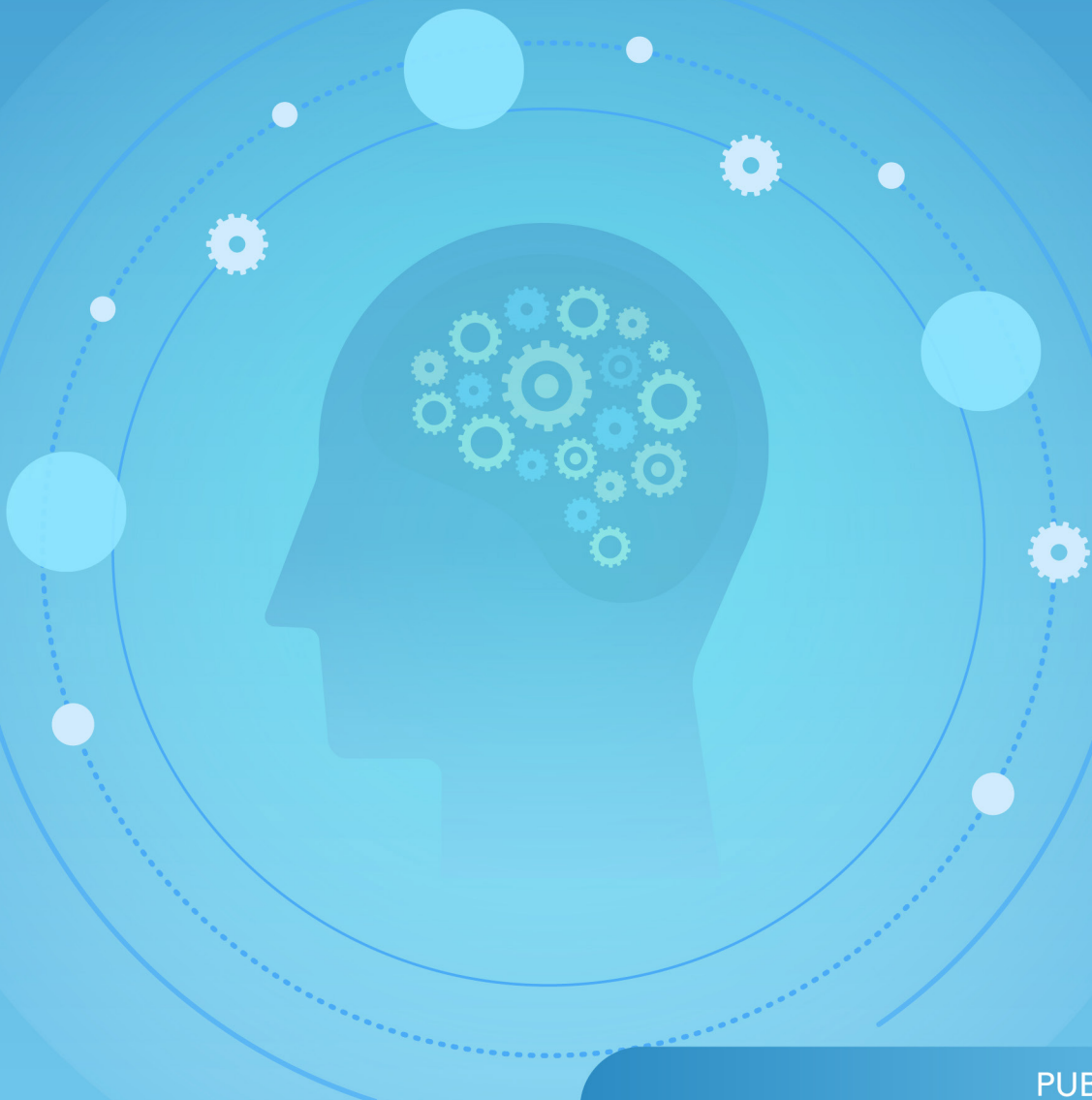




American Journal of Arts and Human Science (AJAHS)

ISSN: 2832-451X (ONLINE)

VOLUME 5 ISSUE 3 (2026)



PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

Beyond the Bedrock: The Third-Party as a Great Attractor in the Resolution of Deep Disagreement

Vesel Memedi^{*}

Article Information

Received: March 10, 2026

Accepted: May 30, 2026

Published: July 30, 2026

Keywords

Deep Disagreement, Dynamical Systems Theory, Great Attractor, Third Party, Dialogue, Macedonian Conflict

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the “impossibility thesis” in relation to the phenomenon of deep disagreements, which suggests that fundamental disputes over “hinge” beliefs cannot be resolved through rational methods. By integrating argumentation theory with Dynamical Systems Theory (DST), this study proposes a shift from dyadic (two-party) models to a “trialogical” approach. A key element of this approach is the introduction of a Third Party, envisioned as a “Great Attractor.” Using the 2001 Macedonian conflict as a case study, this analysis demonstrates how the structural role of a Third Party can break the cycle of deep disagreement and navigate the parties toward a reasoned resolution. The Great Attractor model shows that deep disagreements can be addressed rationally through structural intervention rather than logical persuasion, thereby creating new grounds for cooperation, even amidst persistent fundamental disagreements.

INTRODUCTION

Deep disagreement presents a significant challenge to contemporary philosophical, political, and practical discourse. Since Robert Fogelin’s seminal 1985 work introduced the “impossibility thesis,” scholars have explored whether fundamental divergences in worldviews can be reconciled through rational discourse (Lyreskog *et al.*, 2025). Fogelin’s pessimistic view, which suggests that rational debate is useless without a shared foundation of beliefs and principles, has significantly influenced argumentation theory for over four decades. However, while this conclusion is logically compelling within a dyadic context, it overlooks a crucial structural possibility: the involvement of a neutral third party acting as a “Great Attractor,” thereby fundamentally altering the nature of the disagreement itself. In fact, recent scholarly investigations have increasingly focused on how accurately the impossibility thesis captures the intricate nature of human conflict. Significant moral disagreements appear in various forms, such as conflicts over incompatible values, persistent obstinacy even under ideal conditions, emotional intensity that hinders compromise, and contested interpretations of evidence and expertise (Lyreskog *et al.*, 2025). The perception of these disagreements as permanent is not necessarily due to their logical structure, but rather to the closed, dualistic nature of argumentative interactions (Kiš, 2023).

This study calls for a fundamental shift in how we approach deep disagreements. This suggests that resolving such conflicts does not require bridging the logical gap between different epistemological systems. Instead, resolution is achieved by introducing a structural element that creates a new “center of gravity” attracting

both parties to orbit towards this “third-party” element. By combining Dynamical Systems Theory (DST) with trialogical argumentation models, this study shows that deep disagreements can be rationally managed through the involvement of a Third Party, acting as a “Great Attractor.” This method, of course, does not aim to persuade parties to abandon their core beliefs, but rather it recognizes that parties can be encouraged to adopt new language, procedural rules, and cooperative frameworks when a third party holds control over resources, legitimacy, or security that both sides need.

In this line of reasoning, the theoretical significance of this paradigm shift is considerable and has several implications. While Fogelin identified an irresolvable impasse between two individuals engaged in argumentation, this analysis broadens the scope to include institutional, political, and social contexts, thereby exploring potential avenues for progress (Almagro, 2024). The aim is not to resolve the fundamental metaphysical disagreement, which may remain perpetually unsolvable, but to transition the system from a state of destructive conflict symmetry to one of effective cooperation. This transformation, therefore, is achieved not through logical persuasion but by reorganizing systems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Deep disagreement, as initially conceptualized by Fogelin, involves a profound clash between differing worldviews rooted in opposing foundational beliefs, such as essential moral, epistemic, and metaphysical principles (Wee, 2025). Unlike typical or “shallow” disagreements, where individuals might change their perspectives upon receiving new information, deep disagreements resist rational

¹ Dituria Foundation, Gostivar 1230, North Macedonia

^{*} Corresponding author’s email: veselmemedi2@gmail.com

resolution because of the lack of a shared framework for evaluating evidence and arguments (Fogelin, 1985). The individuals involved start from distinct “starting points,” i.e., different sets of hinge beliefs or epistemic principles that form the foundation of their worldviews (Pritchard, 2021). Wittgenstein’s notion of hinge propositions (1969) provides a philosophical lens for understanding the emergence of deep disagreements. Hinge propositions are foundational commitments that remain unchallenged; they are not justified through reasoning but instead form the backdrop against which reasoning occurs. When two parties hold incommensurable hinges, they cannot persuade each other because each party’s logic appears irrational to the other.

Nonetheless, we argue that the realm of deep disagreement extends well beyond theoretical and philosophical discussions. In fact, most of current empirical research reveals that deep disagreements are evident in debates on abortion, climate change, pandemic responses, medical ethics, and polarized politics, just to mention a few. These are called “radical moral disagreements” not only because of their persistence but also because of their inherent structural characteristics. According to Lyreskog *et al.* (2025), these disagreements involve conflicting values that require resolution, remain unchanged even under ideal conditions, provoke emotional intensity that impedes compromise, show increasing polarization, involve censure that limits public dialogue, lead to widespread social upheaval, and involve contested epistemologies concerning evidence and expertise.

In other words, the central argument regarding deep disagreement transcends mere logical issues and represents a systemic phenomenon. The emotional aspect tied to deep disagreement, especially the frustration felt when parties realize that further discussion only entrenches their positions, acts as a phenomenological indicator of disagreement depth (Kish, 2025). Epistemic disdain often arises in situations where deep disagreements persist. Parties begin to view each other not only as incorrect but also as lacking epistemic competence, irrational, or inherently unreasonable. This cognitive and emotional divide creates what can be described as a “repelling state” within the framework of dynamic systems theory (Lavorerio, 2023).

Dynamical Systems Theory (DST) presents a fundamentally different approach to conflict analysis, setting itself apart from traditional models that focus on rational choice or argumentation. Rather than asking “who is right,” DST investigates “how does the system evolve?” (Kugler & Coleman, 2020). In this framework, a system is defined by its non-linear dynamics, where small changes can lead to significant effects, creating attractors, which are stable states that systems tend to gravitate towards; and feedback loops, which are self-reinforcing cycles that can either stabilize or destabilize the system. The innovative application of DST to address intractable conflicts is credited to Peter Coleman, Andrzej Nowak, and Robin Vallacher (2007), who reconceptualize these

conflicts as non-linear, self-organizing systems trapped in “malignant attractors.” In this context, intractable conflicts are not seen as stemming from a single contentious issue but rather from feedback loops that make the “state of conflict” the system’s natural equilibrium.

In fact, the concept of an attractor is crucial for understanding conflict dynamics. An attractor refers to a pattern or condition toward which a dynamic system naturally evolves when it is left undisturbed. A fixed-point attractor denotes a singular stable state, a cycle attractor signifies a recurring pattern, and a strange attractor is characterized by chaotic yet bounded behavior. In cases of deep disagreement, the adversarial relationship often manifests as a fixed-point attractor where both parties anticipate conflict, prepare for it, and interpret each other’s actions through the lens of past disputes. Efforts at logical persuasion may in fact inadvertently reinforce the attractor, as arguments are perceived as instruments of conflict rather than endeavors to seek the truth. Dynamic Systems Theory notably illustrates that negative attractors can be destabilized by introducing “noise,” external disturbances, or by fortifying alternative, positive attractors (Coleman, 2024). The objective of conflict transformation is not to compel parties to alter their beliefs but to modify the environment so that cooperation becomes the most accessible path to peace.

On the other hand, when participants shift their focus from competing for limited resources to prioritizing the cooperative management of interconnected systems, deep disagreements often become less intense. This paradigm shift enables the system to reorganize around new core principles (Fisher & Rucki, 2016). The process of collective adaptation within complex socio-cognitive systems demonstrates how the dynamic interplay of social integration strategies, environmental factors, and problem structures can lead to either successful adaptation or significant failure (Galešić *et al.*, 2023). This reorientation underscores that achieving a sustainable resolution to persistent conflicts depends not on changing individual beliefs but on transforming the systemic context in which these beliefs are embedded in. By establishing new institutional frameworks and incentive structures, third parties can support systemic reorganization without requiring explicit consensus on foundational principles.

An important topic in argumentation theory that has only recently begun to receive significant attention is its emphasis on dyadic or two-party interactions, where each side adopts an opposing stance to the other. Although discussions involving multiple parties are typical deliberative argumentative processes, they have often been overlooked or evaluated using dialectical models intended for two-party disagreements (Aakhus and Lewinski, 2013). The core idea is straightforward yet profound: many conflicts that seem unsolvable within a two-party framework can be addressed when transformed into a triad, an interaction that includes a third party serving as a mediator, arbitrator, judge, or institutional authority (Lisanok & Ševarenkova, 2024). In the realms of

mediation and arbitration, for instance, the involvement of a third party has increasingly played a stabilizing role in international law and in diplomacy. In fact, arbitration institutions fulfill a dual purpose, illustrating that third parties not only facilitate but also create new institutional structures in the process.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilizes a synthetic theoretical framework that merges Dynamical Systems Theory with argumentation theory and institutional analysis. Instead of gathering empirical data, this study constructs and evaluates a theoretical model through logical reasoning and validation using case studies. The methodology, therefore, integrates philosophical argumentation with systems-level analysis to explore how structural interventions can resolve conflicts that resist rational persuasion.

In this line of reasoning, the Great Attractor model was developed using a structured three-phase process. Initially, the research identifies the philosophical constraints linked to dyadic methods in resolving deep disagreements by examining Fogelin's impossibility thesis and its contemporary critiques. Subsequently, it explores the theoretical foundations of Dynamical Systems Theory, emphasizing the importance of attractors in conflict scenarios. Finally, the model is applied to a particular case study of the 2001 Macedonian conflict to assess its explanatory and practical significance.

In fact, the 2001 Macedonian conflict serves as the primary empirical case study because it exemplifies a significant clash of fundamental state principles. This conflict was characterized by irreconcilable beliefs between Macedonian governmental forces and Albanian armed group, about whether the state should be defined as a unitary or binational, and it could not be resolved through conventional bilateral negotiations. The involvement of the International Community, including the USA, NATO, and the EU, along with the resulting Ohrid Framework Agreement, provides concrete evidence of how a third-party Great Attractor can influence the dynamics of a conflict without addressing the underlying philosophical disagreements.

In this sense, therefore, the analysis draws on the scholarly literature related to deep disagreement, dynamical systems theory, conflict resolution, and the Macedonian context. Documentary sources include the Ohrid Framework Agreement, statements from international mediators and evaluations by conflict experts. The case study utilizes the Great Attractor model to illustrate how the structural mechanisms of third-party intervention work to steer system dynamics toward cooperation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In situations marked by deep disagreements, the term "Great Attractor" refers to a third entity - an individual, organization, or set of principles - that exerts sufficient structural influence to navigate conflicting parties toward sustainable resolutions. This influence operates

through measurable incentive structures and cost-benefit calculations rather than persuasion. The gravitational metaphor proves particularly suitable: just as mass cannot escape gravitational fields once entangled within them, parties find themselves unable to reverse course from a sufficiently powerful attractor once they commit themselves - either implicitly or explicitly - to its sphere of influence.

Empirical analysis of successful third-party interventions reveals four critical, operationalized dimensions. First, the Third Party must possess or control resources vital to both conflicting parties - quantifiable incentives such as economic aid allocations, security guarantees, membership conditionality, or international recognition. When incentive mechanisms are structured transparently, parties demonstrate statistically measurable shifts toward cooperation as discord costs exceed collaboration benefits. Second, the Third Party must maintain procedural credibility through neutral proceduralism: impartial governance that adheres to transparent, consistent guidelines demonstrable across multiple cases. This neutrality need not be absolute; rather, it must be procedurally credible and defensible against accusations of arbitrary bias. Third, the Third Party establishes procedural legitimacy by introducing externally imposed yet logically justifiable terminologies, translations, requirements, and criteria. Lastly, the Third Party must demonstrate institutional persistence - positioning itself as a permanently embedded structural constraint rather than a temporary intervention that parties can circumvent or "wait out."

The attractor's gravitational authority operates through multiple reinforcing mechanisms. In the Macedonian context, the European Union and NATO wielded demonstrable authority through concrete mechanisms: market access regulation, security assurance provision, and conditional membership pathways. This authority compels acknowledgment not through coercion but through rational actors recognizing that alignment produces measurable benefits. Consequently, the attractor shifts argumentative focus from irresolvable foundational principles to practical, procedurally manageable issues. By transforming disputes into dialogues rather than dyadic confrontations, the attractor reframes the objective: parties cease attempting to "defeat" opponents and instead focus on "meeting" externally established criteria. This procedural reframing produces cascading effects: parties adopt specialized vocabularies, internalize new communicative frameworks, and develop institutional competencies that reinforce compliance.

In proceeding in this way, the Great Attractor framework confronts a fundamental philosophical challenge: if two parties disagree over foundational principles, how can they agree on a Third Party's legitimacy? This "problem of the criterion" (known epistemologically as the Agrippan Trilemma) appears logically insurmountable (Aikin, 2020), or the Agrippan Trilemma (Sextus Empiricus, 2000). Wittgenstein famously captured this

dilemma: “If I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned” (Wittgenstein, 2009: 87). Yet this objection confuses logical validity with structural necessity. Parties need not achieve philosophical consensus on the attractor’s legitimacy; they need only recognize that mutual benefits exceed continued discord. This distinction proves decisive: acceptance becomes implicit and structural rather than explicit and ideological. Parties demonstrate acceptance through action - hiring lawyers, filing institutional documents, pursuing benefits - thereby entering the attractor’s sphere of influence without formally renouncing foundational beliefs.

In this line of reasoning, the attractor emerges not as external imposition but as a natural structural consequence of the conflict itself. Both parties implicitly recognize its authority by pursuing resources it controls: international organization membership, economic assistance, security guarantees, and diplomatic recognition, just to mention a few. This recognition is fundamentally structural, not logical. In divorce proceedings, for example, mutually antagonistic parties lacking shared values nonetheless acknowledge the judge’s authority through shared self-interest in acquiring contested property. Their involvement stems from mutual benefit calculation, not shared ideology. Critically, acceptance remains largely implicit: parties do not formally declare legitimacy; they simply engage according to the attractor’s procedural requirements.

When proceeding in this way, an unexpected empirical phenomenon emerges: prolonged engagement within the attractor’s framework produces genuine cognitive shifts. This developmental impact operates through four reinforcing mechanisms. First, repeated exposure to the attractor’s language creates habit formation and new conceptual categories. Second, consistent procedural adherence produces predictability and institutional trust. Third, success in achieving benefits through cooperation creates positive reinforcement loops. Fourth, recognition of opponents as legitimate institutional participants yields measurably superior outcomes relative to overt conflict. This internalization is neither deceptive nor evidence of false consciousness; rather, it exemplifies structural cognition: the attractor functions as an environmental force reshaping the conditions within which reasoning and action occur.

In fact, in dynamical systems theory, when a system transitions to a different basin of attraction, it amplifies its state characteristics and becomes resistant to reversion. The Macedonian case demonstrates this mechanism empirically. The negative attractor - remaining locked in original ideological positions regarding state definition - progressively lost force as the positive attractor implemented by the International Community gained prominence. Multiple factors reinforce this shift: institutional momentum, memory effects, and the formation of new cooperative pathways. Parties recognize that collaboration produces advantages, attractor processes demonstrate fairness, and acknowledging

opponents as legitimate participants, yields superior outcomes compared to continued conflict. The system exhibits hysteresis in which movement to a new basin state proves remarkably resistant to reversion toward the previous configuration.

The Macedonian Case: Deep Disagreement and Structural Resolution

The 2001 Macedonian conflict exemplified intractable disagreement rooted in fundamentally incompatible state definitions. The Macedonian government held that Macedonia constituted a unitary nation-state characterized by ethnic-majority dominance, emphasizing national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA) argued for collective rights recognition, binationality, and minority status as equal political entities (representing approximately 30% of the population). These positions transcended policy disagreement, touching on essential political community definition. Direct communication proved ineffective, with logical argumentation reinforcing rather than resolving the “us versus them” divide.

The critical intervention involved systematized International Community involvement (USA, EU, and NATO) wielding quantifiable structural authority. Rather than addressing the philosophical question “whose state is this?” - which admits no neutral resolution - the International Community established a framework requiring both parties to adopt new terminology and procedures as prerequisites for concrete benefits: economic aid packages, NATO membership, EU integration pathways, and international recognition. The Ohrid Framework Agreement (August 2001) achieved substantial transformation not by resolving deep disagreement but by establishing a framework within which such conflicts could persist without inciting systemic violence.

In line with this reasoning, the Ohrid approach emphasized modifying incentive frameworks rather than changing individual beliefs. Participants were not required to embrace democracy principles, human rights, or minority protection ideologies. Rather, they were mandated to meet concrete requirements using the attractor’s language: instead of historical justice debates, parties discussed proportional representation percentages (specifically, constitutional amendments establishing proportional representation thresholds); instead of sovereignty assertions, parties drafted institutional mechanisms ensuring minority participation in executive and legislative structures.

Over time, changes emerged that could not be solely attributed to structural necessity. The negative attractor - characterized by ethnic conflict, mutual animosity, and violence - demonstrably declined in intensity. Simultaneously, a positive attractor - characterized by institutional cooperation, constitutional governance, and effective pluralism - gained prominence. This shift was not driven by either side abandoning core beliefs but rather

by practical benefits of cooperation and institutional mechanisms facilitating collaboration. Measurable indicators demonstrated this: violence decreased sharply post-2001, inter-ethnic dialogue mechanisms were institutionalized, and constitutional reforms achieved implementation despite ongoing ideological divergence. In short, when disagreements become entrenched in ideological positions, conventional rational discourse often falls short. However, an external entity can achieve significant outcomes by persuading parties to adopt its terminology without requiring ideological acceptance. Through repeated engagement, parties internalize new frameworks, cultivate novel habits, develop specialized competencies, and establish collaborative patterns that become resistant to reversion. This exemplifies the developmental impact of attractors: they function as structural forces reshaping the environment in which cognition and action occur, creating conditions where cooperation becomes the demonstrably rational choice.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that disagreements are shaped by structural dynamics, not logic alone. By recognizing this reality, we transcend Wittgenstein's turned spade, laying foundations for cooperation despite persistent fundamental differences. By combining Dynamical Systems Theory with trialogical discourse, the model resolves disagreements through a neutral Third Party intervention. Rather than eliminating fundamental differences, the Attractor transforms the communicative environment, encouraging parties to adopt specialized language and abandon entrenched rhetoric. Ultimately, this study illustrates that deeply rooted disagreements cannot be resolved through logical reasoning alone, as they are inherently shaped by structural dynamics. By recognizing this reality, we can move beyond the fundamental limitations symbolized by Wittgenstein's metaphor of the turned spade. In doing so, we lay new foundations for meaningful cooperation, even amidst persistent and fundamental disagreements. However, we have to admit that the Great Attractor model has significant limitations. It requires genuine authority and impartiality; if one party gains control or perceives bias, it fails. It only works best when both parties benefit from collaboration, limiting effectiveness in zero-sum conflicts.

REFERENCES

Aikin, S. F. (2020). What optimistic responses to deep disagreement get right (and wrong). *Co-herencia*, 17(32), 225–238. <https://doi.org/10.17230/co-herencia.17.32.9>

Almagro, M. (2024). *Deep conflicts and deep disagreements. THEORIA: An International Journal for Theory History and Foundations of Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1387/theoria.24675>

Coleman, P. T. (2024). Navigating firestorms: The imperative of conflict-intelligent leadership in a turbulent world. *Negotiation Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1162/ngtn_a_00003

Druckman, D., Bulska, D., & Jochemczyk, Ł. (2020). Turning points at the round table talks. *Social Psychological Bulletin*. <https://doi.org/10.32872/spb.v14i4.2329>

Fisher, J., & Rucki, K. (2016). Re-conceptualizing the science of sustainability: A dynamical systems approach to understanding the nexus of conflict, development and the environment. *Sustainable Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1656>

Fogelin, R. (1985). The logic of deep disagreement. *Informal Logic*, 7(1), 1–8.

Galešić, M., et al. (2023). Beyond collective intelligence: Collective adaptation. *Journal of the Royal Society Interface*. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsif.2022.0736>

Kiš, S. (2023). Does deep moral disagreement exist in real life? *Organon F*. <https://doi.org/10.31577/orgf.2023.30302>

Kish, S. (2025). Frustrated and aware. *Informal Logic*, 45(1), 8444. <https://doi.org/10.22329/il.v45i1.8444>

Kugler, K. G., & Coleman, P. T. (2020). Get complicated: The effects of complexity on conversations over potentially intractable moral conflicts. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ncmr.12192>

Lavorerio, V. (2023). Cognitive peerhood, epistemic disdain, and affective polarisation: The perils of disagreeing deeply. *Episteme*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2023.11>

Lisanok, E. N., & Ševarenkova, A. V. (2024). Visual argument mapping, deep disagreement and dispute resolution (a case-study of the harassment discussion). *Πράξη Journal of Visual Semiotics*. <https://doi.org/10.23951/2312-7899-2024-2-167-187>

Lyreskog, D. M., Wilkinson, D., Atuire, C. A., Farrell, M., Francis, E., Harrison, M., Kingori, P., Savulescu, J., Singh, I., & Parker, M. J. (2025). The problem (and the value) of radical moral disagreement. *Wellcome Open Research*. <https://doi.org/10.12688/wellcomeopenres.24721.1>

Sextus Empiricus. (2000). Outline of skepticism (J. Annas & J. Barnes, Trans.; 2nd ed.). *Cambridge University Press*. (Original work published c. 2nd or 3rd century CE)

Wee, M. (2025). Concept-formation and deep disagreements in theoretical and practical reasoning. *Synthese*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-024-04884-6>

Weber, L., Shantz, A. S., Kistruck, G. M., & Lount, R. B. (2023). Give peace a chance? How regulatory foci influence organizational conflict events in intractable conflict environments. *Journal of Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01492063231196556>

Wittgenstein, L. (1969). On certainty (G. E. M. Anscombe & G. H. von Wright, Eds.; D. Paul & G. E. M. Anscombe, Trans.). *Basil Blackwell*.

Wittgenstein, L. (2009). *Philosophical investigations* (P. M. S. Hacker & J. Schulte, Eds.; G. E. M. Anscombe, Trans.; 4th ed.). Wiley-Blackwell. (Original work published 1953).