note how HC2 is not a metaphysical assertion (of the kind "there is an intelligent designer"). It is an assertion of what a particular theory states, a way to understand Darwinism.

vi. Resolution of Deep Disagreements

Finally, the third desideratum was to offer a plausible resolution strategy for deep disagreements. In this regard, we must again consider the two camps independently, as their proposed resolutions differ.

Lynch's Resolution Strategy

For Lynch, deep disagreements cannot be resolved through *epistemic* reasons. But, he claims, parties can invoke *practical* reasons for preferring an epistemic principle over another. In order to discern the practical reasons for choosing between competing epistemic principles, Lynch proposes a procedure he calls "*the Method Game"*. The Method Game takes inspiration from Rawls' idea that rational individuals will choose the appropriate distributive justice principles if they were to choose them under 'the veil of ignorance'. In Lynch's version of this hypothetical collective decision exercise, epistemically rational subjects must decide which epistemic principles they will use in a parallel world, W, where they will live in the future. The subjects are ignorant of their future social circumstances in W: "they don't know their educational level, their ethnicity, their social class" (Lynch 2013, 354). Importantly, they know that, even if their experiences in W will be indiscernible to their experiences in the actual world, they don't know "which principles will be true in W. They do not know which methods are more likely to result in true beliefs" (Idem). In this situation, Lynch argues, subjects will judge the candidates for privileged[13] epistemic principles by prioritising self-interest. Given that the capacity of forming true beliefs is beneficial, subjects will want to use the epistemic principles, methods and practices that are the most likely to deliver true beliefs about the facts of W, whatever they may be. He concludes that:

> … were we to play the method game, it would seem in our self-interest to favour privileging those methods that, to the greatest degree possible, were *repeatable*, *adaptable*, *public*, and *widespread* (Lynch 2010, 275).

[13] About privileged epistemic principles Lynch says: "an epistemic principle is privileged when it is worthy of teaching in the schools, used in evaluating research, and seen as trumping other, possibly conflicting methods" (Lynch 2010, 275).

Lynch's motivation for the Method Game is to separate the discussion over the merits of epistemic principles from the discussion over which worldview is correct. By removing the epistemic principles from the actual world and placing them into a parallel one, we are untethered from the facts of our world. Thus, we must weigh the merits of the FEPs beyond their supposed reliability.

The problem I see with this resolution strategy is that the merits of our epistemic principles cannot be assessed independently from the perceived facts of the world. Why does Abel uphold the epistemic principle that reading the Holy Book is the most reliable method for knowing about the distant past? Because he believes that there is a God who created Earth and revealed itself to prophets of the past. The methods we use to know about the world are inseparable from how we think the world is. Thus, blinding ourselves to the facts of the world (as we would do if we played the Method Game) would not improve our judging abilities, but hinder them. As Klemens Kappel says:

> The root of the matter is that most epistemic principles are fact-dependent. Whether they are true or not depend on facts about the world. If we ignore what we know about the world, criteria for the choice of epistemic principles such as those defended by Lynch simply leaves the choice of privileged epistemic or doxastic practices underdetermined (Kappel 2012, 22).

One could argue that the features sanctioned by Lynch (repeatability, adaptability, publicity, and being widespread) are independent of the principle's reliability. For this reason, these features can function as criteria for preferring some epistemic principles regardless of facts. So, instead of judging Abel's principle based on whether it tracks the facts of the world, we could discuss whether such a principle is public, widespread or repeatable. Therefore, even though Cain cannot offer Abel epistemic reasons for abandoning his epistemic principle, he could nevertheless argue that such a method is not public. Consulting the Bible is a public method; everyone can read it. But the Bible's privileged status depends on revelation, and only very few people have received information from God (on the record, at least). If an epistemic method is not public, then not everyone can judge its effectiveness. Publicity, thus, seems to be a factor independent of the facts

of the world: whatever the world is like, we should want everyone to be able to judge our epistemic methods.

The problem is that whether publicity is a merit of an epistemic principle and not a flaw also hinges on how we take the world to be. Privileging the publicity of epistemic principles assumes that everyone is (roughly) equally good (or equally bad) at getting true beliefs, or at judging the effectiveness of epistemic methods. But whether this is true or not depends on the facts of the world. Perhaps there is a God, and it communicates only to a select group through divine intuition. Then, the method of revelation would not be public (or widespread). This, however, would not speak against it, as it would ultimately deliver true beliefs. Furthermore, if W were like this, then it would be in our best self-interest to privilege this non-public method when playing the Method Game, even if we ignore whether we will be among the lucky few who get to hear God's word. It is better to be a conscious ignorant than an unaware one. Therefore, whether publicity is a practical reason for preferring an epistemic principle depends on the facts of the world, and thus cannot be determined 'behind the veil of ignorance'. We can make a similar case for the other features Lynch mentions: repeatability, adaptability and being widespread.

To conclude, Lynch wants to offer criteria for judging epistemic principles beyond their reliability. But this project is doomed, as the facts of the world determine how creditable epistemic principles, methods and practices are.

Pritchard's Resolution Strategy

Pritchard construes deep disagreements as grounded in different hinge commitments. Because he sees hinge commitments as immune to reason, deep disagreements cannot be resolved "head-on", that is, a party cannot offer reasons for or against a hinge commitment.

> Throwing more and more arguments and evidence at the religious believer is not going to change her religious conviction. One's hinge commitments, recall, are immune to rational considerations, **at least directly** (Pritchard, 2018a: 33).

Nevertheless, Pritchard argues that rational resolution of deep disagreements is possible, due to two features of his account of hinge epistemology. The first is the inevitable overlap between people's hinge commitments, which provides a common ground the parties can leverage to argue their way out of the disagreement (Pritchard 2018b, 7). The other feature is Pritchard's conception of hinge commitments. In Pritchard's view, we can distinguish three kinds of convictions: beliefs, which are responsive to reasons, hinge commitments, which are not, and an underlying conviction that he calls *Über Hinge Commitment:*

> What all of our hinge commitments have in common is that they are manifestations of an overarching commitment that we are not radically and fundamentally in error in our beliefs. I refer to this as the *über hinge commitment*. The idea is that, given the über hinge commitment and one's wider set of beliefs, this general commitment will manifest itself as a commitment towards a range of specific propositions. Exactly which propositions will depend on one's set of beliefs (Pritchard 2018b, 4).

The über hinge commitment (ÜHC) is the same for everyone: the conviction that each of us is not radically mistaken about our beliefs. But since everyone has different beliefs, the ÜHC gets codified in different hinge commitments. Therefore, a hinge commitment is an in-between entity which mediates the terrain of what can change easily via evidence and reasons (i.e. beliefs), and what is, by logical and psychological necessity, immutable: the ÜHC. We cannot alter hinge commitments by appealing to reasons, but we can change them through a transformation in beliefs. When enough beliefs have changed, the hinge commitments which codify the ÜHC will change accordingly. Therefore, Pritchard's indirect method to resolve deep disagreements is through the massive modification of beliefs. But how does this change occur?

> If they are both [parties] in principle open to counterevidence—and so genuinely engaged in a conflict of belief—then there is no reason why this dispute cannot be epistemically resolved at some point (Pritchard 2011, 281)

According to Pritchard, people rationally change their beliefs because of evidence or counterevidence. He takes evidence to be a neutral court upon which different positions can be

assessed. This can (and probably should) be the case in most disputes. But in deep disagreements, it is not that easy. Pritchard is rightly concerned with how confronting evidence can change our beliefs, hence reshaping our hinge commitments. But he does not consider how our hinge commitments shape what we accept as evidence and what we do not. For example, Bill Nye has, by his own admission, read the Bible twice. And yet he has not found any piece of evidence in it that would make him reconsider his beliefs about the origins of the Earth. Nye's reluctance is not due to dogmatism or close-mindedness, but because whatever his hinge commitments are, they preclude an ancient book from being considered evidence in this domain.

But is Nye entitled to dismiss the information in the Bible as non-evidence? In his 2009 article "Defusing Epistemic Relativism", Pritchard considers how permissible a certain kind of dogmatism is. The epistemic dogmatism he is concerned with is one that "allow[s] one to discount all counterarguments and counterevidence that those from different epistemic frameworks might offer" (Pritchard 2009, 407). He reconstructs what he takes to be the relativist's best case for epistemic dogmatism thus:

> P1. S has excellent framework-relative grounds for believing p.
>
> P2. S competently deduces from p that any putative evidence against p is misleading, thereby coming to believe that any putative evidence against p is misleading while retaining her belief.
>
> C1. S has excellent framework-relative grounds for believing that any putative evidence against p is misleading (Pritchard 2009, 408).

Pritchard denies that C1 licences epistemic dogmatism. C1 only states that it is reasonable to treat counterevidence as possibly misleading, and hence "treated with caution". "There is a big difference, however, between treating putative counterevidence with caution and disregarding it out-of-hand in advance" (Pritchard 2009, 409). For Prichard, epistemic dogmatism is disregarding evidence out-of-hand in advance because you have a (possibly rational) belief that it is misleading.

But is Nye disregarding the Bible out-of-hand? Why would he read it carefully if he were? Although I do not doubt that many (perhaps most) people in divisive controversies disregard counterevidence out-of-hand, this is not the case in deep disagreements. Deep disagreements are argumentative, and one cannot argue (not much, at least) if one does not engage with what the other party considers to be evidence. Nye did not change his mind about the origins of the Earth after reading the Bible. Not because he disregarded the information written there out-of-hand, nor because he had good reasons to consider it wrong (which he does). Nye did not change his mind after reading the Bible because he cannot find the story of Genesis even remotely plausible. Even if Nye approaches the Bible with an open mind and treated the information within it at face-value, and not with caution or suspicion. Neither Nye nor Ham dismisses the other party's position because it contradicts what they already believe about the issue. Even if they bracketed their beliefs about the origins of the Earth, and acted, at least for argument's sake, as agnostic towards the issue, what they hear from the other side is, in a profound sense, *unbelievable and absurd*.

In conclusion, it is not an issue of whether Nye is justified in disregarding the evidence Ham provides (i.e. whether epistemic dogmatism is warranted). In Nye's eyes, what the Bible and its defenders offer as evidence is, in some cases, utterly unconvincing and, in others, *not really evidence*. Prichard underestimates how contentious the concept of evidence is in deep disagreements. Parties hold radically different understandings of what counts as evidence, reasons and arguments in the dispute. Underestimating this difference risks prescribing a resolution virtually impossible to achieve.

Conclusion

In reviewing the most influential views of deep disagreements in the epistemological literature, we see a particular pattern emerge: deep disagreements are conceptualised in terms of propositionality, layeredness and symmetry. These theories can be subsumed into a model which I called the Fundamental Model (FM). Although the theories included in the FM show significant

variety, they all conceive deep disagreements as grounded in differences between the parties' *fundamental epistemic resources* (e.g. principles, sources, hinges, etc.).

I laid down three desiderata that all theories of deep disagreement should meet: to be consistent with the way they are carried out argumentatively, to provide a plausible account of the source(s) of the disagreement, and that they give a viable resolution strategy. Reflecting on how the FM deals with the desiderata lead me to conclude that conceptualising deep disagreement along the lines of the Fundamental Model is flawed in deep-rooted ways.

- The FM cannot explain the array of argumentative strategies found in deep disagreements beyond challenging and defending sources of information.
- The FM struggles to find the source of deep disagreements beyond differences in fundamental epistemic resources.
- The FM fails to find a plausible resolution of deep disagreements.

Attention to real-life cases of deep disagreements, instead of toy examples, suggests not a fundamentalist structure of our thought, but a more systemic and distributed picture of our beliefs. For example, when we observe real-life cases, we see that argumentation in deep disagreements tends not 'top-down', i.e. from beliefs to fundamental principles, or 'bottom-up', i.e. from fundamental principles to beliefs. Deep disagreements involve a host of beliefs, not all of which relate directly to the legitimacy of sources of information. What the FM overlooks is that the parties to a deep disagreement are not just defending divergent sources of information, but advocating utterly different ways of making sense of a phenomenon.

One aspect that we see in all cases of deep disagreements is a sense of perplexity from the parties directed at the other party's position. This perplexity is, in most cases, not caused by unfamiliarity. Because deep disagreements are long-standing, whoever engages in an argumentative exchange with someone on the other side of the controversy is already familiar with at least their most popular talking points. People like Ken Ham or Bill Nye are informed about the other side of the debate. And still, we encounter bewilderment, surprise and disbelief at what the other party is saying. This is because deep disagreements have as much to do with evidence, preferred sources

and epistemic methods, as they do with 'common sense' and intuition. Which is why words like 'absurd', 'obvious' or 'nonsense' are commonplace in deep disagreements.

The fact that both theories reviewed run into problems with their proposed resolutions should not make us jump to the conclusion that deep disagreements are beyond resolution. They are not. People change their minds regularly, sometimes drastically. Thus, an account of deep disagreements must offer a *feasible* resolution. But also show that resolution is *challenging*. Deep disagreements are not resolved in the same way as normal ones because they involve a level of complexity that normal disagreements lack. Therefore, an account of deep disagreements can be flawed when it either shows no route for resolution or a too easy one.

In conclusion, theories of deep disagreements which represent them as involving fundamental differences between the parties (i.e., the FM) faces serious problems which should make us reconsider using this model as unreflectively as they do in the epistemological literature.

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