

## Wittgenstein and the Logic of Deep Disagreement

### Wittgenstein y la lógica del desacuerdo profundo

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**Abstract:** In “The logic of deep disagreements” (*Informal Logic*, 1985), Robert Fogelin claimed that there is a kind of disagreement – deep disagreement – which is, by its very nature, impervious to rational resolution. He further claimed that these two views are attributable to Wittgenstein. Following an exposition and discussion of that claim, we review and draw some lessons from existing responses in the literature to Fogelin’s claims. In the final two sections (6 and 7) we explore the role reason can, and sometimes does, play in the resolution of deep disagreements. In doing this we discuss a series of cases, mainly drawn from Wittgenstein, which we take to illustrate the resolution of deep disagreements through the use of what we call “rational persuasion.” We conclude that, while the role of argumentation in “normal” versus “deep” disagreements is characteristically different, it plays a crucial role in the resolution of both.

**Keywords:** deep disagreement, Robert Fogelin, form of life, reason, *Weltbild*, Ludwig Wittgenstein.

**Resumen:** En “The logic of deep disagreements” (*Informal Logic*, 1985), Robert Fogelin sostuvo que hay un tipo de desacuerdo –el desacuerdo profundo– que es, por su misma naturaleza, impermeable a la resolución racional. Sostiene además que estas dos perspectivas son atribuidas a Wittgenstein. Siguiendo una exposición y discusión de esta perspectiva, reseñamos y obtenemos algunos aprendizajes de las respuestas existentes en la literatura a la perspectiva de Fogelin. En las dos últimas secciones (6 y 7) exploramos el rol que la razón puede, y a veces en efecto lo hace, jugar en la resolución de desacuerdos profundos. Para realizar esto discutimos una serie de ca-

esos, principalmente obtenidos de Wittgenstein, que tomamos para ilustrar la resolución de un desacuerdo profundo a través del uso de lo que llamamos “persuasión racional”. Concluimos que, mientras el papel de la argumentación en desacuerdos “normales” y “profundos” es característicamente diferente, juega un rol crucial en la resolución de ambos.

**Palabras clave:** desacuerdo profundo, Robert Fogelin, forma de vida, razón, *Weltbild*, Ludwig Wittgenstein.

The belief as formulated on the evidence can only be the last result – in which a number of ways of thinking and acting crystallize and come together. (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *LC*, p. 56).

## 1. Introduction

In “The logic of deep disagreements” (*Informal Logic*, 1985), Robert Fogelin described a kind of disagreement – deep disagreement – which, he claimed, is by its very nature impervious to rational resolution (p. 7). He further claimed that the conception of some disagreements as deep and the claim that these are irresolvable by rational means is attributable to Wittgenstein. “My thesis, or rather Wittgenstein’s thesis,” Fogelin wrote (p. 5), “is that deep disagreements cannot be resolved through the use of argument, for they undercut the conditions essential to arguing.”

This paper explores a Wittgenstenian perspective on deep disagreements. We begin (in Sections 2 and 3) by considering Fogelin’s account and noting some of its overtly Wittgenstenian components. Section 4 clarifies the nature and scope of deep disagreements and their relation to understanding, in order to specify the role that reason can be expected to play in their resolution. Section 5 summarizes and critically evaluates the existing optimistic claims concerning the prospects for a rational resolution of deep disagreements. We argue that the optimists largely misconstrue the nature of deep disagreement, or of reason itself, and thereby misrepresent the role reason can play in their resolution. Finally (in Section 6) we analyse a variety of cases, taken mainly from Wittgenstein, in an effort to gain some insight into the actual operation of reason in disagreements having depth. We conclude (Section 7) with some remarks about the relationship between agreement and reason in the resolution of disagreements both deep and normal.

## 2. The Nature of Deep Disagreement

Highly elliptical conversation, planning and highly enthymematic reasoning and argument, Fogelin (1985: 3) observed, is made possible only by the great many beliefs and preferences shared by the participants. Fogelin (p. 3) described their role in argument as follows:

They guide the discussion, but they are not themselves the subject of it. ... They provide the framework or the structure within which reasons can be marshaled, where marshaling reasons is typically a matter of citing facts in a way that their significance becomes clear.

Recognizing the role of this “rich background of agreement” (p. 4), Fogelin distinguished between normal (or near-normal) argumentative exchanges and deep disagreements. Normal arguments (p. 3) share two characteristic features: (i) they occur within this background context of broadly shared beliefs and preferences and (ii) there exist shared procedures for resolving them. While Fogelin does not explicitly state this, it seems reasonable to suppose that these resolution-procedures are at least grounded in, if not articulated among, these shared background commitments (cf. Adams 2005: 69).

Deep disagreements, by contrast, are not indicated by their rhetorical or emotional intensity or by their resolvability. Normal disagreements can be irresolvable due, for example, to the ignorance or intransigence of their participants. That said, disagreements which are deep are characteristically and abnormally resolution-resistant in that they “are immune to appeals to facts” and tend to “persist even when normal criticisms have been answered” (Fogelin, 1985: 5).

According to Fogelin, deep disagreements are instead distinguished by an absence of any relevant shared background commitments. Fogelin (p. 5) described this as a clash of “underlying principles” or “framework propositions.” Rather than involving differences of opinion on isolated issues, Fogelin (pp. 5-6) described them as follows:

when we inquire into the root of a deep disagreement, we do not simply find isolated propositions ... but instead a whole system of mutually supporting propositions (and paradigms, models, styles of acting and thinking) that constitute, if I may use the phrase, a form of life.

Deep disagreements, then, are not *inter-framework* disagreements occurring within a framework, language game or form of life, but rather are defined as *intra-framework* disagreements occurring across different frameworks, language games or forms of life.

So far, it might seem as though deep disagreements are wide as well, involving whole systems of claims. Yet Fogelin's examples (the abortion debate and the issue of affirmative action quotas) indicate that the depth of a disagreement may not be due to its breadth. Davson-Galle (1992: 153) concluded that deep disagreements might be isolated to a single claim (an ultimate premise, methodological principle or primitive rule of inference), just so long as that claim is genuinely basic or primary.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Adams (2005: 69) gave an example of a seemingly narrow but deep disagreement, claiming that so long as "there exists no decision-procedure or other method for resolving [an] inconsistency [of opinions or judgments], the disagreement between the two disputants is deep."<sup>2</sup>

On Fogelin's picture, background or framework commitments provide the fixed context in which argument can occur, and in which differences of opinion can be articulated and settled. As such, Fogelin treats them as argumentatively basic, or primitive – while they guide the activity of reasoning, they are not subject to it. Instead, Fogelin claimed that "the significance of all of our argumentative devices is internal to normal (or near normal) argumentative contexts" (p. 4).

Since the marshaling of reasons is an inter-framework procedure, this means of resolution is unavailable in the situation of deep disagreement. As a consequence, "to the extent that the argumentative context becomes less normal, argument, to that extent, becomes impossible," and genuinely deep (intra-framework) disagreements are "by their nature, not subject to rational resolution" (Fogelin, 1985: 4-7).

<sup>1</sup> Such a basic difference might clearly have repercussions across the system(s), but any other differences would be traceable to this single difference, and shallow in relation to it. In this way, each party might agree that, were the difference on this one point settled, their other differences would also be settled as a consequence.

<sup>2</sup> Davson-Galle (p. 153) observes that the existence of a shared decision procedure does not, in and of itself, provide sufficient resources for the resolution of disagreements – so long as the decision procedure itself is not decisive or can be properly applied in several incompatible ways.

### 3. Wittgenstenian Elements of Fogelin's Picture: Preliminary Observations

To what extent is Fogelin's picture genuinely Wittgenstenian? What are its Wittgenstenian elements?

First, Wittgenstein (*PI* p. 225) accepted that there is a kind of disagreement (e.g., over the correct result of a calculation) which Fogelin would later call "highly normal." These disagreements, Wittgenstein claimed, can be decided 'with certainty;' yet he also claimed that disputes of this kind are essentially "rare and of short duration" and thus not normally characteristic of ordinary argumentative situations. Highly normal disagreements are a-typical and, for the most part, straightforwardly uninteresting both philosophically and argumentatively.

Fogelin further claimed that deep disagreements arise from, and amount to, differences in forms of life. If this is so, then it would seem that they are genuinely basic, or fundamental differences, for Wittgenstein (*PI*, p. 226) held that "What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – forms of life." What is basic, for Wittgenstein – what lies at the end of all paths of justification and reason-giving are ways of doing – sets of practices learned through training (*OC* § 110; cf. §§ 204, 559; *PI* § 217).

A second Wittgensteinian element of Fogelin's picture is the idea that argumentative words have their meaning only within some roughly fixed and established framework of linguistic and other normative practices. Indeed, the very evidentiary and semantic relationships drawn upon in argument, and used to identify and evaluate reasons, are inter-framework relationships (*OC* §§ 105, 82; *AWL*, p. 26).

These two ideas – that forms of life are basic and that reason-giving argument can only occur within a system – come together in Wittgenstein's notion of a *Weltbild* ("world-picture").

Roughly, for Wittgenstein, in learning our mother tongue we become enculturated into a form of life which is comprised of a rich set of ways-of-doing and an attendant *Weltbild*. This, in turn, amounts to learning a vast set of beliefs about the world (*OC* §§ 83, 141). The *Weltbild* and the way of life are connected through the very grammar of language (*OC* § 140). While providing a certain description of the world (if you will), the *Weltbild* we learn is not something which we rationally accept by a process of reasoning,

experiment or argumentation (*OC* § 94). Rather it is simply acquired in the process of learning a language – through practice, imitation, training and instruction (*OC* § 144). To learn a language is, to use Austin’s phrase, to learn how to do things with words, and this involves not only, e.g., expressing feelings, asking questions, giving instructions and telling stories, but making judgments and inferences as well. For example, we learn concepts by learning to apply them in certain ways (rather than others), and this typically involves making and accepting certain judgments, and not making, or rejecting, others (*OC* §§ 81, 82). It not only within this set of practices, but against this background *Weltbild*, that our actual inquiry, discovery, debate and argumentation occurs (*OC* §§ 162, 167).

If deep disagreements are really intra-framework disagreements arising from different forms of life and world-pictures, then they seem well beyond the scope rational mediation. It would seem, then, that there are pronouncedly Wittgensteinian elements to the picture Fogelin presents, and that, initially, these elements support the thesis that no rational resolution to deep disagreements is possible.

#### **4. The Nature of Deep Disagreement Revisited: A Partly Corrosive Clarification of the Problem**

To use Campolo’s (2007: 1) apt phrase, then, Fogelin’s thesis is that “there is a kind of disagreement which will always turn our spade” – which is constitutively impervious to rational resolution. Yet, why call this disagreement at all? What makes disagreement possible, if resolution – indeed the conditions essential to the marshaling of reasons – is impossible?

##### **4.1. Fathoming the Depths of Deep Disagreement**

Not all differences are disagreements. Disagreement is the contrary of agreement. Thus, it would seem that disagreement is only possible where agreement is also possible. Yet, agreement is only possible where understanding is possible, and understanding, being the result of successful communica-

tion, is only possible where communication is possible. So, it would seem that there are a number of important preconditions to what might be called *meaningful disagreement*.

Whatever other differences can occur, I cannot disagree with a lion (*PI*, p. 223). I can ‘differ’ (if you will) with him. I can be ‘opposed’ by him; he can obstruct me or hinder me. But when I ‘differ’ with a lion it is because I cannot ‘find my feet’ with him. I cannot communicate with him at all; we do not share a form of life. Because of this, I cannot reason with him either. But nor can I ask him questions, give him instructions, or tell him a story. Now there may be people with whom we cannot ‘find our feet.’ Yet, it is no failure of rational argumentation that it cannot resolve differences between parties incapable of communicating with each other.

Rational disagreements (and their attendant failures), then, can only occur within the context of meaningful disagreements. The ability to meaningfully disagree with one another is partly rooted in our ability to understand one another. And understanding, like other linguistic abilities, is, according to Wittgenstein, rooted in a common set of activities and practices. “The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language” (*PI* § 205; cf. *PI* §§ 23, 99). Thus, in order for meaningful disagreement to occur, a significant amount of mutual understanding and shared behaviour must already exist and operate in the background to provide the framework in which communication can occur.

This seems to place a lower limit on the extent to which disagreement can occur. People whose forms of life, and their attendant *Weltbild*, do not sufficiently intersect cannot disagree – not even deeply. As such, as much as such differences cannot rationally be repaired, it is no failure of rationality or rational argumentation that it cannot span a gulf which language itself cannot traverse. As Lugg (1986: 47) rightly points out, “the interesting case is the one in which individuals are able to argue yet unable to settle their differences, i.e., the case in which there exists a framework for disagreement but not one for bringing about its resolution.” Meaningful deep disagreements seem to occur either at the intersection of two different but overlapping forms of life, or within a single but heterogenous *Weltbild*, where different, similar but incompatible language games are in play.

## 4.2 Disagreement and Understanding

If someone doubted whether the earth had existed a hundred years ago, I should not understand, for *this* reason: I would not know what such a person would still allow to be counted as evidence and what not. (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *OC* § 231)

Suppose, then, that there were two peoples, otherwise alike in practices, each of whom had the homophonic utterance “blah.” Suppose further that in one culture utterances of this sort prompted ‘affirming behaviour,’ whatever that might turn out to be, say, nodding the head and smiling. But in the other culture, suppose that this same utterance prompted ‘rejecting behaviour,’ say, shaking the head and frowning. (Notice that the very *detectability* of any disagreement, deep or otherwise, presupposes some shared practices including asserting and denying, accepting and rejecting.) What reason have we for saying that the two peoples *disagree* about the acceptability of the *same* claim, assertion or proposition? First we require some evidence that the two homophonic utterances *have the same meaning* in the two different language games.

Consider now that a variety of other utterances employed by each of the two peoples were considered in series, yet for each of these there was absolutely no accord as to whether the newly considered expression was positively relevant, negatively relevant, or irrelevant to the original target expression. At some point, we will reach the conclusion not that these peoples disagree deeply about the acceptability of some claim, but instead that they mean two completely different things by this homophonic expression. The very same evidence that points to the conclusion that they disagree deeply about something, also points to the conclusion that they are doing different things with that expression.

Considerations such as these might lead one to the Davidsonian ([1974] 2001) conclusion that radically different conceptual schemes are either *a priori* impossible (since translatability is a condition of truth specification) or methodologically precluded (since attempts at understanding demand hermeneutic charity). Against this, Hacker (1996) claims that pronounced differences in conceptual schemes are not only conceivable but are distinct from differences of opinions. A disagreement in concepts, Hacker (pp. 302-303) writes:

is akin to a disagreement in measures, whereas a disagreement in judgments is akin to a disagreement in measurements. [But] Is it intelligible to claim that we can *never* allocate an apparent difference in judgement to a difference in the measure used, as opposed to a disagreement in the measurement executed? That is tantamount to the claim that we cannot distinguish between the determination of a sense and the application of a sense.

While such classifications cannot always be made with confidence in problematic cases, it turns out that this distinction becomes crucial to appreciating the nature and depth of deep disagreements. Normal disagreements are like disagreements about measurements (the application of concepts), while deep disagreements arise from differences in measures (the determination or adoption of concepts).

If deep disagreements involve differences in the determination of concepts, can they be meaningful? On Wittgenstein's transitional account of meaning, propositions belonging to different *Satzsysteme* cannot have the same meaning.<sup>3</sup> For example, suppose that "[t]he meaning of a proposition is the method of its verification" (Schlick, 1936: 341; cf. p. 351; cf. Wittgenstein *PR* § 43; *WWK* pp. 243 ff.). On this picture, just as there are no meaningful problems (questions) which are in principle insoluble; nor are there any meaningful disagreements which are in principle irresolvable. Here there is no possibility for meaningful, deep disagreement.

One might be tempted to think, then, that when expressions belong to different language games there is similarly no prospect for meaningful deep disagreement. This would be a mistake. The mature Wittgenstein held that, while language use is a rule-governed activity, the meaning of an expression is "not everywhere circumscribed by rules" (*PI* §§ 68 ff.) and using language is not "operating a calculus according to definite rules" (*PI* § 81). Deep disagreements occur when there is a partial but incomplete accord in the disputants' use of an expression as well as a partial but significant variation. The depth of a disagreement is due to fact that some aspects of the use of an

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of Wittgenstein's "*Satzsysteme* conception of language" and its relationship to a verificationist account of meaning see Shanker (1987: 40 ff.) and Medina (2001). We take *Satzsysteme* to be the conceptual ancestors of language games (cf. Shanker 1987: 9 and *passim*).

expression are either indeterminate or incongruous (e.g., disputants might disagree about what should count as evidence for the claim). The meaningfulness of a disagreement is due to the similarities in the use of an expression (e.g., disputants might agree about the consequences of the acceptability of the claim). Thus, deep disagreements tend to occur on the fringes of understanding. Importantly, these are the very features that make deep disagreements impervious to the normal operations of reasons and evidence.

To illustrate this type of case, consider an example Wittgenstein (*LC*, pp. 55-56) contemplated during his *Lectures on Religious Belief* (c. 1938) about a religious person who believes in Judgement Day and a person who does not.

If you ask me whether or not I believe in a Judgement Day, in the sense in which religious people have belief in it, I wouldn't say "No. I don't believe there will be such a thing." It would seem to me utterly crazy to say this. And then I give an explanation: "I don't believe in ...", but then the religious person never believes what I describe. I can't say. I can't contradict that person. In one sense, I understand all he says – the English words "God", "separate", etc. I understand. I could say: "I don't believe in this," and this would be true, meaning I haven't got these thoughts or anything that hangs together with them. But not that I could contradict the thing. You might say "Well, if you can't contradict him, that means you don't understand him. If you did understand him, then you might [contradict him, or agree with him]." That again is Greek to me. My normal technique of language leaves me. I don't know whether to say they understand one another or not. These controversies look quite different from any normal controversies. Reasons look entirely different from normal reasons. They are, in a way, quite inconclusive. The point is that if there were evidence, this would in fact destroy the business. Anything that I normally call evidence wouldn't in the slightest influence me.

While normal controversies might be settled by the evidence, this controversy would require being persuaded to acknowledge the determination of a new concept of evidence. Yet, Wittgenstein does not say that such a disagreement is impervious to the operations of reason; rather he claims that reasons function differently in such cases.

In Section 6 we consider some cases Wittgenstein offered as illustrations of the way reasons actually function in the resolution of disagreements

which might be called “deep.” Before doing this, though, we review and, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, critically evaluate the existing accounts of the role of reasons in resolving deep disagreements.

## **5. Prospects for the Rational Resolution of Deep Disagreements**

Fogelin’s respondents can be divided into optimists and pessimists according to whether they find there to be good prospects for the rational resolution of deep disagreements.

### **5.1. Theoretical and Methodological Reasons for Optimism**

Fogelin’s initial respondent, Lugg (1986) argued that even in cases of deep disagreement, non-rational persuasion is not the only means available to the disputants. Instead, he offers an account, ably described by Turner and Wright (2005: 31), whereby “interlocutors can build to a common understanding by retreating to neutral ground, untangling, coordinating and synthesizing ideas, examining assumptions reviewing alternative proposals and negotiating conflicting demands.” Further, Lugg reminds us that in many cases the rational resolution to a disagreement may be suspension of judgment (and perhaps an accompanying resumption of inquiry) rather than the endorsement or rejection of the claim(s) at issue.

Ultimately, Lugg (p. 50) seeks to wrest us of Fogelin’s picture that “argumentative exchanges must be always normal (and hence rational) or nonrational (because abnormal).” To this end, Lugg recommends that we take a new perspective on the role of agreement in argumentation. “What we happen to agree upon is important because it provides a starting point for discussion between us, not because it dictates what the outcome of our discussion should be” (Lugg, p. 49). Agreement, for Lugg, is best conceived of as a goal or accomplishment of argumentation, rather than a necessary starting place or precondition of argumentation.

Taking a rationalist, epistemic approach Feldman (2005: 19) construes deep disagreements as “disagreement[s] about a framework proposition.” The kernel of Feldman’s argument is his denial of the claim that “framework propositions are somehow beyond rational assessment” (p. 21) which

he sees as being at the root of Fogelin's thesis that no rational resolution is available for deep disagreements. Normal disagreements are rationally resolvable, and deep disagreements differ from normal ones only in that they are about framework propositions. Yet, Feldman argues (p. 20) that any account of the difference between framework propositions and ordinary ones is either implausible or fails to place framework propositions beyond rational assessment.

Finally, Memedi (2007) argued that another resource available might be to introduce a "third party" to the discursive situation of the deep disagreement, in such a way that this third party might serve as the genuine audience of the disputants, and a rational arbiter thereby 'normalizing' the dispute.

## 5.2. Prudential Reasons for Optimism

Adams (2005: 67) argues that, from the point of view of the participant arguers, there is an epistemic problem about "knowing when a disagreement is deep," and that in this context "the parties to ... [such disputes] have strong reasons to commit to the idea that they can be rationally resolved in spite of the possibility that such disagreements might ultimately turn out to be deep in Fogelin's sense."

In support of this view, Adams claims that parties to a dispute ought not to be satisfied with a consensus achieved through non-rational persuasion. Such a resolution, he claims (p. 74), is both substantively and procedurally problematic. "Consensus' is not simply the name of an outcome but an achievement – something produced by a form of collective ... reflection and deliberation, a process of being mutually convinced by reasons" (p. 73). Further, since the only distinguishing feature of deep disagreement is "exhausting [all] the possible resources of normal discourse" (p. 76), there is no *a priori* way of determining whether a disagreement is genuinely deep. "The only way, in other words, to come to know whether discourse is normal is to proceed as if it is" (p. 76), and to do otherwise is to abandon reason. Because of this, Adams argues that even when a disagreement *appears* to be deep, by being intractable and resolution-resistant, disputants ought to continue to treat it as though it were normal.

### 5.3. A Wittgenstenian Pessimism?

Given that deep disagreements are disagreements across language games, our position is that the optimism of Fogelin's respondents is largely misplaced – at least, on a Wittgenstenian view of the issue – because each variously mischaracterizes the nature of deep disagreement or the nature of reason, thereby misrepresenting reason's role and potential in resolving such disputes.

To begin, consider Memedi's proposal to normalize deep disagreements by introducing a "third party" rational arbiter.<sup>4</sup> Recall though, that by definition deep disagreements are ones whose irresolvability is not due to the ignorance or intransigence of their disputants. As such, adding an impartial interlocutor cannot provide resolution-resources not already available to the initial disputants. At best, the third-party might be conversant in the different language-games involved in the deep disagreement, thereby possibly adding a degree of understanding not initially present. Yet since the irresolvability of disagreements is due to the language-games in which they occur and not the language-users engaged in them, this added understanding could only help to clarify the nature of the disagreement, rather than indicate or prescribe its resolution.

Similarly, there is a problem with Feldman's construal of deep disagreements as differences of opinion about framework propositions which treats a difference in measure (concept determination) as though it were a disagreement in measurement (concept application) when in fact their logical, and therefore rational, character is of a different order. On Feldman's view, in "turning our spade" we loose some single stone – the framework proposition at issue – from the "sedimentary layer of the unchallenged" and displace it into the shifting sands or even "the river of thought" itself, realizing that it is not "intrinsically" fixed (cf. *OC* §§ 96, 97, 99). (For Wittgenstein no proposition is beyond assessment intrinsically, but only insofar as it is functioning foundationally.) While surely this 'loosing of some single stone of the logical grammar' occurs, and is part of the ordinary development of

<sup>4</sup> For a further commentary on Memedi's proposal see Campolo (2007).

language, in treating this circumstance as though some “rational resolution” were available, Feldman’s presentation assumes that the evidentiary relations which determine where the stone eventually lands already exist—as though there was already some “proper” measure for their evaluation which determines the “rational response” to the question of the stone’s final placement. (For Feldman (p. 16; emphasis added) rational resolution follows the “*proper* evaluation” of arguments and evidence, and is available when “there is some way of presenting arguments and evidence to which *the rational response* is a resolution of the disagreement.”) Yet, given the nature of the situation – one in which the language-game(s) in play do not specify a resolution to the issue – such evidentiary relations do not yet exist; and they do not yet exist because *we* have not determined them. We have not stipulated the use of the concept (in this circumstance).

Further, Feldman’s (p. 19) ‘expansion’ of the concept of evidence to include the sorts of activities and practices that at one time held the stone in place obscures and misconstrues the relationship of those activities to the concept. They do not provide reasons or evidence for the application of a concept in one way rather than another. Rather they provide the very semantic content of the concept by stipulating the norms of its application. Thus, Fogelin is quite right to say that such practices precede reasons and instead provide the very conceptual context in which reason-giving occurs. Finally, Feldman’s construal of the situation ignores the fact that it will not have been merely one stone that is loosed into the stream. Such a stone was embedded in a way of doing (thinking and acting) (*OC* § 144). Once loosed, all the connected ways of doing will similarly be affected by the stone’s displacement. Thus, what is at issue is not merely the acceptability of some claim but an entire way of doing.

Lugg attempts to supplement the supply of rational resources available to deep disagreeers in such a way that the reach of their reasonings is not limited by their initial agreements. Yet, in a mistake similar to Feldman’s (above), Lugg seems to misconstrue the nature of those agreements that prescribe the reach of our reasoning. As Wittgenstein tells us, “It is not agreement in opinions but in form of life” (*PI* § 241). Thus, while the results of argumentation (whether deep or normal) are not limited or determined by

the opinions disputants share at the outset, they are limited by the shared framework (*Weltbild*) in which those opinions have meaning.

To elaborate, Campolo (2005: 41) observes that reasoning, and therefore reasoning together, is an *activity* whose function is inherently reflective, reparative or remedial. The activity of reasoning is invoked when some other activity in which we are otherwise smoothly engaged is somehow interrupted. Like any other activity, reasoning is based in training. “[T]he path to expertise, competence, and intersubjectivity is paved with training, practice, study, apprenticeship, immersion in a tradition or way of doing something. Reasoning together, on its own, cannot bring about any of this – it first gets its foothold once all of this is already in place” (Campolo 2005: 45). Thus, our ability to reason together successfully is dependent on our shared training – our enculturation into a form of life and attendant *Weltbild*. “[R]easoning together is not some sort of magically creative act that always produces efficacious results. It is rather a way of drawing on shared resources, and as those resources get thinner, reasoning loses traction” (Campolo 2005: 41). Deep disagreements differ from normal disagreements in that they are characterized by a divergence, incongruity or other difference in the forms of life of the disputants. This difference limits both the availability and traction of rational resources in the resolution of deep disagreements, and thereby dictates that the operation of reason in deep disagreement will be characteristically different than in normal ones where there is no such limitation on the *relevant* rational resources.

Lugg’s optimism fails to recognize the role played by the shared background commitments in determining the ‘resolution space’ of a disagreement, and because of this, as Turner and Wright (2005: 31) point out, it fails to recognize that two very different sorts of things are going on in normal as compared with deep disagreements.

Fogelin’s point is not that what goes on in such dialectical free-for-alls cannot involve argument, or even that the resulting resolution cannot sometimes be represented as accomplished through nothing but serial arguments. It is that everything rests on how much is shared to begin with. And when that is not enough to resolve the conflict through the

simple giving of reasons against a stable background of understanding and competence, it will require *altering this background in non-incremental ways*, which is *another sort of thing entirely*. [Our italics.]<sup>5</sup>

In view of considerations like these, Campolo (2005: 46) further recommends a prudential attitude of caution when approaching resolution-resistant disagreements. To *naively* treat a deep disagreement as though it were shallow is to *unwittingly* employ reasoning ungrounded in practice *as though* it were so grounded. Failure here is often the best outcome, since apparent successes will be due to luck, which the reasoner will mistakenly attribute to skill. Thus, it is far better to rightly recognize reason's limits than to rely on it in circumstances where it has no purchase.<sup>6</sup>

To summarize the argument thus far: (i) Fogelin, following Wittgenstein, highlights a kind of disagreement that he calls “deep;” (ii) he ascribes to reason a stereotypically different role in deep versus normal disagreements; and (iii) because of this, “deep disagreements” thus defined allow only for nonrational persuasion in their resolution. We proceeded to argue that (iii) neither follows from (i) and (ii) nor represents Wittgenstein's position. The following section illustrates, through a series of examples, mostly inspired by Wittgenstein, various ways that “rational persuasion” (as we call it) can operate in disagreements having depth.

<sup>5</sup> We suggest connecting “another sort of thing entirely” with *OC*§ 300: “Not all corrections of our views are on the same level” and “altering this background in non-incremental ways” with *RFM*, p 237: “The limit of the empirical—is *concept-formation*.” The preceding sentence is explained on the same page: “... When I say: ‘If these derivations are then same, then it *must* be that ...’, I am ... Recasting my concept of identity.// But we *do not seem* [our emphasis] ... to alter the form of our thinking, so as to alter *what we call ‘thinking*.’ We seem always to be fitting our thinking to experience [cf. Quine].” For more on this, see *LFM*, pp. 73, 166, 174, 273-74, 289, 290, 292 and *OC* 126-31.

<sup>6</sup> As should be evident, in general we find the approach taken by Turner and Wright (2005) and Campolo (2005, 2007) to be both broadly representative of a Wittgenstein attitude, and correct in its pessimism – or at least its scepticism of misplaced optimism – concerning the normal rational resolvability of deep disagreement. Our thoughts here owe much to their welcome influence.

## 6. Wittgenstein, Rationality and Deep Disagreements

At the end of reasons comes persuasion. (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *OC*§612)

Wittgenstein speaks of ‘persuasion’ where what is put forward has the power to induce one’s interlocutor to accept a new concept-formation, whether doing so involves a change in the person, as in moral and religious conversion, or does not do so, as in the case of new mathematical proofs. (Dilman, p. 17)<sup>7</sup>

### 6.1. Training & Persuasion

Logically as well as temporally, enculturation into a *Weltbild* is prior to being able to give reasons to justify or explain something; logically as well as chronologically, being able to give and understand reasons is prior to what Wittgenstein called “persuasion,” namely a sort of rhetoric in the service of concept-formation.<sup>8</sup> As with the sort of training or pre-linguistic instruction he talks about early in the *Investigations*, persuasion has to do not with the (correct or incorrect, justified or unjustified) use of terms but with “preparation for their use” (*PI* §§ 26, 49).

Persuasion and training have to do with introduction of new concepts, and therefore with induction into new language games of judgment and an expanded conception of what might count as a reasons or justification for a judgment.

In giving reasons as premises of an argument we’re applying (or presupposing) acknowledged concepts. Giving reasons in that sense is seeking to justify a knowledge-claim.

Both training and persuasion are preparations for a (new) language game. But while training is entirely pre-rational (pre-explanatory, pre-justificatory), persuasion can involve reasoning of a kind – analogical and “dialectical,” rather than demonstrative reasoning from commonly acknowledged principles and matters of fact, or experimental (inductive) reasoning from “hard data.”

<sup>7</sup> This section owes much to the collection of essays from which this passage is quoted. A member of “the Swansea school,” the late Ilham Dilman was an outstanding philosopher and Wittgenstein scholar.

<sup>8</sup> Here we use “rhetoric” to mean “persuasive discourse” without any pejorative connotation.

Is a *mobile* a kind of sculpture? ... the *square root of 2* a kind of number? These are questions about whether to enlarge one's store concepts, whether to add a new instrument to one's "toolbox of language." Refusing to do so might deserve the criticism: "rigid" "impractical," "unimaginative"—but not "mistaken." It would be a mistake in language (a conceptual mistake) to wonder whether paradigm examples of what we all learned to call "sculptures" and "numbers" really *are* numbers and sculptures.

### **"World-Picture"**

1

Imagine a small child asking his grandparents whether the earth really existed before they were born. "Yes, of course!," they respond, "all the while conscious that ... one cannot answer [his question] by way of one particular piece of instruction, but only by gradually imparting to him a picture of our world" (*LWPP- II*, p. 53).<sup>9</sup>

"The earth is enormously old;" "We all have a mother and a father;" "Humans, like other animals, have internal organs;" "Water eventually boils when heated." These are a few of the propositions descriptive of the "river bed channeling our stream of thought," which Wittgenstein refers to as our world-picture: "I say world-picture and not hypothesis, because it is the matter-of-course foundation for [our] research and as such also goes unmentioned" (*OC* § 167).

To give someone our picture of the world would be to bring him into harmony with our ways of making true or false judgments about the world. If that someone is a small child learning his native language, this would happen by way of training. If asked, "But is it really true that the earth is as old as you say?" we might say "yes;" and if reasons are demanded, we might say "We can't give you any, but if you learn more you'll think the same." If that doesn't come about, that would mean that our interlocutor will not, for example, be able to learn history.

<sup>9</sup> The quoted passage is preceded by the following intriguing remark: "We say 'Undoubtedly it is so', and don't know how very much this certainty [*Sicherheit*, sureness] determines our concepts."

Could an adult believe that the earth came into existence 50 years ago?  
We would have to imagine that he has

grown up in quite special circumstances and been taught that the earth came into being 50 years ago, and therefore believed this. We might instruct him: the earth has long ... etc.—We should be trying to give him our picture of the world.// This would happen through a kind of persuasion. (OC§ 262)

For example, we might convince him of the greater simplicity or symmetry of our picture, whereupon he might say something like “*That’s* how it must be.”<sup>10</sup>

2

Is it wrong for me to be guided in my actions by the propositions of physics? ... Isn’t precisely this what we call ‘a good ground’?... // [But] supposing we meet people who did not regard that as a telling reason. Instead of the physicist, they consult an oracle. (Ludwig Wittgenstein, OC§§ 608-09)

Oracles do not fit into our modern scientific world-picture: where we consult a scientifically-trained professional for guidance, those people consult an oracle. But as fellow human beings, they’re surely no strangers to practical, inductive reasoning, and so we should be able, in principle, to prove to them the practical advantage of our approach.

Suppose they acknowledge the ‘advantage’ but give it little weight. That might strike us as unjustified. But can we justify what *we* do, save by reference to something else that we don’t question? Can we give those people a sufficient reason why they should act *this way* rather than *that*, except that by doing so they bring about such-and-such a situation, which again has to be an aim they *accept*?<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> A rough paraphrase of OC§92b.

<sup>11</sup> A paraphrase of CV, p. 16 c, 1931. Cf. OC§378: “Knowledge is in the end based on acknowledgment.” And cf. PPO, p. 363, where Rush Rhees recalls the following comment by Wittgenstein on a presentation by Benjamin Farrington:

[W]hen there is a change in the conditions in which people live, we may call it progress because it opens up new opportunities. But in the course of this change, opportuni-

It would be only reasonable to reject a practice proven to be based on beliefs that are simply erroneous. Think of how Semmelweis disproved the old theories of contagion and revolutionized our medical practice.<sup>12</sup> But is the practice in question really like that, i.e., really based on beliefs (theories, correct or mistaken propositions)? Wittgenstein argued (plausibly, we think) that a people will give up a practice after recognizing an error on which it was based only when calling their attention to it is enough to turn them from their way of behaving. “But this is not the case with the religious practices of a people and therefore there is no question of an error” (*PO*, p. 121).<sup>13</sup> And the practice of oracle consulting in question *may* be much more akin to the religious practices of a people than to hygienic practices based on a theory.<sup>14</sup>

Of course there are all sorts of slogans that have been used to support our practices and to combat<sup>15</sup> those of ‘primitive peoples’ – slogans such as

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ties which were there before may be lost. In one way it was progress, in another it was decline. A historical change may be progress and also ruin. There is no method of weighing one against the other to justify ... speaking of “progress on the whole.”

“[When Farrington responded] that even ‘with all the ugly sides of our civilization, I am sure I would rather live as we do now than live as the caveman did,’ Wittgenstein replied: ‘Yes of course you would. But would the caveman?’” (Cf. *CV*, p. 60 h.)

<sup>12</sup> See Hempel (1966: 3-8).

<sup>13</sup> From “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*.” Wilde (1976: 86) explains that, for Wittgenstein, the rituals described by Frazer “are not based on beliefs such as that there are ghosts, so that if this belief is shown to be false, then the practices are shown to be without foundation; rather, both the belief and the practice are the natural expression of responses which are neither true nor false.”

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *LRPP*- II, p. 86: “There is a ‘why’ to which the answer permits no prediction. That’s the way it is with animistic explanations, for instance. Many of Freud’s explanations, or those of Goethe in his theory of colors, are of this kind. The explanation gives us an analogy. And now the phenomenon no longer stands alone; it is connected with others, and we feel reassured.” Compare *CV*, p. 83, c. 1949:

It’s true that we can compare a picture that is firmly rooted in us to a superstition; but it’s equally true that we always eventually have to reach some firm ground, either a picture or something else, so that a picture which is at the root of all our thinking is to be respected and not treated as a superstition.

On distinguishing a “respectable” from a “superstitious” use of a picture, see *LC* (p. 59) and “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*,” (*PO*, pp. 125, 153). So “a picture firmly rooted in us” is *not beyond rational criticism*. For it may be positively harmful if it “holds us captive” (*PI* §115) and blinds us to possibilities of sense (*CV*, p. 60 h) or “important aspects of things” (*PI* § 129).

<sup>15</sup> According to Wilde (p. 85) “Wittgenstein contrasts ‘combating’ the other with giving him ... reasons why he *must* see the facts in one connection rather than another [on pain of being to that extent unreasonable or incompetent].” Cf. Rhees (2003, p. 171): “We may think

“The White Man’s Burden.” And shouldn’t we object *on moral grounds* to that and to any other slogan smacking of an arrogant cultural imperialism? For we do not want to deny that we must sometimes either object to a practice or else forfeit our moral integrity. We might feel obliged to object to it if we come to see it as cruel and unjust – though we must admit that such charges may stem more from self-serving chauvinism than genuine moral seriousness.

## Morality

Suppose I say Christian ethics is right [and Nietzsche’s wrong]. Then I am making a judgement of value. It amounts to adopting Christian ethics. It is not like saying that one of these physical theories must be the right one. The way in which some reality corresponds—or conflicts—with a physical theory has no counterpart here. (Wittgenstein as quoted in Rhees 1965: 24)

That we should not infer a relativist doctrine from preceding lines is clear, we think, from the paragraph following them: “If you say there are various systems of ethics you are not saying they are all equally right. This means nothing. Just as it would have no meaning to say that each was right from his own standpoint. That could only mean that each judges as he does.” But “each judges as he does” is a tautology and therefore says nothing.

Though we may grant that Wittgenstein has not formally committed himself to a relativist thesis, we may still be dissatisfied. For we can agree that no ethical system conforms or conflicts with how things are *in the way* a physical theory does but still want to ask whether there’s *another way*? In other words, can there be truth or falsity in the *way* someone judges?

Our short reply to these difficult questions – one we think is suggested by but not articulated in Wittgenstein’s writings – is that the “conformity to reality” of an ethical system is to be found in the meaningfulness of the con-

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we can say that our scientific world-picture is right because the world is so constituted. But that adds nothing to saying that our inductive methods get the results that they do. We learn from nature, but nature does not dictate *how* we learn from it.” *Cf. RFM*: pp. 237, 379, 387 379 (on “the limits of empiricism”) and *CV*, p. 60 (“Science: enrichment and impoverishment. *One* particular method elbows all the others aside.”)

cepts it articulates, as exhibited by their use-in-practice – a “use-in-practice” not to be understood in a narrowly pragmatic sense.<sup>16</sup> To clarify what we have in mind here, consider these remarks by Stephen Mulhall on Thrasymachus, the Sophist appearing in Book I of the *Republic*. According to Mulhall (2007: 34-35), when Thrasymachus says that justice is nothing more than whatever is in the interests of the powerful,

he is in fact doubting the reality of justice altogether. [For,] if what we talk of as ‘just’ and ‘unjust’ merely reflects the balance of power in a given social group, ... language could suffer the loss of the concept of justice altogether without losing its ability to register the reality of things in our human social world.<sup>17</sup>

When it comes to “registering reality,” the concept of justice – on that interpretation of it – is an idle wheel in the machinery of language. We take it that Socrates wanted Thrasymachus to reflect on his life, asking himself whether what is clearly an idle wheel *in theory* (in the Sophist’s cynical account of it) is also an idle wheel *in practice*. “You must look at the *practice* of language, then you will see it” (*OC* § 501, emphasis added) – then you will see the *logic* of language, its possibilities of sense.

We might say, with Socrates, that Thrasymachus needed weaning away from rhetorical speech-making and initiation into philosophical dialogue. Recall that, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates contrasted *thinking philosophically* with *thinking self-assertively*. Now, wouldn’t thinking philosophically, in that sense, be a *logically necessary condition* for ordinary, “in-practice” certainty about *moral reality* (about the authority of moral values to limit self-assertion) – though *not*, admittedly, a logically necessary condition for the commonsense certainties about *material reality* that make up our *Weltbild*?

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *LFM*, pp. 247-49.

<sup>17</sup> Mulhall (2007) explores the idea that the various modes of human discourse are “dialogically interconnected ways of being responsive to reality.” He draws heavily on the work of Wittgenstein’s student and friend, Rush Rhees. Compare Dilman (pp. 17-20) for an illuminating discussion of Plato’s *Gorgias*.

## Religion

1

“At the end of reasons comes *persuasion*. (Think what happens when missionaries convert natives.)” (OC § 612). Well, what *does* happen? The following remark from *Culture and Value* (p. 64; c. 1947) suggests one possibility:

It strikes me that a religious belief could only be something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference. Hence, although it’s a belief, it’s really a way of living, or a way of assessing life. It’s passionately seizing hold of this interpretation. Instruction in a religious faith, therefore, would have to take the form of a portrayal, a description, of that system of reference, while at the same time being an appeal to conscience. And this combination would have to result in the pupil himself, of his own accord, passionately taking hold of the system of reference. It would be as though someone were first to let me see the hopelessness of my situation and then show me the means of rescue until, of my own accord, or not at any rate led to it by my instructor, I ran to it and grasped it.

Can we speak here of a *rational* means of persuasion?—It’s not of course rational in the purely objective, impersonal sense appropriate in the scientific context. Nor is it necessarily irrational either, if that implies “deserving of rebuke.”<sup>18</sup>

The missionary, or preacher, preaches the Gospel and appeals to his hearer’s conscience. We take it that this “appeal to conscience” presupposes a moral sensibility in the would-be convert. The preacher will appeal to this sensibility, trying to evoke a sense of sin, etc., and then present his message as “a means of rescue.” His rhetoric will not necessarily rely on bribes, conditioning, or sophistry. But the reasons he gives for accepting his message will be more like motives (“reasons of the heart”) than rationales (evidence in support of propositions).

<sup>18</sup> Compare *LC*, p. 58.

Although fervent religious believers may well be “irrational” in the economic, prudential sense of the word, but they are not *necessarily* “irrational” if saying that implies either in-practice uncertainty on their part about “bedrock principles” of our common *Weltbild*, or believing things about the facts of the world in despite of scientific evidence.<sup>19</sup>

2

I believe that every human being has two human parents; but Catholics believe that Jesus only had a human mother ... and give no credence to all the contrary evidence.... // [W]e should not call anybody reasonable who believed something in despite of scientific evidence. (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *OC* §§ 239, 324)<sup>20</sup>

Shall we say the Catholic belief is irrational? As “reasonable people,” we don’t doubt that all human beings have two parents: it goes without saying and is part of our *Weltbild*. If asked to say what *our* belief is based on, however, we might answer: on our own experience and on everything we’ve been taught about biology. But is that really a proof? If we’ve proven a belief, then we have a right to claim that that we *know* it to be true, and that those who believe the opposite are mistaken. For “I know” relates to a possibility of demonstrating the truth. But if what we believe is of such a kind that the grounds that that we can give are no surer than our assertion, then we cannot say that we know what we believe.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> “[D]ogma is expressed in the *form* of an assertion, and it is unshakable, but at the same time any practical opinion *can* be made to harmonize with it; admittedly more easily in some cases than in others” (*CV*, p. 28, c. 1937; italics added).

Early and late, Wittgenstein seemed unable to make sense of ascribing “theoretical content” to theological assertions. Consider the following journal entry from 1937:

I believe: the word “believing” has wrought horrible havoc in religion. All the knotty thoughts [in Kierkegaard] about ‘the [absolute] paradox’ ... and the like. But if instead of “belief in Christ” you would say: “love of Christ,” the paradox vanishes, i.e., the irritation to the intellect ... // It’s not that now one could say: Yes, finally everything is ... intelligible. ... [I]t is just not *unintelligible*. (*PPO*, p. 247; cf. p. 225).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *OC* §§ 218-19: “Can I believe for a moment that I have never been in the stratosphere?. No. ... There cannot be any doubt about it for me as a reasonable person—That’s it.—” Compare the following remark by Peter Winch, reminiscent of Aristotle on *phronesis*: “[T]he *reasonable person* is not defined by reference to logic; logic is defined by reference to what the kind of person we take to be ‘reasonable’ does or does not accept.” (1991: 229)

<sup>21</sup> Much of the preceding paragraph is a close paraphrase of *OC* §§ 240, 243. Cf. D.Z. Phillips (1999: 54):

So, philosophical (metaphysical) sceptics will contradict commonsense philosophers who claim to know that every human being has two parents, on the grounds that they cannot justify their claim. And Catholics will contradict them as well, though for quite different (doctrinal, religious) reasons. Of course, both philosophical skeptics and Catholic believers would have trouble making sense of anyone who, out of any special (philosophical or religious) context spoke of doubting whether we all have a human mother and father. Like the rest of us, they would then look for a cause rather than a reason for such a “crazy” utterance.

The religious, biblical, reasons for believing that Jesus was born of a virgin do not, of course, have any weight in a biological investigation into the possibility of parthenogenesis. But *should* the biologist’s evidence against the possibility of human parthenogenesis oblige *reasonable* Christians to put aside the allegedly traditional belief that Jesus was, “literally,” born of a virgin? While we’re not sure what to say here, we wonder if even the most conservative believer in the supernatural nature of His paternity would entertain even the possibility that the claim of “the pregnant girl next door” to be a virgin might be true—on the grounds that, “Well, it happened once before.”

### 3

Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic. (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *OC* § 611)

We agree with Turner and Wright (2005: 34, fn. 3) that “a good illustration of this point can be seen in the current debate over evolution and intelligent design creationism (IDC). Proponents of both views tend to insult the other side as much as engage with it.” But is the IDC proponent’s opposition to modern evolutionary theory based on an arguably unreasonable disregard

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We would not say ‘I know that’s a tree’ when looking at a familiar tree in our garden. For if one said that, the question would arise of *how* one knew. There is nothing more to which one could turn. But this is not because the proposition cannot be doubted but because it cannot be doubted when it holds a certain place in our practice. What is ungrounded is not a proposition but a practice.

of scientific evidence or principles of rational inquiry? Not necessarily—as the continuation of Turner and Wright quotation suggests: “Just as IDC proponents tend to use the design vocabulary to express a certain spiritual commitment, proponents of evolution often use Darwinian vocabulary to simply express a secular world-view.” If that’s the foundation of the dispute, then the IDC proponent is not *really* “believing something in despite of scientific evidence.”

Perhaps we could say that what *really* separates them is a difference in *Weltanschauung* rather than in *Weltbild*. For a *Weltbild* (as Wittgenstein uses the term in *OC*) relates to what, in a given culture, “no reasonable person would question,” whereas a *Weltanschauung* (as we understand the term) refers to an individual’s personal (though not necessarily unreasonable) attitudes and commitments vis-a-vis the common life and practice of the culture that formed and sustains her.<sup>22</sup>

Although the difference between them is one of Faith (or religious *Weltanschauung*) rather than Reason, that doesn’t mean that rational discussion between them is pointless. Reasonable criticism could be directed at scientists (or their popularizers) who claim to deduce morally abhorrent conclusions from their science (think of Social Darwinism) or who use apparently demeaning, reductive language on the authority of their science (“Man: the Naked Ape”). And believers might be persuaded that there is no real opposition between modern science *as such* and the faith they live by.

<sup>22</sup> In his “Lecture on Ethics,” Wittgenstein said that in making “an absolute judgment of value,” it is essential to step forth as an individual and speak in the first person.” We think same could be said to be essential in professing adherence to a certain *Weltanschauung*. Compare *CV*, p. 20, c. 1931:

It is sometimes said that a man’s philosophy is a matter of temperament, and there is something in this. A preference for certain similes could be called a matter of temperament and it underlies more disagreements than you might think.

Disagreements arising from differences in *Weltanschauung* (“a man’s philosophy”) are to be distinguished from the more impersonal disagreements over “the main problems of philosophy.” The latter problems (as Wittgenstein understands them) arise from misunderstanding “the workings of our language” (*PI*§109), and of the *Weltbild* associated with those workings. (For more on the *Weltbild* / *Weltanschauung* distinction, see Rhees (2003: 109-110).)

In the following argument Simone Weil (p. 90) provides, in effect, a particularly interesting illustration of what we have been calling *concept-formation*; as we read her, she is demonstrating the formation of a concept of divine reality:

I have not the principle of rising in me. ... It is only by directing my thoughts toward something better than myself that I am drawn upwards by this something. If I am really raised up, this something is real.//No imaginary perfection can draw me upwards ... For an imaginary perfection is automatically at the same level as I who imagine it ...

Weil's *principle of rising* acted for her as an ideal of purity and holiness—as both a standard against which she measured herself and a focus of worshipful attention and humble aspiration. But to what are the words “principle of rising” supposed to refer? Not to any physical object, of course; and if not to a subjective referent, such as an ideal in her mind—then to *what?*<sup>23</sup>

We take it that what Weil's reasoning actually accomplishes is the fixing of a concept—a determination of what it might *mean* to believe in the *mind-independent reality* of that “principle of rising.” It might mean acknowledging it as a *divine* standard or *godly* ideal. This acknowledgement would show itself in the believer's revaluing her values and reorienting her life in light of that *godly* ideal. Nor can one acknowledge the authority of this ideal while at the same time taking it to be nothing but a product of human fancy.

Developing her argument, Simone Weil says that “what is thus brought about by directing my thought is in no way comparable to suggestion”:

If I say to myself every morning [she continues] “I am courageous ...”, I may become courageous, but not with a courage which conforms to what, in my present imperfection, I imagine under that name. ... It can only be

<sup>23</sup> Aquinas (and other metaphysically inclined “classical theists”) would probably suggest that Weil is referring to “a *subsistent* ideal” —something that (in the words of the “Fourth Way”) “causes in all other things their being, their goodness, and whatever other perfection they have.” As far as we can see, however, such an account would add nothing intelligible to Weil's argument.

a modification on the same plane, not a change of plane.// A sensitive person who by suggestion becomes courageous hardens himself ... [but] Grace alone can give courage while leaving the sensitivity intact. (*ibid.*)

But how does Weil know that Grace alone (i.e., divine grace) can give such “miraculous” courage? We suggest that, in spite of the “surface grammar” of what she says, she is not to be understood as proposing a causal explanation of that courage (on the model of, say, “Steroids alone could account for that athlete’s performance”). Rather, she is explaining what it might *mean* to speak of that extraordinary courage her something as “a gift of God.” In other words we are suggesting Weil’s claim that Grace alone can give such courage needs to be understood as “a grammatical remark,” rather than as what it might seem to be—an empirically falsifiable hypothesis. Not bound by the ordinary logic of “courage” her argument is a persuasion aimed at extending our concept of courage to include “*supernatural* (God-given) courage.” Her argument represents “a grammatical movement” in thought; it expresses, not “a quasi-physical phenomenon” but “a new way of looking at things” (Cf. *PI*§401).<sup>24</sup>

## Mathematics & Science

Wittgenstein speaks of ‘persuasion’ where what is put forward has the power to induce one’s interlocutor to accept a new concept-formation ... (Dilman, p. 17)

1

“Deep” seems an appropriate adjective to characterize disagreements that can only be resolved through the kind of persuasion Dilman takes Wittgenstein to be talking about. Resolving such a disagreement will consist, not in getting one party to reject a false or improbable opinion, but in one party being persuaded to accept a new concept-formation—i.e., to acknowledge a new rule about what it does or doesn’t make sense to say and do.

<sup>24</sup> The preceding is re-written version of Brenner (2009: 29-30).

Conversion to a new concept-formation is not something *arbitrary*, if that implies “pointless”; nor is it *irrational*, if that implies inappropriately motivated. This might be illustrated by John Wisdom’s story in *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics* of how his tutor persuaded him that  $3 \times 0$  equals 0. It struck the young pupil as more “logical” to say that it equals 3. His tutor persuaded him otherwise, not by intimidation (pressing his authority as teacher), but by way of an argument by analogy:

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

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

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

*Therefore, by analogy,*

Three multiplied by zero = zero threes ( $3 \times 0 = 0$ ).

The young Wisdom had an argument too: that if you multiply 3  $x$ ’s by 0, that would be equivalent to *not* multiplying them at all (“multiplying them by nothing”)—not a bad argument, abstractly considered! He was led to abandon it by being given a perspicuous representation of the math he was being taught, so he could understand how – not “ $3 \times 0 = 3$ ” – but “ $3 \times 3 = 0$ ” fits into the system he was being taught. Had he not been persuaded but persisted in going his own way, his elders might have been forced to conclude that he was unteachable when it comes to arithmetic.

## 2

The Pythagoreans were brought up with an arithmetic in which the only numbers were integers and fractions of integers. Imagine the controversy that must have arisen when one member of the brotherhood pointed out that the hypotenuse of the 1-1 Right Triangle is neither an integer nor a fraction of integers. The controversy needn’t have consisted in one party offering non-rational inducement to the other; it consisted, one might imagine, in pointing out analogies and disanalogies between established numbers and these new candidates for the title, and in ‘weighing’ the analogies and disanalogies in the light of the place of numbers in their home context of measurement and calculation. Now, of course, we include “irrationals” among the ranks of numbers with no trace of the aversion and hesitation

which (we can imagine) led some of the Pythagoreans to call them by that name.

3

The river-bed of thoughts may shift.... [W]hat men consider reasonable or unreasonable alters. At certain periods men find reasonable what at other periods they found unreasonable. And vice versa ... (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *OC* §§ 97, 324)

*Must* there be a causal connection between the state of one's brain and the thought one thinks? A serious dispute over this question might well be called a "deep disagreement." Neither party might understand the difficulties of the other, while each feels that what is at stake is a radical difference about how to proceed in science.

It might be objected that no rational, well-informed investigator is likely to take the negative side of that dispute, on the grounds that everything we know today points to an exceptionalness correlation between psychological and neurological processes. Against this, Wittgenstein pointed out that it was also once widely believed that everything pointed to the idea that classical mechanics must be able to explain everything. But did it, he asks? No—just everything the scientists of the time concentrated on. Nor is it true today that everything points to the correlation you speak of. It's just that everything filling contemporary scientists' mental vision points to it.

Following Wittgenstein, we oppose the notion of some god-given, a-historical ideal of "exact science" or "adequate causal explanation." We want to say that at different times we have different such ideals, and that none of them is absolute. Nor does this commit us to the thesis that where there is conflict over fundamentals, all reasoning comes to an end. For we think that, for example, the proponent of "the contemporary scientist's mental vision" *may well* be able to give us persuasive *and appropriate* reasons why *current* research programs should be guided by the ideal they set out—"appropriate reasons" as opposed to scientifically irrelevant, irrational inducements.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> The preceding paragraph is a condensation of material from Brenner (2003: 18-23), which in turn is based on the material from Wittgenstein referenced there. Cf. *RFM*, pp.

## Agreement in Judgment: Complete & Incomplete

1

*Concepts : judgments :: measures : measurements.* But, just as a method of measurement requires a certain uniformity in the results of measurement, so too a way of judging requires a measure of “agreement in judgments.”<sup>26</sup> *How much* agreement is required depends on the type of concept involved, as shown by the kind use a term has in the language.

Arithmetic is characterized by a virtually unanimous agreement in the results of calculations performed by people acknowledged to have mastered certain techniques (addition, subtraction, etc.) In contrast, psychological (and ethical) concepts allow far more “indeterminacy in judgment.” Learning to apply such concepts is a matter not of mastering a technique but of learning “good judgment,” by way of paradigm examples and “rules of thumb.”<sup>27</sup>

2

Is fear of relativism at the back of the worry about the persistence of deep disagreements? Relativists don't seem to respect the law of excluded middle: they appear to “want it both ways.” But Wittgensteinians aren't enemies of reason in the sense that they want to question the law of excluded middle. They do, however, want to point out that it is not equally applicable to everything we call a judgment. For our judgments do not all have a determinate ( $p \vee \sim p$ ) sense in every context. In some cases, our judgments are “better or worse” (plausible or implausible, insightful or “just weird”)—rather than “true or false” or “calculated correctly or incorrectly.” To highlight one important example, such indeterminacy is to be found in some of our judgments about the feelings of others.

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237-38: “The limit of the empirical is—concept-formation” and *ibid.* p. 379: “The limits of empiricism [and pragmatism]—Do we live because it's practical to live? ... think because thinking is practical?”

<sup>26</sup> Wittgenstein argues this point at *PI* §§ 142, 242 and in *PII*xi, pp. 226 ff.

<sup>27</sup> See *PI*, pp. 227-28.

Some “neurophilosophers” claim that such indeterminacy is a *defect* in our psychological concepts – one threatening the very rationality our everyday psychological judgments.<sup>28</sup> Their claim, we suggest, is based on the dubious view that all cognitively significant judgments are propositions with determinate sense ( $p \vee \sim p$ ), and that all results of a competently employed method of judgment *must* agree (differences being, in principle, traceable to a mistake).

Wittgenstein’s disagreement with such philosophers might be called a “deep disagreement.” He tries to persuade them to see the “raggedness” of our everyday (“folk”) psychological concepts as *appropriate and desirable* rather than as a defect. This requires getting them to “think outside the box” – the box of the only reasons they’re used to calling relevant.

Ben Tilghman (2001, pp. 248-49) provides a nice illustration of how such a persuasion might go:

That there is only better and worse judgment about the genuineness of human feeling is not a shortcoming, but is a feature of the concept of genuineness. We must remember that it is not merely a fact about mathematics that there is agreement in judgment about the results of calculation, for that agreement is a constituent of our concept of mathematics. If there were no such general agreement, then whatever it is that we are doing with columns of figures would not be what we call adding and subtracting. Similarly, if there *were* strict procedures to determine the correctness of judgments about other people, then whatever it is that we would be doing in thinking, for example, “I am sure she loves me,” is not what we would call judging the genuineness of human feeling. At the edge of materialism we reach one limit of language. Were we to venture beyond the edge our lives would be unrecognizable.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, not everyone will find Tilghman’s Wittgensteinian ‘persuasion’ persuasive. But is *that* a defect? Or shall we say: “If there were a strict procedure for determining whether it’s *really* a defect, then applying it is not what we would call doing philosophy (or investigating a *deep question*).”

<sup>28</sup> For example, Paul Churchland (1988: 179-80).

<sup>29</sup> “The *limits of my language* mean the limits of my world” (*TLP* 5.6). “And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life” (*PI* § 19).

Isn't "defect" a family resemblance term? And aren't "neurophilosophers" such as Paul Churchland trying to persuade us to make *one* member of the family lord it over the others? But could we "find our feet" with people who actually used a language that was "reformed" in a way they recommend, i.e., with all the indeterminacy eliminated from our "psychological" concepts?—"Concepts with fixed limits would demand a uniformity of behavior" (*RPP-II* § 683). And do we really want that?<sup>30</sup>

### "Deep Disquietudes"

When we do philosophy we are like savages, primitive people, who hear the expressions of civilized men, put a false interpretation on them, and then draw the queerest conclusions from it. (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *PI* § 194)

[As reported by Moore, Wittgenstein] said that what he was doing was a "new subject" ... [and] that though what he was doing was certainly different from what, e.g., Plato or Berkeley had done, yet people might feel that it "takes the place of" what they had done – might be inclined to say "This is what I really wanted." (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *PO*, p. 113)

The traditional "problems of philosophy" are often thought to generate the deepest of deep disagreements. Yet Wittgenstein would persuade philosophers to adopt a fresh conception of the 'depth' of these problems. On Wittgenstein's view, philosophical problems "have the character of depth. They are deep disquietudes; their roots are as deep in us as the forms of our language and their significance is as great as the importance of our language" (*PI* § 111).

Wittgenstein suggested that philosophical problems call for a "grammatical investigation" – one that sheds light on the problems by clearing away misunderstandings concerning the use of words, misunderstandings "caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language" (*PI* § 90). An example of an analogy that appears to have captivated and mislead more than one philosopher is the comparison of certain knowledge with a building or tower resting on

<sup>30</sup> For more on this, consult *RPP-II*, *LWPP-II*, and *PI*, pp. 223-29.

unshakable foundations. In this picture we find the roots of the following idea: “‘You can’t go on having one thing resting on another; in the end there must be something resting on itself.’ (The *a priori*) Something firm in itself” (*PO*, p. 407). To this Wittgenstein gives this curt (but we think reasonable) response: “I propose to drop this mode of speech as it leads to puzzlements” (*ibid.*). Notice that Wittgenstein does not engage in a refutation of a thesis through argument, but rather proposes the changing of a conceptual picture – the very way a subject is conceived – by changing the language applied to the subject. His *reasons* (implicit in this case) are that the problems (disquietudes) arising from the first picture do not arise in the second; thus the problem is dissolved—rather than solved through the discovery and presentation of evidence.

To sketch another example: Wittgenstein recommended comparing mathematical equations to *rules*, rather than – as their surface grammar suggests – to *truth-claims*. For this, he urged, would help us escape the disquieting back-and-forth debate over what these propositions might be *about* – while at the same time highlighting their important *normative* function in practices that permeate our lives as rational animals. Here again Wittgenstein is encouraging philosophers to put aside a captivating but misleading comparison or “picture.”

Philosophical argumentation of the kind Wittgenstein practiced and recommended is inherently persuasive – its function is dialectical rather than demonstrative. It serves, not to establish a conclusion, but to reorient our thinking. Rather than proving something (e.g., a “platonic” as contrasted with a conceptualist theory of numbers), Wittgenstein offered philosophy a “means of rescue” from its metaphysical “fly-bottles.”<sup>31</sup> Admittedly, the persuasions found in his writings are not rational in the sense of “certifiable within standard rules of deductive and inductive inference.” But “rational” surely has a broader sense than that. Wittgenstenians will call it a family resemblance term and argue for including their philosophical persuasions in the family. And a few of us will even suggest that some of “what happens

<sup>31</sup> The “therapeutic,” *ad hoc*, and (we think) appropriately *ad hominem* character of philosophical argumentation as Wittgenstein practiced it is suggested by the following striking remark from *CV*, p. 43c, 1942: “At present we are combating a trend. But this trend will die out, superseded by others, and then the way we are arguing against it will no longer be understood; people will not see why all this needed saying.”

when missionaries convert natives” might also be included. This will be a hard sell, or course, given that philosophers tend “constantly to see the method of science before their eyes” (*BB*, p. 18), imagining that in it they can see the very essence of rationality.

“What I’m doing is also persuasion. ... I am in a sense making propaganda for one style of thinking as opposed to another. I am honestly disgusted with the other” (*LC*, pp. 27-28). It appears that Wittgenstein failed to persuade mainstream philosophers to share that disgust and adopt the style of thinking his later writings demonstrate. It looks like they have yet to lose faith in the traditional styles of thinking and methods of investigation. The depth of the disagreement dividing them is to be found, not in a difference of opinion, but in their different ways of conceiving and practicing the activity they both call “philosophy.”<sup>32</sup>

## 7. Concluding Remarks

“So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?” – It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. This is not agreement in opinions but in form of life. (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *PI* § 241)

In distinguishing deep from normal disagreements, Fogelin (p. 5) argued that deep disagreements by their very nature “cannot be solved through the use of argument, for they undercut the conditions essential to arguing”—a view which he took himself to share with Wittgenstein. In our view, Fogelin’s characterization of deep disagreements has distinctively Wittgensteinian features which make them characteristically distinct from normal disagreements. Yet, these features do not lead to the conclusion that they are rationally insoluble; instead they reveal that reasons operate differently in the resolution of deep disagreements than in normal ones.

<sup>32</sup> “I still find my own way of philosophizing new ... – This method consists essentially in leaving aside the question of *truth* and asking about *sense* instead.” Compare that remark from a 1929 journal (*CV* rev. Ed (1998), p. 1) with the following from the 1939 *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*, p. 103: “I am not trying to persuade you to change your opinion. I am only trying to recommend a certain sort of investigation.” (We find it particularly evident that mainstream Anglophone philosophers of religion have not been persuaded to adopt the sort of investigation Wittgenstein recommends.)

Deep disagreements are rooted in differences in concepts (measures, understood as the determination of sense or conceptual content) rather than judgments or opinions (measurements, understood as the application of concepts). Because of this deep disagreements involve partial differences in forms of life and their attendant *Weltbild*, the extent of which determines the depth of the disagreement. Not only are such disagreements primitive or basic, but they occur on the horizon of understanding, whereby there is minimally only a partial accordance in the use of a concept and a partial discordance or indeterminacy. Because of this difference in concepts, deep disagreements are unresponsive to the operation of reason in normal disagreements (i.e., disagreements within a fixed conceptual framework).

Highly normal disagreements can be settled, in a relatively straightforward sense, on the basis of the evidence. Despite a difference of opinion about the acceptability of some claim at issue, disputants' judgments about the acceptability and relevance of reasons (premissory and consequential claims) by and large agree. Without this agreement in judgments *in paradigm cases* reasoning and argumentation could not occur. Such agreements in these *paradigms of judgment* are founded, ultimately, in the training that is preparatory to the normal application of concepts and comprise part of the very content of the concept itself – they allow us to “go on together.” Normal disagreements presuppose an established and shared system of measurement which sets in place the logical and evidentiary apparatus by which reasons are evaluated. As such, there is an important sense in which they provide the conditions necessary for the marshaling of reasons.

In deep disagreements this shared conceptual apparatus is not established. Disputants do not share a common grounding in training and they are inclined “go on differently” – to apply similar concepts in divergent and incompatible ways. These inclinations can be motivated and can strike the disputant as “natural,” “logical” or “intuitive.” Disagreements of this sort are unresponsive to the ‘evidence;’ they cannot be resolved by marshaling reasons in any ‘normal’ sense – and not merely because the disputants have different “logical inclinations.” Rather, their irresolvability and unresponsiveness to the ‘evidence’ is principally due the fact that the evidentiary apparatus does not exist; the grammar of the concept (including the relevant conceptual and inferential relations) has yet to be determined or specified.

The settling of how this is to be done needn't be either irrational or

nonrational. Instead, it involves a kind of “persuasion” which we have explained as a form of rhetoric in the service of concept-formation. While the type of reasoning and argumentation involved here is dialectical rather than demonstrative, amorphous rather than uniform, indeterminate rather than binary, it is neither fraudulent nor relativistic nor arbitrary. To be “won over” through such persuasion involves accepting a certain picture of the world; it involves learning to apply concepts in a way to which one was, perhaps, not initially inclined, and then “recognizing” (understanding, judging, appreciating) that *this* use of concepts is befitting of one’s projects – it “allows one to go on.” The resultant conceptual shift will involve a new understanding of things; it will be holistic rather than singular – commonly it will involve broad reaching changes in one’s activities (including judgments, inferences, explanations and attitudes). Similarly, it will be made for holistic rather than individual ‘reasons.’

Recall that the persuasive success of the argument by analogy offered by John Wisdom’s math instructor depended on his young pupil’s being able to recognize and appreciate the significance of the relevant similarities he pointed out. In a normal, “post-instructional” case, our ability to decisively resolve differences over the results of a calculation presupposes our being able to go on in the way we were taught. But when we are genuinely unable to go on together “in the same way,” we reach a limit not only of the meaningful “giving of reasons” but also of mutual understanding and communication.

In distinguishing deep from normal disagreements Fogelin called our collective attention to a pair of ideas at the very core of the practice of arguing: agreement and reason. Yet, if Fogelin’s views, and our Wittgenstenian interpretations of them, are correct, argumentation theorists have largely misconstrued the roles of agreement and reason in the rational resolution of disagreements, whether normal and deep. Typically, rational agreement is taken to be the outcome of reasoning properly employed. And this is so in the case of agreement in *opinions*. Yet, deep disagreements seem lie beyond the reach of this picture of the operation of reasons. Here, reasoning seems to become detached from agreement. Yet, closer inspection shows that the *activity* of reasoning itself (as a form of concept use) depends on an agreement in *ways of doing*. And it is this agreement which ultimately “grounds” and preserves the life of all our rational, conceptual endeavors— “persua-

sions in the service of concept-formation” at the frontiers of our conceptual world, as well as “normal argumentation” in the interior.

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