

ONE-DAY SYMPOSIUM

Deep Disagreement and the Limits of Argumentation

Book of Abstracts

Keynote lecture: **Scott F. Aikin** (Vanderbilt University)

Wednesday, 21 October 2026
Bratislava

Institute of Philosophy
Slovak Academy of Sciences

About the symposium

Deep Disagreement and the Limits of Argumentation is a one-day symposium organised by the Institute of Philosophy of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava. It brings together work in argumentation theory, epistemology and ethics on the question of what argumentation can and cannot achieve when disagreement runs deep.

Date: Wednesday, 21 October 2026

Venue: Study Room, Central Library of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Klemensova 19, Bratislava

Keynote speaker: Scott F. Aikin, Vanderbilt University

Organiser: Tomáš Kollárik, Institute of Philosophy, Slovak Academy of Sciences

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Format. The keynote lecture lasts one hour. Each of the ten further talks has 20 minutes for presentation and 10 minutes for discussion. The programme runs from 9:10 to 17:45, with coffee breaks and a 90-minute lunch break.

This booklet collects the titles and abstracts of all contributions in the order of the programme.

Programme

Wednesday, 21 October 2026 · Study Room, Central Library of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Klemensova 19

- 9:10** Welcome and opening
- 9:20** **Scott F. Aikin** (Vanderbilt University)
Deep Disagreement and the Owl of Minerva Problem — keynote lecture
- 10:20** Coffee break
- 10:40** **Andrew Aberdein** (Florida Institute of Technology)
Virtuous Resolutions to Vicious Disagreements
- 11:10** **Martin Hinton** (University of Lodz)
The problem of deep disagreeers: from conflicting arguments to conflicting arguers
- 11:40** Lunch break
- 13:10** **Guido Melchior** (University of Graz)
Subjective and objective rationality in deep disagreement
- 13:40** **László Bernáth & János Tőzsér** (HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities, Budapest)
Transparent Deep Disagreements and the Epistemic Status of Beliefs
- 14:10** **Anand S. S.** (University of Hyderabad)
Rethinking Explanatory Analysis
- 14:40** Coffee break
- 15:00** **Manuel Almagro Holgado & Amalia Haro Marchal** (University of Valencia & NOVA University Lisbon)
Deep disagreement and poisoning the well
- 15:30** **Jordi Fairhurst & Seunghyun Song** (University of the Balearic Islands & KU Leuven; Tilburg University)
Online Hate Speech and Deep Disagreement
- 16:00** **Hareim Hadi Hassan** (American University of Iraq, Sulaimani)
Argumentative Civility and the Role of Argumentation in Polarized Discourse: The Turkish–Kurdish Peace Process
- 16:30** Short break
- 16:40** **Chris Ranalli** (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)
Deeply Disagreeing about Conspiracy Theories
- 17:10** **Petar Bodlović** (Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb)
Can There Be a Burden of Proof in Deep Disagreement?
- 17:40** Closing remarks

Deep Disagreement and the Owl of Minerva Problem

Scott F. Aikin

Vanderbilt University

Owl of Minerva Problems emerge when our normative concepts for a practice, made explicit and applied for that practice's improvement, occasion new errors in that practice. This occurs in argumentation, for example, when the concept of fallacy, constructed and applied for correction and improvement, yields the new meta-argumentative error of the fallacy fallacy. The notion of deep disagreements is an explanation of persistent divergences – that the difference is between unbridgeable perspectives, and perhaps they are ever-widening. A number of pathological responses are occasioned by this concept. One is in persistent meta-commentary on the divide and then proposals for resolution being those of finding 'middle ground' that is, unsurprisingly, self-serving.

Virtuous Resolutions to Vicious Disagreements

Andrew Aberdein

Florida Institute of Technology

I am an advocate of a virtue theory of argumentation. I believe that normative questions about how we should argue can best be addressed by considering the virtues and vices of arguers. I have argued that this approach can profitably be applied to deep disagreement too (most recently in Aberdein 2023). In so doing, I have paid particular attention to the vices of arrogance and cowardice and the virtues of courage and humility. While other virtues or vices may also be relevant, these seem specially significant for the epistemology of disagreement. If I respond to a position disagreeing with my own by sticking to my guns (the “steadfast” view), I exhibit courage but risk arrogance. Conversely, if I respond to a disagreement by weakening my support for my own position (the “equal weight” view), I demonstrate humility but may have given in to cowardice. Thus arrogance and cowardice can make disagreements appear deeper than they are and frustrate the resolution of genuinely deep disagreements, whereas courage and humility are likely to be required for any such resolution. Or so I maintain. Scott Aikin has drawn attention to the Owl of Minerva Problem (most recently in Aikin 2025). This is the tendency of technical solutions to problems of reasoning to generate hitherto unanticipated new problems. He takes the Owl of Minerva Problem to exacerbate the problem of deep disagreement and also to undercut the virtue approach to argument, and thereby any hope it may have of remedying deep disagreements. In this paper I argue that the virtue approach has the resources necessary to respond to both of Aikin’s challenges.

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The problem of deep disagreeers: from conflicting arguments to conflicting arguers

Martin Hinton

University of Lodz

In this talk I shall put forward a view – or perhaps offer a challenge – that the apparent limits of argumentation stem from the limitations put upon it by theorists of argument. These limits come in various forms, but I shall concentrate on two: those which are teleological – suggesting that arguing has a fixed purpose – and those which come from focussing on arguments rather than arguers.

Firstly, I shall claim that arguments have a range of functions. My own typology has these as Persuasive, Expressive, Explanatory, Exploratory, and Provocative (PEEEP) (Hinton et al. 2024), but this is just one suggestion. Secondly, I suggest that within Expressive argumentation, the notion of ‘identity’ arguments (Hample & Irions 2015, Hinton 2024), and, therefore, of arguer identity, is of particular importance. Such arguments are claims made with the intention/effect of demonstrating an identity characteristic of the speaker or their group and should not be treated as argument in a ‘standard’ logico-philosophical sense, more as ideological position taking.

Fogelin (1985) is close to this idea when he talks about deep disagreements as being caused by conflicting ‘forms of life’. However, his mistake, as I see it, is to suggest that: ‘when we inquire into the source of a deep disagreement, we do not simply find isolated propositions ... but instead a whole system of mutually supporting propositions’. This gives the impression that those who disagree do so because they have different principles – usually moral – which lead to different conclusions. Since these are ‘mutually supporting’ they constitute some (coherent) system of belief, which, we feel, ought to be open to argument but isn’t. This, however, is not the case in reality – individuals happily cling to contradictory views based on mutually exclusive propositions when it suits them, suggesting that they are not reasoning from fundamentals.

Understood in this way, many apparently deep disagreements are not disagreements in the sense of conflicting reasoning at all: they result from the expression of incompatible identity positions. There is no reason why argumentation – understood as an exchange of reasons aimed at finding truth or resolving disagreement – should be able to bring about any change in the positions of the protagonists in such cases.

The key point here is that it is not the issue or the argument that leads to deep disagreement – it is the attitude towards the subject of certain individuals. In fact, to follow Fogelin’s example, cooperative, argument-based discussion on the subject of abortion is carried out every day and results in laws across the world which recognise the competing rights of mothers and fetuses. That the conflicting positions of some individuals cannot be resolved is not due to the nature of the issue nor to the weakness of argument as a tool, but rather to the characteristics of certain individuals.

I discuss what this means for work on disagreement in general, and how a shift towards the procedural approach of explainable argument theory (XAT) is beneficial for the field.

Subjective and objective rationality in deep disagreement

Guido Melchior

University of Graz

Human agents can fail to be epistemically rational for various reasons, e.g., because they are prejudiced or biased, or because they simply do not care about the truth. A particularly interesting case are agents who do care about rationality and truth but might fail to be rational because of holding false beliefs concerning rationality. These false beliefs might include how they think about properly responding to evidence, or to testifiers in cases of disagreement. These agents are rational from their subjective point of view but might fail to meet objective standards of rationality.

The distinction between objective epistemic rationality – believing in line with the objective rules of rationality, whatever these rules might be – and subjective epistemic rationality – believing according to one's own standards of rationality – provides the conceptual starting point of this paper. This distinction is not only of theoretical interest. Our world is actually full of subjectively rational but objectively irrational agents. For example, agents in a conspiracy bubble who believe unreliable sources because they falsely believe them to be proper are subjectively rational but fail to be objectively rational.

Part 1 of this paper investigates the nature of subjective and objective rationality by demarcating subjective and objective rationality from other forms of rationality discussed in the literature. As I will argue, subjective and objective rationality are rather broad phenomena that concern one's belief formation in light of a given body of (alleged) evidence but also acquiring new information via sources and methods that are (believed to be) reliable or trustworthy.

In part 2 of this paper, I explore the specific role that subjective and objective rationality plays in cases of disagreement. In particular, I will investigate what it actually takes for merely subjectively rational agents to become objectively rational in cases of disagreement. As I will argue, transitioning from mere subjective rationality to objective rationality requires as one step epistemically akratic belief formation. For example, a conspiracy theorist who is entangled in her belief system might become objectively rational by starting to form beliefs on the basis of testifiers of whom she believes that they are unreliable. She cannot, however, become objectively rational by continuing to form beliefs in line with her false meta-beliefs about reliable sources. Accordingly, resolutions of deep disagreement between two subjectively rational agents require an epistemically akratic act from one of the disagreeing parties.

Transparent Deep Disagreements and the Epistemic Status of Beliefs

László Bernáth & János Tózsér

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Recent literature has argued that deep disagreements arise from differences in fundamental epistemic principles, hinges, or values. Some authors further maintain that the transparency of these differences provides both parties with a strong epistemic reason to retain their beliefs (Levy 2021; Kappel 2021). Two kinds of considerations have been offered in support of this view. The first holds that the transparency of a deep disagreement reveals the fundamentally different nature of the interlocutors' epistemic backgrounds, thereby providing grounds for discounting the epistemic authority of the opposing party. The second consideration points in the opposite direction: the transparency of the disagreement makes it clear that neither party has committed a cognitive mistake. If so, each participant is epistemically entitled to maintain their own view.

In this paper, we challenge this view and argue that transparent deep disagreements, far from providing epistemic support for maintaining one's beliefs, instead constitute a strong epistemic reason to reconsider both the disputed beliefs and the underlying epistemic principles, hinges, or values from which they arise.

First, we argue that some of the cases commonly cited as examples of transparent deep disagreement are neither genuinely deep nor genuinely transparent; rather, they involve straightforward cognitive mistakes. Second, we seek to show that there is a direct connection between the transparency of a disagreement and the question of whether the parties ought to suspend their disputed beliefs, drawing on examples of shallow disagreements. In doing so, we also provide grounds for challenging the standard view that shallow disagreements invariably furnish epistemic reasons for suspending contested beliefs. Third, we return to the case of deep disagreement and argue that, in instances of transparent deep disagreement, participants lack epistemic reasons for maintaining their beliefs. At most, they possess excuses grounded in psychological limitations or practical considerations. The core of our argument is that transparent deep disagreements reveal that it is largely a matter of epistemic luck whether a party's beliefs align with the truth or fail to do so. The recognition of this fact, we contend, provides a strong epistemic reason to suspend the beliefs at issue in the disagreement.

Rethinking Explanatory Analysis

Anand S. S.

University of Hyderabad

There has been a proliferation of literature on the nature of deep disagreement in recent times. Anyone with adequate acquaintance with this literature will notice that there is no agreed-upon account of deep disagreement. Theorists have characterized it as a clash between fundamental principles, as a conflict between framework propositions, as a conflict between hinge commitments, and so on. This dispute regarding disagreement has prompted a metaphysical program aimed at adjudicating between rival accounts, determining which one, if any, captures the real nature of deep disagreement. I argue that this framing of the problem is misconceived. Once disagreement is understood as a relational concept, the opposing accounts turn out not to be competitors for a single analysis, but specifications of what the relata of that relation can be.

Descriptive analysis and Carnapian explication have both been proposed as models for this adjudication, and both face serious problems. Melchior (2024) argues that deep disagreement is not a common-sense concept like knowledge or truth but a technical term stipulated by Fogelin, so there is no shared pre-theoretical intuition for competing definitions to be tested against; applying explication or descriptive analysis to it is therefore a methodological mistake. Arroyo (2025) grants that an ordinary, non-philosophical concept of deep disagreement exists, but argues that descriptive analysis is still the wrong model for technical accounts, since these are built from theoretical background that ordinary speakers have no access to. He raises a parallel objection against treating technical accounts as revisions of the lay concept: unlike standard cases of revisionary analysis, proponents of deep disagreement theories never diagnose a deficiency in the ordinary concept their definitions are meant to correct.

Arroyo (2025) proposes “explanatory analysis” as an alternative, on which competing accounts should be judged by how well they explain the relevant phenomena. While agreeing with the broader implications of it, I argue that this proposal is underdeveloped. It is defended almost entirely through an analogy with chemical analysis, where underlying microstructure explains observable properties, and the analogy is never extended far enough to say what counts as an adequate explanation when the subject matter is disagreement rather than chemical substances.

This paper provides an alternate account of explanatory analysis, without relying on the chemical analogy. My claim is that disagreement is a relational concept. A relation that holds between attitudes, between propositional contents, or between both. Each theory of deep disagreement, on this picture, specifies the relata of that relation (fundamental principles, framework propositions, hinge commitments, axiological commitments). When relata with the properties a given theory specifies come into conflict, the resulting disagreement exhibits the general features we associate with deep disagreement (persistence, systematicity, fundamentality etc.). Rival theories are not competing for the single correct analysis of deep disagreement, but each identifies a different kind of relatum, and the properties of that relatum, whose conflict produces depth. The metaphysical project, on this account, is the project of mapping which relata, and which of their properties, give rise to which features of deep disagreement.

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Deep disagreement and poisoning the well

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The contemporary literature on deep disagreement has largely developed along two traditions. One conceives of deep disagreements as disputes concerning fundamental epistemic principles and methods (e.g., Lynch 2010, 2016), while the other, inspired by Wittgenstein, understands them as disagreements rooted in divergent worldviews, forms of life, or hinge commitments (Fogelin 1985; Pritchard 2021, 2023). According to the latter view, deep disagreements are especially problematic because they involve difficulties in making sense of what the opposing party is saying in the first place (see Smith & Lynch 2021, 979).

Despite their differences, these views converge on a central idea: deep disagreements are unusually resistant to rational resolution. The reasons offered by one party often fail to count as reasons for the other, since the disagreement concerns not only whether p is true but also how the truth of p is to be determined, what counts as evidence, and what counts as a good reason in the first place (Fogelin 1985; Lynch 2010; Aikin 2021). Consequently, deep disagreements are commonly portrayed as epistemically problematic and as obstacles to knowledge acquisition.

Although “deep disagreement” is a technical notion, recent work has emphasized that classifying a disagreement as deep is itself an evaluative act (Forero-Mora & Frápolli 2026). We still think that “deep disagreement” refers to a specific kind of disagreement, but agree that judging a situation of disagreement to be an instance of deep disagreement has an irreducibly evaluative dimension, and the evaluative is especially linked to action.

Building on this, we make two points. First, we argue that deep disagreements are neither necessarily pernicious nor inherently detrimental to ordinary processes of knowledge acquisition. Much of what we know is acquired not through arguments, explicit reasons, or inferences, but through participation in practices, embodied experience, and the gradual mastery of forms of activity. From this perspective, the value of some deep disagreements lies precisely in their capacity to expose us to unfamiliar practices and experiences that cannot be transmitted through argument alone. In such cases, the disagreement is located primarily at the level of action rather than at the level of reasons (Almagro & Villanueva 2025).

Second, we argue that, in some contexts, judging a certain situation as a deep disagreement can itself function as a form of argumentative manipulation, in particular as a form of poisoning the well. It may signal that everything the interlocutor says is intelligible only from within a particular perspective, and that there is no standpoint-neutral route for assessing those claims from outside that perspective, so the other party’s point can only be understood from their own ideological perspective. In this respect, the classification of a situation as a deep disagreement can itself become a powerful manipulative argumentative move.

Finally, we challenge the widespread assumption that poisoning the well is necessarily epistemically vicious. Drawing on recent work rejecting the ideal of neutrality in argumentation (Almagro & Haro Marchal 2025), we argue that describing a disagreement as deep may sometimes constitute a legitimate—and even virtuous—instance of poisoning the well, which connects with our first point.

Rather than silencing an opponent, it can serve to resist epistemic injustice, reveal asymmetries in social positioning, and redirect inquiry toward the practical conditions under which mutual understanding becomes possible.

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Online Hate Speech and Deep Disagreement

Jordi Fairhurst & Seunghyun Song

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Online hate speech has received growing interest in philosophy, with numerous studies discussing the social, political, moral and epistemic harms it inflicts on targeted groups. This paper seeks to examine an understudied consequence of hate speech: its role in instigating and sustaining deep disagreements. Drawing on recent work on deep disagreements and epistemic injustice, I argue that hate speech gives rise to deep disagreement by undermining the shared resources necessary for argumentation by systematically discrediting people as knowers and arguers. Specifically, I defend that hate speech contributes to epistemic and argumentative injustices by poisoning the well, undermining the epistemic and rational standing of a specific target within an argumentative exchange. On this basis, I explore how the use of hate speech online in deep disagreements can exceed this relational dynamic and incite widespread structural deep disagreements. Specifically, using examples from the ‘manosphere’, I show how hate speech enables actors to spread across communities and platforms the conditions that deepen disagreements, namely the epistemic and argumentative discrediting of targeted groups. Accordingly, the use of hate speech not only deepens the disagreement in which it is uttered: it can also deepen future disagreements by spreading hateful ideologies to listeners. Finally, I defend that addressing these deep disagreements requires much more than improved argumentation: it requires epistemic and argumentative reparations at an individual and structural level. Resorting to recent work on reparations within the field of social epistemology, I outline some of the remedies perpetrators of hate speech have to undertake to undo their wrongs.

Argumentative Civility and the Role of Argumentation in Polarized Discourse: The Turkish–Kurdish Peace Process

Hareim Hadi Hassan

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This paper examines the role of argumentation in polarized discourse through the case of the Turkish–Kurdish peace process. My central claim is that in deeply divided political contexts, if we zoom out and adopt a historical lens, we can see that argumentation does not function as a neutral tool for resolving disagreement. This is to say that argumentation can, to varying degrees, help create the conditions for more constructive political engagement, but it can also reinforce and deepen polarization. Which of these roles it plays depends on the epistemic and normative conditions under which argumentation takes place. The Turkish–Kurdish conflict is especially useful in this regard because it is not only a long-standing political conflict of more than a century, but also one shaped by contested identity, unequal recognition, and historically entrenched exclusion. In such a setting, argumentation becomes a struggle not simply over policy or reform, but over fundamental questions of legitimacy, such as who even has the right to speak in their mother language?

The paper applies the framework of argumentative civility to this case. Argumentative civility is not understood here as politeness, moderation, or a call for superficial consensus. Rather, it refers to the virtues and preconditions necessary for disagreement to remain politically productive rather than destructive. These include equal political dignity, willingness to treat one's opponent as a legitimate interlocutor, openness to reasons, and a readiness to engage in public argument without foreclosing the possibility of socio-political change. The question, then, is not whether argumentation matters in polarized discourse. It clearly does. The real question is: what kind of argumentation reproduces polarization, and what kind makes transformation possible?

To answer this question, the paper first examines the historical and epistemic background of the Turkish–Kurdish conflict. Drawing on the concepts of the Muslimness Contract and the Turkishness Contract, I argue that the Turkish state has historically been structured by exclusionary norms of belonging that determine who is entitled to recognition and whose claims are treated as credible. These background norms shape polarized discourse before any explicit exchange of reasons begins. In other words, argumentation here does not take place on an even field. Some speakers are already treated as legitimate, while others must first struggle to be recognized as arguers at all.

The paper then turns to the recent peace process and analyzes selected speeches by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Öcalan. The aim is not merely to compare their positions, but to examine how argumentation itself functions within polarized discourse. I focus on how each side frames identity, unity, legitimacy, and reform, and whether their discourse opens or closes the possibility of meaningful engagement. Particular attention is given to argumentative practices that intensify polarization, including dismissal, strategic misrecognition, and the reduction of political claims to security threats, as well as to practices that may soften polarization by creating space for recognition, reason-giving, and reciprocal political address.

Deeply Disagreeing about Conspiracy Theories

Chris Ranalli

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Deep disagreements arise when disputants disagree not only about whether a proposition is true, but about the standards by which it should be evaluated. At first glance, many disagreements over conspiracy theories seem to fit this description. Consider disputes about the existence of climate change. Here, disagreement often extends beyond the evidence for anthropogenic climate change to questions about which sources of evidence are trustworthy. Conspiracy theorists might reject the scientific consensus on the grounds that mainstream institutions and experts are corrupted by political or financial interests. Although such disputes concern trust as well as evidence, I argue that they are not yet cases of deep disagreement. Instead, disagreements over conspiracy theories exhibit different levels of depth. Some are ‘micro-level’ disagreements involving straightforward differences in the interpretation, evaluation, or weighting of evidence, differences that can be explained by misunderstanding, competence, and familiarity with the evidence. Others are ‘meso-level’ disagreements concerning the trustworthiness of epistemic authorities and institutions, where disputes likely cannot be settled simply by appealing to shared evidence, even after disclosing and explaining it. Only ‘macro-level’ disagreements qualify as genuinely deep disagreements, since they center on fundamental normative or metaphysical principles. In this case, they arise when distrust is itself grounded in an overarching conspiracy theory—such as Barkun’s ‘superconspiracies’, including the Illuminati and Reptilian conspiracy theories—which function analogously to Wittgensteinian hinges, structuring the evaluation of all contrary evidence, insulating the conspiracy theory from ordinary and scientific evidential evaluation. Here, I argue that the epistemology of conspiracy theory is more heterogeneous than is typically recognized, and that while some conspiracy-theoretic disputes are genuinely deep, many others occupy an intermediate position between standard ‘micro-level’ disagreement and full-blown ‘macro-level’ or deep disagreement.

Can There Be a Burden of Proof in Deep Disagreement?

Petar Bodlović

Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb

The burden of proof (henceforth, BoP) is the proponent's obligation to support her standpoint with (convincing) argument if the respondent requires her to do so (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004; Walton 2014; Bodlović 2026). It is commonly regarded as one of the fundamental norms of argumentative discourse. However, this norm seems to apply only where there is common ground between the interlocutors (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002). If they do not share the relevant dialectical starting points—a set of mutual commitments, beliefs, and preferences—then formulating a convincing argument becomes impossible. And, as Rescher (2006) points out, arguers cannot be obliged to do the impossible (“Ought implies can”). If making a convincing argument is impossible in principle, then the proponent cannot incur an obligation to argue convincingly. It therefore seems that in cases of “deep disagreement”—which “proceeds from a clash in underlying principles” or “framework propositions” (Fogelin 2005, p. 8)—the proponent cannot bear the BoP. But if the proponent cannot (be obliged to) argue convincingly, then deep disagreement appears to make argument itself impossible. This conclusion aligns with Fogelin's pessimistic view that, in the context of deep disagreement, “the conditions for argument do not exist” (Fogelin 2005, p. 7). In this talk, I argue that deep disagreement does not have the consequences for the burden of proof and argumentative discourse that are often attributed to it. First, I argue that although deep disagreement may undermine the so-called “burden of persuasion” (or burden of successful defence), it does not necessarily undermine the “burden of production,” a distinct and less demanding variety of the burden of proof. Second, I argue that deep disagreement might not undermine the burden of persuasion either. On my reading, the absence of common ground does not eliminate the mutual standards for successful defence, but rather lowers them or makes them more abstract. Finally, I argue that even if deep disagreement renders the BoP inapplicable, this neither makes arguing impossible nor renders it irrelevant. Even if we are under no obligation to argue, we may still choose to engage in (seemingly) hopeless argumentative exchanges, and doing so can bring a range of epistemic, communicative and social benefits. Accordingly, I argue that deep disagreement does not eliminate the burden of proof, and even if it does, it does not undermine fruitful argumentative practice.

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