1 Why Do We Argue?

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle was an especially astute observer of human nature. Among his many famous pronouncements and ideas, the following two claims may already be familiar to you:

1 Humans by nature are political creatures.
2 Humans by nature desire to know.

The first of these quotations comes from Aristotle's book titled *Politics* (1253a2), and it is often interpreted as saying that humans are naturally "political" in our current colloquial sense of that term. To say that we are political in this sense is to say that we are competitive, ambitious, cunning, shrewd, manipulative, and perhaps ruthless. But this is not the sense of "political" that Aristotle intends. In claiming that we are by nature political, Aristotle means to say that we are by nature social and sociable beings. That is, Aristotle saw that it is no accident that human beings live together in families, neighborhoods, communities, and other social forms of association, including political associations.

Not only are we social in the sense that we enjoy the company of others, we also *depend* on each other in various ways. We need others if we are going to live lives that exhibit the familiar characteristics of a *human* life. From the time we are very young, we need others to nurture and care for us; we need others to teach us how to get along in the physical and social world. Moreover, there are certain distinctively human capacities—capacities for friendship, loyalty, love, gratitude, sincerity, generosity, kindness, and much else—that can exist only given the presence of others. For example, one cannot be a friend all by oneself, and generosity can be exercised only toward needy others. Finally, it seems that the ability to use language—to communicate, to express ourselves—is one of the most central features of human life, and communication presupposes a social life. In order to be fully human, we need others.

As Aristotle also observed, our dependence on others is not a one-way street. Others need us, too. Our dependence is mutual. This is most obvious in the case of friendship. Our friends need us, and, though it may

sound odd to say so, we not only need them, but *we also need to be needed by them*. That's just what friendship is. Even infants, arguably the most helpless among us, provide for adults occasions for the development and exercise of the distinctive dispositions and attitudes appropriate to caregivers, nurturers, and guardians. We depend on others even when they depend on us. Dependence is not necessarily a one-way street. As human beings, we are interdependent. We need each other, and we need to be needed by each other.

Importantly, this inevitable and pervasive mutual dependence is not a sign of weakness or deficiency in human beings. As Aristotle also claimed, interdependence is *proper* to human beings. That's simply who we are. We are the kind of creature that needs others of its kind. Our relationships with others are what *make us properly human*. In fact, Aristotle went so far as to say that any creature that is not dependent on others in these distinctively human ways is thereby not a human being at all, but rather something either greater than or less than human—a god or a beast, he said.

Although our dependence on each other is not a defect, our mutual dependency does make our social relations complex and sometimes even problematic. It's obvious that our interdependence means that we must *rely* on others. We *count* on others to be sincere, to think and behave rationally, to follow the agreed-upon rules, to play fair, and so on. Consequently, in order to have the humanizing effect we all need, our relations of mutual interdependence must be in some sense *reciprocal*. They must have as their aim some *mutual* benefit. Or, to put the matter in a different way, we are not made more human when our relations with others are one-sided and inequitable, aimed at dispensing benefits only to one party to the relationship at the expense of the other party. Takers need Givers and perhaps Givers need Takers, too; but unless the taking and giving are aimed at some kind of mutual benefit for *both* parties in the long run, their relationship becomes merely a case of someone taking advantage of another. We sometimes speak of one person *using* another. The term *using* captures the one-sidedness of the relationship's benefit.

Perhaps more importantly, if our relationships are to have a humanizing effect, they must involve more than a simple *quid pro quo* or exchange of benefits, as when you scratch your neighbor's back so that he will in turn scratch yours when the time comes. Living socially involves relying on others, and in relying on others we seek not only a *mutual* benefit, but a *common* benefit, a benefit that accrues to *us*. In other words, properly ordered social relations aim at a common good among those who participate in the relation.

Consider, for example, the norms for standing in line. When someone cuts the line, the people behind that person in line have been wronged to some degree, at least by the fact that they must now wait a little longer, or they may miss out on the finite resource being doled out. It is certainly right for those folks to object to this instance of line-cutting. But it does

not seem out of place for someone *in front* of the person cutting the line to object, too. This is because cutting in line is not simply a case of one person inconveniencing others; it also involves the breaking of a social rule, and following the rule in question provides for everyone a more peaceful and cooperative social environment than the one that would result from a mad scrum for counter service. A mark of civic-mindedness is that even those not wronged by an infraction can and will object to it.

The humanizing element of our social relations makes possible civic-mindedness, the disposition to think not merely of one's individual good (good for me), but to consider also the shared good of the group (good for us). Families are the first places where these group-minded goods begin to motivate humans, but that civic-mindedness grows to larger associations, and ultimately to the state.

As mentioned above, these features of our mutual interdependence make our social relations complex, and this complexity gives rise to complications. Our mutual dependence creates opportunities for some to take advantage of others. Sometimes people enter into relations with others that are in fact not nurturing and mutually beneficial, but instead are lopsided, manipulative, stifling, or even abusive. What is philosophically interesting (and personally vexing) about relations of this kind is that those who are on the losing end of them often do not realize that they are being harmed; they do not see that they are being manipulated and used by the other. Frequently these are cases of misplaced trust and outright manipulation. These cases are possible because of our mutual dependence, and it is often because of the dependencies that people who are exploited in these relationships cannot recognize their exploitation.

Consequently, our natural dependence gives rise to a kind of vulnerability. In relying on others, we place a degree of trust in them; we interact "in good faith," and we count on others to reciprocate. In some sense this initial expression of trust and good faith is made blindly. We trust others so that they may prove worthy of trust; we rely on others, at least initially, in the hope that they will prove to be reliable. As we know all too well, sometimes we trust the wrong people to the wrong extent. Hence we not only depend upon others, we depend on others to be worthy of our dependence; we trust them to be responsible, reciprocating, and cooperative. And sometimes we learn a difficult lesson, and we consequently know that some others, under certain circumstances, are not to be trusted. And there are certain people who not only should not be trusted, but rather should be positively distrusted. It's an unpleasant fact. But that's life.

We are inherently social creatures, we depend on each other. This, in turn, means that it often matters to us how others live their lives. Since the question of whether those upon whom we depend are in fact trustworthy is a recurring issue for us, we must make the lives of others our business. We must sometimes make it our business to discover and evaluate what others do, even in private, as it were. That your neighbor stores dangerous

chemicals under unsafe conditions in her garage is your business. That the store-owner downtown engages in unfair hiring practices is also your business. Perhaps it is also your business how the couple across the street raises their children. Of course, it has been a main occupation of political philosophers to discern the limits to the concern we should have with the lives of others. We depend and rely on each other, and so the lives of others are our business, at least to some extent; nonetheless, we must not become busybodies. The philosophical project of drawing a proper line between having a healthy regard for others and being a nuisance or busybody is notoriously difficult. The history of philosophy is replete with varied attempts to do just this. Luckily, we need not undertake this task at present, because our concern is with an area of our shared social lives where we tend to think that the line is easier to discern.

To be more specific, one of the most obvious features of our social lives is that we depend on each other *epistemically*. *Epistemology* is the area of philosophy that examines the nature of knowledge, evidence, belief, and the like. Epistemologists are also concerned with the ways in which knowledge is transferred and accumulated, how new knowledge is achieved, and how knowledge differs from other phenomena, such as wishful thinking, blind faith, and lucky guessing. We need not delve deeply into the field of epistemology to make our central point, which is this: Much of what we believe and take ourselves to know derives in large measure from others.

Think about it. Apart from what you believe based on your own memories ("I had Cheerios for breakfast this morning"; "Tomorrow is my mother's birthday") and current bodily sensations ("I have a mild headache"; "I see an apple"), most of what you believe involves reliance on reports, information, findings, testimony, and data that are provided by others. You depend on these others to be reliable, accurate, sincere, and honest. Accordingly, we often regard what others think, and especially what others claim to know, as our business.

And this brings us to the second of Aristotle's claims from the beginning of this chapter. In his book titled *Metaphysics* (980a22), Aristotle observes that we each desire to know. Aristotle is often taken to be saying that humans are naturally or insatiably curious and eager to learn. This is a claim that is obviously disputable. Some of our fellow professors would go so far as to say that, in light of their many years teaching college students, it is obviously false. According to a more plausible interpretation of the quotation, Aristotle is asserting that we take ourselves to know quite a lot, and we are disturbed when we discover that we are wrong about some thing or another. We do not like being mistaken. We hate being wrong. We all desire to know insofar as we desire to avoid being duped, confused, incorrect, or deluded. If this is what Aristotle meant, then it looks as if he may be correct. Again, we try to avoid error, and we do not like having to change our minds about things, especially when it comes to the things we think are important.

The interest we have in knowing, the importance we place on getting things right, and the corresponding discomfort and frustration we feel when we discover that we have erred are all easy to understand. Our actions, plans, and projections are to a large extent based upon the things we believe to be the case. Consider even the mundane example of planning to meet a friend for lunch at a local restaurant. In setting your plans, you take yourself to know the location of the restaurant at which you are to meet your friend. You also take yourself to know that the restaurant in question is open for lunch. And in setting your plan, you take your friend to also know the location of the restaurant, and to understand that you are to meet at the determined time of day. And so on. To be mistaken in any of these beliefs will likely result in a failure to meet your friend for lunch. So, if it is important to you that you succeed in meeting your friend for lunch, it is important that you actually know the things you take yourself to know. The same is true in examples involving more important matters. Suppose you think that your health is very important, and accordingly try to keep to a healthy diet. Now imagine that you (mistakenly) believe that banana-splits are extremely healthy, and so you eat one or more banana-splits every day. Your false belief about what foods are healthy undermines your attempt to preserve your health.

More generally, your behavior is based on what you believe to be the case. If your beliefs are false, you are more likely to act in ways that contravene your intentions and undermine your aims. In a very literal sense, when your actions are based on false beliefs, you don't know what you're doing. Hence we tend to think that knowledge is highly valuable, and, correspondingly, we think it is important to avoid error. Consequently, it makes sense that we attempt to *manage* our cognitive lives, to exercise some kind of control over the processes by which we form, evaluate, sustain, and revise our beliefs.

The main way in which we try to manage our cognitive lives is by trying to attend to our reasons. When we hold beliefs, we typically take ourselves to have good reasons for them, reasons that provide sufficient support for the beliefs we hold, while also suggesting that we should reject competing beliefs. Consider an example. You look out the window and see that it is sunny. You consequently form the belief that it is not raining outside. Your observation of the clear sky and the bright sun provides you with reasons for your belief that it is not raining, while also giving reason to reject the belief that it is raining. Moreover, your belief that it is not raining outside provides you with reasons to act in various ways. If you were planning to go outside, you would probably not wear your raincoat nor carry an umbrella, and so on. Additionally, you think that your reasons for thinking that it is not raining outside can readily be made available to others. Were someone to doubt that it is sunny, you could show her the clear sky and bright sun or you could tell her that you just saw it was a nice day, and then she, too, would have good reason to believe that it is not raining outside.

It all seems rather easy, right? We believe for reasons. Or, to put the point more precisely, when we believe, we typically take our belief to be the product of what our reasons say we should believe. And this is exactly as it should be. There seems to be something odd, perhaps irrational or even idiotic, about believing *against* the reasons we have. Someone who insists that it is raining while gazing out the window onto a sunny day is not only making the error of believing what is false; she is also failing at rationally managing her beliefs. She not only fails to believe what her best reasons say she should believe; she also believes against them. That is, she not only denies what is obviously true, she denies something whose truth should be obvious *to her*. In such cases, we may say to her, "Look out the window! Can't you see that it is sunny?" And if our interlocutor persists in asserting that it is raining outside, we are likely to conclude that she's playing some kind of joke or just being stubborn. In either case, we take it that she doesn't *really* believe that it is raining, but only *says* that she does. We may scratch our heads, and then move on.

The sunny day case involves a *low-cost error*. Our friend may be wrong about the rain, and so she may take her umbrella with her when she goes outside. No biggie—she carries an umbrella with her on a sunny day. However, change the case a bit. Imagine that it's raining, it's clear from the available visual evidence that it's raining (that is, if she looked out the window she'd see a rainy day), and yet she believes it's not raining but sunny. So she's wrong, again. But now add one more thing to the case: she's planned a large picnic. She's taking the kids, some grandparents, the neighbors out to the park for a day in the grass and sun. Imagine she reasons as follows: *it can't be raining, because rain would ruin the picnic*. Not only does our friend reason badly (this is a case of simple wishful thinking), this is a *high-cost error*, and the cost in this case isn't paid only by her, but by the kids, the grandparents, and the neighbors. There they are in the rain with their cute little picnic baskets, which now are full of soggy sandwiches. That's a biggie, and one that our friend should want to avoid not just for the sake of having true beliefs about the weather, but to avoid ruining a Saturday for her friends and family. Her beliefs and how she forms them, then, matter not just to her, but to all those folks involved.

Recall from earlier our point about civic-mindedness. Even those who aren't directly impacted by those breaking the rules nonetheless have grounds for objecting to the violation. Originally our point was about the norms of standing in line, that even those *in front* of the person cutting the line are right to criticize the person who cuts the line behind them. Well, the same thing goes for cognitive norms, too. With the rainy picnic case, not only do the neighbors, kids, and grandparents who got wet have reason to criticize the reasoning, but even those who'd never go on the picnic are right to criticize it, too. And it's not just because the picnic got ruined, but also because it was bad reasoning.

Again, consider the line-cutting case. Imagine that the inconvenience to those back in line was negligible, and the line moved quickly, and nobody missed out on anything. It still is reasonable to criticize the line-cutter for the simple reason that they broke the rule of lines—*no cuts, wait your turn*. That's because it was just a lucky accident that nobody was inconvenienced. The rule exists in order to make the inconvenience of line-standing equitable and so that we can reasonably manage our time. Well, the same goes for the picnic. Even if the picnic came out fine, the reasoning behind it was still worthy of criticism. This is because it put the picnic and others' Saturdays in jeopardy of ruin, and that ruin was avoided merely by a stroke of good luck. The reasoning was, in a word, careless. We depend on each other to make plans responsibly, follow the rules, and reason well. Those who don't do those things deserve criticism, even if things turn out just fine in the end. Why? Because in being careless, they break the trust we place in them as social creatures.

We are now in a position to pull Aristotle's two insights together. That we are social creatures means that we are interdependent; we rely on each other in various ways in order to develop the attitudes, dispositions, and capabilities most characteristic of human life. Our interdependence involves relations that are mutual and reciprocal. Hence our lives are, at least to some extent, properly the business of others. This is most obviously the case when it comes to the ways in which our beliefs are dependent on information provided by others. We depend upon others to be honest, precise, careful, and accurate. When we rely on others who turn out to be deceitful, malicious, careless, or sloppy, our lives can be damaged. The health of our cognitive lives depends in large part on the health of the cognitive lives of others.

Now, one of the persistent, and perhaps permanent, facts of social life is that people disagree with each other about many of the most important matters. To live socially is to encounter others who believe things that differ from what you believe. What's more, to live socially is to encounter others who believe things that you believe to be patently false. And on top of that, living socially involves encountering others who believe that the things you believe are patently false. In short, social life is rife with disputes and disagreements. This is evident to anyone who reads the newspaper or watches the news on television or has ever read a political blog. It is also evident that not all disputes can be solved by a casual glance out the window, as with the cases we discussed a moment ago. That is, not all disputes are cases in which one party has grasped the relevant facts and the other has simply failed to do so. When people disagree, often they also disagree about what their reasons say they should believe. And sometimes they disagree about what reasons there are.

Perhaps it is unsurprising to find that disagreements over the things we tend to think most important are often of this latter kind. When it comes to Big Questions—matters of how to live, the meaning of life and death,

the natures of justice, liberty, dignity, and equality, and the like—we often not only disagree about what to believe, we also disagree about what should count as a good reason to believe one thing rather than another. For sure, these are cases in which errors can be high-cost. If you're wrong about the nature of justice or the meaning of life, you're likely to do many unjust things and do things with your life that don't actually contribute to its meaning. It's important to figure such things out. The trouble is that disputes over Big Questions are often messy, and, consequently, seemingly interminable. Moreover, they are also *persistent*: that is, despite their messiness and seeming interminability, we nonetheless *continue* to debate these matters. Debate concerning these matters continues precisely because we want to get them right. In fact, even the view that Big Questions are nonsensical and that hence the debates over them are pointless is *itself* a view about which there is great and ongoing debate. Whether we should spend our time debating Big Questions is itself a Big Question! (And whether it's a very costly error to continue to discuss Big Questions is one too!) The point is that we can't stop caring about these matters, and so debate over them persists, despite the fact that it seems likely that no one will ever have the last word.

Imagine a trolley which just keeps going along its track, never reaching a destination. Would it be wise to board such a trolley? More importantly, once on the trolley, would it be wise to not get off if given the chance? Students in our courses sometimes contend that philosophy is like a trolley that just keeps going around in circles. They say that this means that philosophy is a pointless voyage that goes nowhere. Maybe they are correct in the simile. Philosophical debates do seem to go endlessly around and around. But we think our students are wrong to draw the conclusion that philosophy is for that reason *pointless*. Again, to claim that ongoing, perhaps never-ending, debate about things that matter is pointless is to take oneself to know something about what really matters. It is to take oneself to know something about what is a waste of time and what is worthwhile. The claim that philosophy is pointless is itself a philosophical position about a Big Question, one about which there is, as usual, lots of room for prolonged debate. Once again, we confront our puzzling, perhaps even mysterious, condition. We are creatures for whom argument over Big Questions is inescapable—some would say that it is irresistible—yet it is, it seems, without termination. To put the matter succinctly, we are incurable arguers. The question is why we bother.

So why do we bother? Why do we engage in argument? It might help to begin by asking what argument is. As it turns out, it is not easy to say what argument is. In fact, there are long-standing debates among philosophers about the matter. Yet we have to start somewhere. So we begin with the following. In the most general sense, argument is the attempt to make clear the reasons why we believe something that we believe. That's not bad for a start, but it is insufficient. Argument has an additional

dimension that must be introduced. Argument is the attempt not only to make clear what our reasons are, but also to *vindicate* or *defend* what we believe by showing that our belief is well-supported by compelling reasons. We may say, then, that argument has an *inward-looking* and an *outward-looking* aspect. On the one hand, argument is the attempt to articulate the basis for the beliefs we hold; it is an attempt to explain why we believe what we believe. On the other hand, argument is the attempt to *display to others* that they have reason to believe as we do.

Given this latter formulation, we see that argument is one kind of response to disagreement. Since it involves an attempt to respond to disagreement by stating and examining the weight of our reasons, we may say that argument is the *rational* response to disagreement. Argument addresses disagreement by trying to resolve it by means of reasons. To put the point in a different way, an argument is an attempt to put a disagreement to rest by showing those with whom you disagree that they should be compelled by reasons to adopt your belief.

Assuming that this is at least minimally acceptable as a starting-point, it is important to notice that an argument is not simply a verbal fight or a contest of words. To repeat, it is an attempt to *rationally respond to a disagreement*. But notice also that, when we argue, our aim is not simply to resolve a disagreement by winning agreement. Rather, the aim of argument is to win agreement *in the right way*, namely, by presenting reasons and compelling those who disagree with us to recognize their quality. Consequently, when you and your neighbor argue about, say, the death penalty, you do not aim for your neighbor to simply *say* that she believes what you believe; rather, you want her to come to actually believe what you believe. Moreover, you want her to come to believe what you believe *for the good reasons you (take yourself to) have to believe it*. You don't seek merely to persuade your neighbor, you want her to *rationally adopt* your belief. And so you must attempt to show her that the most compelling reasons support your belief (and not hers). To seek simply to persuade her to *say* that she believes what you believe is not to attempt to resolve the disagreement so much as to merely cover it up. But covered-up disagreement is disagreement nevertheless.

To return now to our main query, why should you care about whether your neighbor agrees with you about the best answer to some Big Question, such as, for example, the justice of the death penalty? Why should you care about what your neighbor thinks about anything, for that matter?

The insights from Aristotle that we discussed earlier can help us. We are by nature social creatures for whom believing the truth and avoiding error is of high importance. Consequently, disagreement is troubling to us. This is not only to say that we typically find disagreement uncomfortable, especially in face-to-face contexts. It is also to say that we often find the *fact* that others disagree with us to be troubling. The simple reason is that the fact that others believe things that you reject can sometimes be

evidence that you are wrong. To be sure, this is not to say that widespread agreement about some belief is evidence that it is correct (though it can be, especially when there is widespread agreement among those who have thoroughly investigated the belief in question); nor is it to say that when others disagree with you there is sufficient reason to take yourself to be wrong. The point rather is that when others who seem relatively intelligent, informed, sincere, and rational reject a belief that you accept, you have good reason to worry that you have made a mistake. Perhaps you have misjudged the force of your evidence? Maybe you have overlooked some important consideration or misunderstood the significance of some piece of data? Could there be some new reason or argument that you have not considered? Or perhaps you have been misinformed, mislead, or deceived? In other words, disagreement is often an appropriate cause for concern about our beliefs.

But it is important to note that to be concerned about your beliefs is not to stop believing. That others deny what you accept is not in itself cause for skepticism, or the suspension of belief. Believing that Madrid is the capital of Spain is consistent with feeling the need to double-check or reassess the evidence you have for that belief. When one feels concern about a belief, and consequently reviews one's reasons and evidence, one engages in an act of *cognitive hygiene*, not self-doubt. In fact, in our next chapter, we will present reasons for thinking that cognitive health requires us to *maintain* our beliefs, rather than simply holding them steady. That is, we will argue that cognitive health is much like health of other kinds. For example, dental health requires us to make regular trips to the dentist, even when we have no special reason for thinking that our teeth are unhealthy. Other forms of physical health require us to exercise our muscles and consume healthy foods. We do these things even when we have no special reason to believe ourselves unwell. In fact, in the cases of dental and bodily health, if one does not engage in routine check-ups, one incurs certain risks; health problems that would otherwise be minor and easily treated can become serious if they are not diagnosed in their early stages. Moreover, we have regimens of maintaining the health of our teeth and our bodies—we brush regularly and have exercise regimens. Similarly, our cognitive health requires us to occasionally *check* and *maintain* our beliefs and the reasons we have for holding them.

And here's the rub. Cognitive health requires us to maintain a regimen of cognitive hygiene. In order to be healthy believers, we must on occasion reexamine, reassess, and reevaluate the reasons we have for holding our beliefs. Now, these processes are inevitably social in that our reasons, evidence, and data in large measure derive from the experiences, testimony, and expertise of others. We must rely on others in order to remain cognitively healthy. We need others in order to manage our cognitive lives.

People tend to see disagreements and the arguments they occasion to be signals of disharmony and unhealthy conflict. To be sure, face-to-face

disagreements sometimes are hostile and unfriendly affairs. But recall that in the sense we are employing here, argument is not necessarily aggressive or unsociable. Our claim is that properly conducted argument and reasoned disagreement is a normal and necessary feature of social life. In fact, we have suggested further that disagreement is a kind of cognitive resource, and thus a good. Those who disagree with the things you believe provide an occasion for you to check your beliefs and your reasons.

And this gives rise to two results that may seem surprising: There is a sense in which argument is an expression of our *respect* and *care* for each other. That is, when you argue with your neighbor, you exhibit concern not only for your own beliefs, but for hers. Again, in arguing, you not only try to win agreement from your neighbor, but you also address her as a fellow rational agent, a person both capable of following and being moved by reasons, and one who can be a source of reasons that can move you. In this sense, engaging in argument with others is a way of showing *respect* for them. But we also see that arguing is also a way of *caring* for others. In arguing, we help others to check their own beliefs and reasons; we provide the resources by means of which they can maintain their cognitive health. It does seem strange, we admit, to say that arguing with others is a way of showing that you care, but everything hangs on what argument is and how it is conducted. If you conduct yourself properly in argument, arguing with others indeed shows that you care for them. If you behave badly in argument, it most certainly alienates others and gets in the way of our cognitive health. And as a consequence, we'd say it's a failure of care. Consequently, arguing well is very important, and what we call the *dialectical* notion of argument captures this social element of arguing well.

So let us ask once more: Why do we bother with argument? We bother with argument because it matters to us that we believe responsibly, and it bothers us when we find that we have made a mistake or have been duped. The fact that others disagree with the things we believe occasions in us the concern that, in forming our beliefs, we have overlooked or misjudged some important piece of evidence or some compelling kind of reason. In cases where the beliefs in question are important, we often call upon those who reject what we believe to provide their own reasons, and we subsequently attempt to weigh their reasons against our own. Even though some arguments over Big Questions seem to go on and on, we engage in the activity of arguing for the sake of caring for our beliefs. You see, it is not so puzzling or mysterious after all.

Not all communication is argumentative. Sometimes people speak in order to haggle, bargain, jockey, compete, flatter, insult, amuse, inform, threaten, and charm. As was said earlier, argument is the attempt to resolve disagreement rationally. The discussion so far has emphasized the positive aspects of argumentation. However, as everyone knows, in the real world, things are not nearly as rosy. People often evoke the apparatus of argument in order to accomplish aims other than rational persuasion.

Under the guise of earnest reason-giving, they seek to embarrass, discredit, ridicule, humiliate, stigmatize, and silence those with whom they disagree. Further, there are those who are simple rationalizers; they have preferred beliefs and pretend to argue for them, but they do not put forth the reasons on the basis of which they truly hold their beliefs. They'll just say anything that they think will place their beliefs in a favorable light. Such is what might be called *pseudo-argument*. It is often difficult to tell the difference between proper argumentation and its counterfeits. In other words, there is a dark side to argumentation. The rest of this book consists of an attempt to provide guidance on how to argue properly, and how to distinguish proper argument from its imposters.

For Further Thought

1 According to the view developed in this chapter, we argue primarily because we encounter disagreement, and we need to find a way to respond rationally to it. But maybe a better response to disagreement is simply to avoid it altogether. Is there any reason why one should not attempt simply to interact only with those with whom one agrees about the things that matter most?
2 Might the answers to certain Big Questions be a matter not of evidence but of faith? Does the answer to this question affect the overall view presented in this chapter?
3 Many philosophers think that almost no one forms beliefs on the basis of reasons, arguments, and evidence. They say that our beliefs are most frequently the products of non-rational phenomena, such as habituation and acculturation. Suppose they are correct. Does this render argument pointless? Might there be a difference between *how we come to believe* what we believe and *how we maintain* our beliefs?
4 Is it really other people's business what you believe? Is it your business how your neighbor forms her beliefs, even if they have nothing to do with you?
5 In this chapter we argue that if people think it's pointless to argue over Big Questions, they must take themselves to have answered a Big Question. Is that right? If we are right, does it mean that the view that it's pointless to argue about Big Questions is self-refuting? Or is there another option?

Key Terms

Epistemology	The philosophical analysis of knowledge. The key questions are: What is Knowledge? What do we know? How do we show that we know?
Big Questions	Roughly, questions about central values and truths at the foundation of a meaningful human life. There is

	wide and persistent disagreement about these questions and their answers.
Dialectical View of Argument	The take on argument that it is an attempt to rationally resolve a disagreement and answer critical questions. Argument is best seen as an instance of dialogue in search of truth.
Pseudoargument	The argumentative product of rationalization, where one finds a preferred conclusion and goes looking for premises to support it.

2 Why Argument Matters

Here's where things stand. We know why we argue. Argument is a natural activity for social beings that desire to know. Insofar as humans are by nature political beings who value knowledge, we might say that arguing is an essential part of what it is to be human. Now a new consideration emerges. That argument is a natural activity for humans does not mean that humans are naturally *adept* at argument. It only means that we are *prone* to argue. That we tend to engage in argument does not mean that we tend to argue properly, or even adequately. Some claim that it is obvious that most people argue poorly. In fact, after you take a logic class and learn the fallacy lists, you will likely come to believe that people reason more poorly than you had thought. It's a regular occurrence among students in our logic classes to bemoan the fact that once they've gotten good at detecting fallacies, they can't look anywhere without seeing them. Bad arguments are pretty much the only arguments around.

But before things get too cynical, let's be clear about what arguing well is all about. The topic of the present chapter is the importance of arguing well. After examining this issue, we will be prepared to examine *how* to argue well, which is the subject of the remainder of this book. Only once we've gotten clear about what comprises a good argument can we really see what's going wrong with bad ones.

When you think about it, arguments—or at least what are *presented* as arguments—are everywhere. In our everyday lives we are constantly subjected to purportedly rational appeals that attempt to alter our beliefs or create wholly new ones. These come from our friends and associates, teachers, authors of books, news media, celebrities, talk-show hosts, advertisers, leaders, and governments. It is easy to see why this is so. As was already noted, our beliefs frequently guide or determine our behavior, and others care about how we behave. Thus they have reason to care about what we believe.

That we care about how others behave and thus what others believe is, as we emphasized in the previous chapter, a consequence of the fact that our social interdependence requires us to rely on each other in various ways. And, once again, this mutual reliance can give rise to troubling

complications. To put the matter bluntly, not everyone who cares about what we believe cares about our believing what the best reasons say we should believe. Not everyone who cares about what we believe cares about our cognitive health. Not all of those who care about *what* we believe care about *how* or *why* we believe. They just want us to believe the things that will make it most likely that we will act as they wish. They care about what we believe because they want to control us.

Thus we see one very important reason why studying argument matters. We want to avoid being duped or deceived. Wanting to avoid being duped is part of wanting to believe what is true and avoid believing what is false. Wanting to avoid being deceived is part of wanting to believe for your own reasons, to be in charge of your own life, to exhibit self-control. We might say then that skills at argument are like skills of self-defense—they protect against being duped.

This thought requires further elaboration. Again, some people care about what we believe because they wish to *manipulate* us in various ways. For example, advertisements often aim to generate buying behavior on the basis of reasons that are stunningly absurd. Crucially, the function of many advertisements is to cause us to lose sight of the quality of the reasons being offered. For example, we are encouraged by advertisements to believe that buying expensive sports cars will make us more successful, that drinking alcohol will make us more attractive and popular, or that smoking cigarettes will make us healthier. When baldly stated like this, we know better than to believe such things. However, when presented alongside polished and titillating imagery of successful and attractive people, we can be moved to adopt such beliefs, or at least act in accordance with them. Advertisements, that is, often attempt to get us to believe (and so to behave) on the basis of bad reasons by diverting our attention away from the quality of the reasons that are being offered. When ads of this kind are successful, we come to believe things on the basis of reasons that we have not taken care to evaluate. To use a phrase whose familiarity should strike you as revealing and even a little disconcerting, we are told to "just do it." Our rational faculties are more or less circumvented.

Here is an experiment to try next time you are watching television. Take out a notebook and write down what is said in the commercials—just copy their linguistic content. Do this for several commercials. Wait a few days, or maybe a week, and return to the notebook. You will find that, once divorced in your mind from the accompanying imagery, often the linguistic content of television commercials does not even make sense, much less present cogent reasons for buying the product being advertised. This is hard to notice when watching television because the words are accompanied by highly stimulating images. The images are there for the purpose of diverting attention away from what is being said.

Now try another experiment. Try watching commercials with the sound off on your television. Pay close attention to the images. Again, we think

you are likely to find that the images and the way in which they are presented are attention-grabbing, but nonetheless they tend to be strange, erratic, and disjointed. Indeed, when it comes to the more stylized commercials, often it is impossible to discern what is being advertised on the basis of the images alone.

This is because the images and the words in commercials often serve different purposes. The images are intended to capture the attention of the eye, and the words are meant to give *the appearance of* reasons. Skilled advertisers know that when the images are especially captivating, good reasons are not really necessary. What matters is presenting you with what *sound like* reasons, but in fact are merely dressed-up versions of the command to "just do it."

Diverting attention away from the quality of our reasons is not the only way in which people try to manipulate us. There is one particular kind of manipulation in which we are overtly encouraged to focus our attention on reasons, and, moreover, strongly urged to evaluate them. How could such a direction of our attention to reasons be a strategy of obscuring reasons? Here's how. In these cases we are presented with a deliberately distorted or deprived image of what reasons there are. For example, let's say that Jack wants Jill to believe that she should vote for Sally for president. One strategy he might employ is to present Jill with his reasons for favoring Sally over the other candidates. A different tactic would be to convince Jill that those who oppose Sally are stupid and uninformed. Employing this second strategy, Jack's message to Jill is that there is no reasonable opposition to the view that Sally is the best candidate. So reasons are given, but those reasons, if considered seriously, block out all the others we should survey when making a decision.

One way to get someone to believe what you want them to believe is to convince them that all opponents of the belief are silly, stupid, ignorant, unreliable, or evil. The aim of this kind of manipulation, then, is not to circumvent our rational faculties, but rather to *channel* them in a specific, predetermined direction. This mode of belief manipulation is perhaps most popular in the realm of contemporary popular political commentary, where pundits often present their opponents as not merely mistaken, but irrational, ignorant, depraved, or demented. Hence they write books with titles like *Liberalism is a Mental Disorder* and *The Republican Noise Machine*. Authors of books like these try to convince you to adopt their favored beliefs by trying to convince you that there is no intelligent alternative to their own point of view.

The aim of this kind of manipulation is to encourage those who are like-minded to insulate themselves from discussion or even interaction with those with whom they might disagree. But there is a problem with this kind of insulation. When groups of like-minded individuals insulate themselves in this way, they not only deny themselves the cognitive benefits of hearing the considerations that favor opposing beliefs; they also deprive

themselves of the relevant information that those outside of their group might have. And, as we will see later in this chapter, there are other risks as well.

Thus far, we have claimed that one crucial reason why we should care about proper argument is that arguing properly helps us to avoid getting duped. We have called special attention to a particular way in which one can be duped, namely, *manipulation*. And we have identified two distinct forms of manipulation, which we can characterize as *diverting* manipulation and *distorting* manipulation. These two ways of getting others to believe what one wants are cases of manipulation because they both involve processes of belief production that are insufficiently attentive to reasons. To repeat, when we believe, we aim to believe what is true; and we aim to believe what is true by striving to believe what the best reasons endorse. This is why, for example, falsity is a *fatal objection* to a belief. To come to see one of your beliefs as false is to come to see the belief as defective.

Yet our ambition to believe only what our best reasons suggest is not explained solely by the importance of believing the truth and rejecting what is false. Truth is, to be sure, a principal goal of cognitive life. But it is not the only goal. We strive to believe in accordance with our best reasons because, in addition to the goal of believing what is true, we also aim to be *in possession of* the truth. We aim to believe in such a way that enables us to *see* the truth of our beliefs, to grasp *why* what we believe is true and *understand it*. And this is so because we desire not only truth, but also to *be in control* of our cognitive lives.

To get a feel for the distinction between aiming to believe what is true and aiming to be *in possession of* the truth, imagine the following scenario. Dr. Know has developed a truth serum. But let's say that Know's serum is different from the truth serum commonly encountered in spy novels and science fiction. Let us say that whereas the more familiar kind of truth serum compels those who take it to say only what they *believe* to be true, Dr. Know's serum compels anyone who takes it to say only what *is true*. That is, one who takes the serum will report that the capital of Spain is Madrid only if Madrid is the capital of Spain; one will report that there are exactly twenty people in Central Park right now only if there are exactly twenty people there now; one will report that the death penalty is unjust only if it is; and so on. Importantly, Dr. Know's serum does not enable those who take it to see *how* they're able to report the truth. When you ask one of Know's patients how she came to believe, say, that the death penalty is unjust, she can give no response. She believes sincerely that the death penalty is unjust, and can report confidently that it is true that the death penalty is unjust, but nonetheless she cannot see what reasons there are for her belief. The best she could do, perhaps, is to explain that she came to believe it by drinking the truth serum.

In one way, those who take Dr. Know's serum are in an enviable cognitive position. They believe only what is true, and do not believe anything that is false. But it is hard to see the development of the serum as an unqualified success. Those who take it have only true beliefs, but they have no access to the reasons which show why their beliefs are true. They unerringly believe what is true, but nonetheless they do not *possess* the truth. Their cognitive lives are in this regard less than successful.

Return now to our two kinds of manipulation. To believe without an adequate evaluation of our reasons is a kind of cognitive shortfall. Even if we wind up believing what is true, we reach our goal by luck, and luck is notoriously fickle. Maybe next time we won't be so lucky. Similarly, to believe on the basis of a trumped-up or distorted presentation of the available reasons is, again, to fail cognitively, even if we wind up believing the truth. In both cases, we satisfy the goal of believing what is true and rejecting what is false, but both cases nevertheless involve a kind of mismanagement of our cognitive faculties. In both cases, when we reach the truth, we do so by a kind of fluke. We get the truth, but, alas, we have not earned it.

Luck is what is problematic in these cases. When we say that someone has achieved a goal by way of good luck, we both praise the goal as worthy and take a critical stance toward that person's performance in reaching it. Consider a few cases. When someone hits an incredible shot on the golf course, that person may say, "I was just lucky." In so doing, he is not saying the shot was not successful; rather, he is saying that the success was not entirely his own doing. It was not the result of his skill and effort. It was luck. Alternately, when your neighbor wins the lottery, you might say she was lucky. You, yourself, may have bought a ticket and put the same thought into selecting the numbers as she did. Yet she won and you did not. When we call her a "lucky winner" we are on the one hand saying she certainly is a winner, but also that it was simply luck that made it so, not effort or skill.

When it comes to our lives, we do not want to be merely lucky winners. We want our successes to be the products of our efforts; we want to *deserve* the goods when they come. Those who diligently practice their golf swings are not simply lucky when they hit those fabulous shots. They are skillful and in control of their swing. And those shots are the result of the exercise of those skills. Similarly, those who carefully manage their finances, save their nickels, and make good investments are not mere lucky winners when they discover their bank accounts burgeoning. They are thrifty. And their financial success is theirs in a way that is very different from those we call "clearing house lucky," even if they end up in the same place.

The point is that we want success at reaching our cognitive goals of believing the truth and rejecting falsehood, but it is important to note that success consists in achieving those goals in a particular way. We want not only to achieve our aims, but to succeed in a sense that the success is *ours.* Only success that results from our effort, skill, and vigilance is success that

is truly our own. To put the point in a different way, we want truth, but we want to attain it not just in any old way. We want it in a way that enables us to possess the truth, to have command of what we believe. This is what those who take Dr. Know's serum lack.

These considerations put us in a position to make a distinction between the values of *cognitive success* and *cognitive command*. One can have a cognitive success by way of good luck—a lucky guess can still be true. But cognitive command is an understanding of an issue, a set of explanations for how and why things are one way and not another, and even an account of how others might have objections and what the replies to them are. Those who only have a correct belief have nothing to say back to someone who has doubts or needs an explanation, except to just say what they believe again. Having cognitive command, however, makes it so that success isn't just a matter of luck—it's the result of having done one's homework, understanding the situation, and having a story to tell. And so those with cognitive command have something to say when others have doubts or request more information.

Note, however, that cognitive command does not guarantee truth. That is, it is possible for those with cognitive command to be wrong. Experts, for example, have cognitive command of the subject of their expertise. That's what makes them experts. But experts sometimes disagree, and when they do, at least one expert is wrong. That doesn't mean that at least one purported expert isn't really an expert. It just means that at least one expert is wrong. So a pro golfer can hit the ball into the water hazard or into the thicket and still be an excellent golfer, and someone who has command of an issue can still get things wrong. Having cognitive command doesn't make us infallible, and this isn't too much of a surprise. We know already that with many issues, we can acknowledge that there are well-researched and impressively thought-out ideas that are nevertheless wrong.

That cognitive command does not guarantee truth or infallibility in no way undercuts its value. The reason why is that achieving cognitive command enables one to *rationally correct* oneself in light of countervailing evidence and counter-considerations. One who has achieved cognitive command of an issue understands how best to revise their belief should it be shown to be incorrect. Additionally, cognitive command enables us to *assess* new evidence, to *address* critics, and to *answer* objections. Cognitive command may not necessarily get us truth, but it does put us in contact with the relevant reasons and evidence. In this way, we come to understand an issue, and thus we are able to manage disagreement.

This point directs us back to the importance of argument. Achieving command of ourselves in forming and holding our beliefs is necessary if we are going to be able to defend our beliefs in the face of challenges to them. It is also necessary if we are going to be able to assess new evidence and unfamiliar considerations that bear on the truth of our beliefs.

Furthermore, having a firm grasp of the reasons why we hold our beliefs is crucial when we are faced with the need to change, revise, or amend them.

Argumentation—again, the processes of giving reasons in support of one's beliefs, proposing considerations that tell against opposing beliefs, and assessing the reasons offered by those who disagree with us—is the activity by which we come into possession of our beliefs. If we argue poorly or carelessly, we may yet believe what is true, but we lose control of our cognitive lives. Often when we lose control of ourselves, there are others who are eager to take control for us, and, when they do so, they gain control *of* us. As we have said above, proper argumentation, or at least competent argumentation, is important as a matter of cognitive hygiene. But now we are able to see that proper argumentation is also a form of cognitive self-protection, a way of avoiding getting duped.

Much of what we have said thus far turns on the overall badness of getting duped by others. We have claimed that argument matters because we all want to avoid being manipulated. But it is important to notice that not all duping comes from other people. We can dupe ourselves. Maybe that way of putting the point is a little too dramatic. But it is clear that when it comes to our cognitive health, we can be our own worst enemy. Recall from the previous chapter Aristotle's keen observation that humans are naturally sociable and desirous of knowledge. These two features can, in some contexts, come into conflict; and in other contexts, they can conspire against our cognitive aims. For example, our need for healthy social relations can sometimes render us especially vulnerable to peer-pressure; it can also prohibit us from speaking our mind in "mixed company," when we are not sure whether our views will meet with agreement. In these cases, we engage in self-censorship. In other cases, sociability and the desire to know work together to subvert our aim of believing what is true and rejecting what is false. Sometimes social pressures forcefully encourage one to speak one's mind, but only under the condition that one affirms a belief favored by the group. These are not cases of manipulation in the sense we identified above. Rather, they involve an *internal* short-circuiting of proper reasoning.

To get a sense of what we mean, consider what happened to Democratic pundits and other supporters a few months prior to the 2016 presidential election in the United States. They were all sure that the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton, was going to win the election by a landslide. They were so sure of this that they systematically discounted and dismissed all reports showing that Donald Trump's campaign was going well in many swing states. They repeatedly insisted that any polls showing an advantage for Mr. Trump represented statistical anomalies or flawed methodology.

Why would they say that? Perhaps because everyone they knew and talked with claimed to oppose Trump's election. Or maybe because they overestimated the impact of the fact that so many stars and talk show hosts were publicly denouncing Mr. Trump—they just figured that

everyone thought that way. Consider the following predictions, all of which were made on the eve of the 2016 election:

- *Huffington Post*'s Natalie Jackson and Adam Hooper ran 10 million simulations of the electoral map with the very latest polling data and determined that Clinton was 98% likely (and Trump 1.7% likely) to win the Presidency.
- *Vox*'s Ezra Klein held that Clinton's win was "assured" and Trump's loss was "inevitable." He paused to note the strangeness of the situation: "We aren't used to this kind of victory…. Hillary Clinton has humbled Donald Trump, and she did it her way."
- *MSNBC*'s Joy Reid said that the Trump Campaign's plans on taking Michigan and Wisconsin were "weird," because she thought he had no chance in those states (which he won). And panelist Jamal Simmons said Trump was "being kind of a jerk" for campaigning in those states he was going to lose, because he should spend more time in states where his campaign could help senatorial candidates.

All of these experts were spectacularly wrong. Mr. Trump won the election with a substantial Electoral College win, despite Secretary Clinton garnering 3 million more popular votes. So what happened? For one thing, over the course of the 2016 campaign, it became more and more clear that polling for the election was unreliable for predicting results, and it was especially unreliable when it came to predicting how voters would swing for Mr. Trump. But these folks nevertheless made their predictions with what in hindsight seems appallingly disproportionate confidence. Importantly, this was not a case of *someone else* manipulating them, it was a case of them doing this *to themselves.* In these cases, in order to argue well, we need someone who can critically push back on our easy rationalizations. Again, argument is a social enterprise, and in these cases, the sociality of argument is that we don't just rely on each other for information, we need each other for critical pushback. If we're in an echo chamber of views we like, we are setting ourselves up for a fall.

We have presented a case for thinking that argument matters, and that it is important to try to argue well. But we have not yet said explicitly what proper argumentation is. Rest assured. We are on our way toward doing so. Before we turn to that issue, we must address a concern that one might raise with our account thus far.

A critic might claim that the views we have laid out are all well and good for those who do not know the truth. Such a critic might concede that the goods we have identified as attainable only by means of proper argumentation are indeed highly important. But she may then contend that the goods of argument pertain only to the processes of trying to *gain* knowledge. The critic might then claim that *once one has knowledge*, further argument is unnecessary. In fact, our critic could go further to say

that for those who have knowledge, further argument is not only superfluous, but also potentially dangerous, as it creates an occasion by which one might mistakenly exchange a true belief for a false one.

There is no denying that engaging in argument carries certain significant risks. When we argue, we exchange and examine reasons with a view toward believing what our best reasons say we should believe; sometimes we discover that our current reasons fall short, and that our beliefs are not well supported after all. Or sometimes we discover that a belief that we had dismissed as silly or obviously false in fact enjoys the support of highly compelling reasons. On other occasions, we discover that the reasons offered by those with whom we disagree measure up toe-to-toe with our own reasons and it seems as if the best reasons support equally two opposing beliefs. In any of these situations, an adjustment in our belief is called for; we must change what we believe, or revise it, or replace it, or suspend belief altogether. Typically we don't like having to make such adjustments, and in cases where the belief in question is one that is especially important to us, it pains us to admit that we are wrong. Indeed, with respect to certain especially important beliefs—such as moral, religious, and political beliefs—to come to realize that we are wrong is usually to invite a kind of cognitive turmoil. When we find that we must give up or change our beliefs of this kind, our lives change. In such cases, we often find ourselves wondering who we are.

Hence our envisioned critic is right to point out that argumentation is risky business. However, she seems to have overlooked the fact that risk assessment is always a *comparative* matter. That is to say, our estimation of the risks of engaging in argument must be informed by an assessment of the risks that are involved in resolutely *avoiding* argument or *declining* to engage in argument. The line of criticism we have been considering claims that once one has a true belief, there is no need to consider the reasons promoted by those with whom we disagree. After all, if you believe what is true and your neighbor holds an opposing belief, then it is clear that your neighbor is mistaken. So why should you bother listening to the reasons she can offer in support of her (false) belief? You know in advance that she believes what is false, and so the reasons she has for her belief are defective, incomplete, or misleading. As you already have the truth, engaging with those who oppose you promises no gain and can only occasion error. Better to just let it go, right?

It may seem that our critic is obviously correct here as well. But, as it turns out, she's not. There is overwhelming and continually growing evidence that shows that those who decline to engage with those with whom they disagree, and instead talk only with those who are like-minded, are prone to a phenomenon called *group polarization*. The phenomenon is this: *When one exchanges reasons about an issue only with those who agree, one's beliefs regarding that issue imperceptibly shift to more extreme versions of themselves.* For example, when pro-life activists discuss abortion

only amongst themselves, over time each person involved in the discussion comes to adopt a more extreme version of the pro-life view than the one he or she held prior to the discussion. The same goes for those who hold the pro-choice view. That is, reason exchange among only like-minded believers produces a change in belief. Again, it doesn't matter what the view is (right or wrong). If you talk about the view only with people you agree with, you become more extreme. And as a consequence, you don't hold the view you started with in the first place.

Let's say that Alfred holds the belief that abortion is morally permissible only in cases of rape, incest, and where it is necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman. We can use the variable P to refer to Alfred's belief. It should be clear that P lies on a spectrum of pro-life views about abortion. One could, for example, hold a more permissive pro-life view, call it Q, according to which abortion is morally permissible in cases of rape, incest, or where it is necessary to avoid certain severe health risks to the pregnant woman (including but not restricted to her death). Or one could hold a more restrictive pro-life position, which we may call R, according to which abortion is morally permissible only in cases where it is necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman. There is of course the even more strict view, S, which holds that abortion is never morally permissible, but sometimes excusable; and there is the maximally restrictive view that abortion is under no circumstances allowable and never excusable. There are several other positions on the pro-life spectrum as well.

Now let us suppose that P is true. (Note that we are not claiming that P is true, we are only supposing that it is for the sake of argument.) The group polarization phenomenon means that if Alfred were to discuss his views about abortion only with others who hold views on the pro-life spectrum, over time his belief would shift from P to some more restrictive view on that spectrum (as would the beliefs of the others he discusses abortion with). He would come to hold R, or some such view. But recall that we have stipulated that P is true, and this entails that R is false. So, in declining to engage the issue of abortion with those on the pro-choice side of the debate and electing to discuss the matter only with those who are like-minded, Alfred loses the truth.

It may seem that our appeal to the group polarization phenomenon presupposes the claim that more extreme beliefs are always false beliefs, that a shift to a more restrictive view from a more moderate view is always a shift in the direction of falsehood. But our argument makes no such assumption. The important feature of group polarization is that the shift toward more extreme versions of one's pre-discussion belief is not caused by the introduction of new or better reasons. Group polarization is caused by group dynamics, not reasons. Accordingly, by discussing abortion only with those who share his general perspective, Alfred has not only lost his true belief, he has done so on the basis of something other than reasons. The group polarization phenomenon threatens our cognitive command, even if it may be that one reaches the truth by means of it.

Recall now the objection posed by our imagined critic. She claimed that when one has the truth, argumentation is unnecessary, superfluous, or even dangerous. We now see her error. Argumentation is not merely a process by which one forms and revises beliefs. Argumentation is also a process by which one maintains one's beliefs. Earlier, we analogized cognitive and bodily health. Like muscles and physical health in general, cognitive health requires us to engage in activities that exercise our capacities. Argumentation is the process of exercising our cognitive muscles, so to speak. Consequently, argumentation has value even to those who already have true beliefs. It is a way to inoculate oneself against group polarization. The group polarization phenomenon shows that by declining to exchange reasons with those who disagree, one runs the risk of losing the truth, *even when one already has true beliefs*. Argumentation is the way we should go about forming our beliefs and ridding ourselves of false beliefs; but it is also what we must do if we want to hold on to our true beliefs.

Thus far, our account of the importance of proper argument has been formulated primarily in individual terms. We have claimed that arguing well is important if one is to maintain control over one's beliefs and avoid being duped. Yet our discussions of manipulation and group polarization both point to the inherently social dimension of cognitive life. We want now to deepen this element of our account by picking up on a thought expressed at the close of our first chapter.

To put the point succinctly: Democracy is a mode of political association that significantly heightens the importance of argument. However much argument matters for our individual lives, it matters even more for those who are also citizens of a democratic society. It may be obvious why this is the case, but the point deserves to be stated explicitly. People living together under any political arrangement must rely upon each other in various ways, but in a democracy, citizens wield collective power over their lives together. Through familiar activities such as voting, campaigning, participating in political organizations, donating to social causes, volunteering in community initiatives, and attending local school board meetings, democratic citizens contribute to the processes by which our collective lives are managed. Laws are made, offices are filled, and policies are enacted by citizens. Just as we as individuals want to believe the true and avoid believing what is false, we collectively want to be governed by institutions and policies that can recognize good reasons and reject bad reasons. In fact, it could be said that democracy is precisely the attempt to live together according to our best reasons.

This is why democracy involves such a broad variety of collective activities. Although perhaps it is common to think of democracy simply in terms of elections and voting, it really is much more than this. To take a most obvious example, elections are preceded by campaigns. And, as we all know, candidates on the campaign trail do a lot of talking, and much of this talking is conducted in the mode of argument. Indeed, a lot of

political talk in a democracy is explicitly presented as a debate, where candidates, pundits, journalists, and citizens speak more or less directly to each other in an attempt to exchange reasons. Yet democracy also involves more than campaigns. In addition to voting in regular and fair elections, democratic citizens are called upon to serve as jurors, to achieve a certain level of education, to uphold the laws, to hold public officials accountable, and to participate in the life of their communities. Indeed, many of the rights and entitlements that we most closely associate with democracy—free speech, a free press, due process, and much else—are directly tied to the social aspiration to have our collective lives managed according to our best reasons. It could be said, then, that democracy is the political and social expression of our aspiration to cognitive health and rational self-control; democracy is, as it is more commonly put, a system of *self-government*.

Given what the real world of democratic politics is like, our claim that democracy is committed to rational self-control will probably strike many readers as utterly incredible or as some kind of joke. Not so fast. Imagine a society in which collective decisions are made by an elaborate system of coin-tosses in which every option is given a fair chance of being selected as the group decision. Does such a system appeal to you? If not, why not? The imagined arrangement is defective because it does not allow collective decision making to be guided by what citizens believe; it rather decides on the basis of chance.

Imagine next a society which makes collective decisions by picking pieces of paper out of a bowl. Imagine that in this system, each citizen is allowed to write on a small sheet of paper his or her opinion about what the government should do, but imagine also that this system does not allow citizens to discuss their views with others. A question is put to the electorate, each citizen is asked simply to write down her opinion on the question, citizens are forbidden to share their views, and a decision is made according to whatever slip of paper is drawn.

Such a system is surely an improvement on the first in that it does allow collective decisions to be guided by what citizens believe, and, furthermore, it gives to each citizen equal input into the decision-making process. However, we suspect that this arrangement will strike our readers as ultimately defective. Why?

Here's the answer. What's missing in this imagined society is the connection between collective political decision making and our individual and collective reasons. A crucial part of democracy is the attempt to reason with each other about what we, collectively, should do. Democracy depends not simply on citizens voting on the issues of the day; it relies also upon citizens sharing their views and their reasons with others, prior to casting their votes. Again, democracy is the aspiration to conduct our collective lives according to our best reasons. And so, we think a *deliberative* conception of democracy is best.

At this point a serious problem for our account comes into view. We have identified democracy with the aspiration to be governed by our best reasons. However, we have yet to mention a central component of democracy, namely, majority rule. It seems there is a tension between the aspiration to be governed by our best reasons and the system in which collective decision making must track the beliefs of the majority. To explain, it has long been a favorite strategy among philosophers who oppose democracy to criticize the idea that majority opinion should determine collective decisions. Collective decisions are often focused on very complex questions, and finding rational answers to complicated questions often requires one to have a high degree of expertise. So why place the power to decide in the hands of the majority? Why not instead have experts rule?

This is the thought driving Plato's magisterial work of political philosophy, *The Republic*. In fact, the common interpretation of *The Republic* has Plato arguing that justice demands that political power be placed in the hands of those who are the most knowledgeable. Believing that philosophers are the only people who actually know anything, Plato draws the conclusion that philosophers should rule as kings. Hence Plato's famous idea of the idea of the *philosopher-king*.

The chutzpah manifest in Plato's view is often noted by his critics. However, one can feel the force of this argument against democracy by simply considering, first, that it matters what we collectively decide to do as a society. When a government acts, it can commit grave forms of injustice; it can waste precious resources, squander opportunities, unduly constrain freedom, and ruin lives. Most decisions made by a state are high error-cost decisions. They are the kind of things we don't want to get wrong. Next consider that we know that the majority of our fellow democratic citizens are not experts in matters of justice. In fact, it is common for democratic citizens to have an especially low regard for the cognitive capacities of their fellows. What then could possibly support the idea that collective political decision making should be determined by majority opinion? That's Plato's challenge, and it's serious.

This is admittedly a very difficult matter, and we cannot provide a full response to the challenge here. But we do have a two-part reply that will bring us back to the main topic of the importance of argument.

For starters, it is worth noting that history supplies a staggering number of examples of kingship gone terribly wrong, and few (if any) cases in which kingly political power has been exercised according to the best reasons concerning justice. To put the point in a philosophical way, Plato makes the mistake of comparing (what was in his day) real-world democracy with ideal-world kingship. You don't get to rig the comparison by saying: "my ideal version of kingship would do better than your real version of democracy." Of course it would! It's an *ideal version*, after all. A proper argument would have to compare either ideal-world kingship to ideal-world democracy, or real-world kingship with real-world democracy.

This occasions a further historical point about the real democracies Plato was looking at and the democracies in the world today. Democracy as Plato describes it is in many respects far removed from modern day democracy. Plato sees democracy as unconstrained and direct majority rule. In modern democracy, by contrast, the majority will is constrained by a constitution that identifies individual rights that constrain what even a vast majority can politically decide. Moreover, modern democracy is non-direct in that it involves a system of representation, where elected office-holders are largely charged with the task of reasoning about policy on behalf of those who they represent. Finally, in modern democracy, those who hold the greatest power are nevertheless constrained by a system of constitutional checks and balances. In short, although modern democracy has majority rule as one of its central elements, it is not merely rule by the majority.

Our second response to Plato's challenge is more philosophical than historical. Recall the distinction we drew earlier between the aspiration to believe the truth and the aspiration to possess the truth. We argued there that we aspire not only to have true beliefs, but also to see why they are true—we want not only cognitive success, but cognitive command. These two aspirations of our cognitive lives permit us to make a handful of replies to Plato.

A Platonic order where an expert makes all of the political decisions is one in which we could not see our collective and cognitive lives as ours. Such an arrangement would be the political analogue of the individual who takes Dr. Know's serum. Perhaps there could be a morally incorruptible expert who always decides political questions in a way that corresponds to what justice requires. A society in which such an individual possesses complete political power would no doubt be by some measure successful. But, like the beliefs of those who take Know's serum, it would fail to be a success attributable to the citizens of the society. In fact, it would be a society in which justice doesn't really matter to anyone except the expert ruler. Citizens would live according to rules required by justice, but could not *see* the justice of the rules, because all they would know is that they were decreed by the rulers. Consequently, they could not see their society as the product of their own collective efforts to reason together about their lives. They could live in a perfect society but not understand it as such. That seems a tragedy, a kind of shame. Or, if that's too dramatic an assessment, it's at least disappointing. And, remember, that's supposed to be an ideal society.

Perhaps most importantly, the Platonic arrangement causes us to see our cognitive lives as fundamentally disjointed. In a Platonic kingdom, citizens must rely on their individual and collective cognitive skills in order to form beliefs about the full range of non-political matters—from how to cook their dinners, clean their clothes, and fix their cars to what books to read and how to spend their free time—but they must nevertheless decline

to apply those faculties to Big Questions about their social and political lives. They must see their social existence, along with their political beliefs and political activity, as *alien*. This seems to us a most severe kind of injustice, one that undoes whatever moral advantages the Platonic kingdom might seem to embody.

Here a critic might object in the following way. It seems that some good challenges to the idea of a Platonic kingship have been raised, but it is still not clear that majority rule can be defended. Even when constrained by the constitutional mechanisms of modern democracy, majority rule still seems to be in tension with the aspiration to believe what is true and avoid believing what is false. Moreover, majority rule is far too often the rule by those with little cognitive command, but who nevertheless want to give commands.

This is a worthy objection. Here's our response. Just as we must rely on others in our individual lives, our collective life in a democratic society involves a similar kind of reliance. Democratic self-government is rooted in a commitment to the cognitive soundness of a system in which individuals are permitted to freely exchange information, ideas, reasons, and arguments. The thought is that under such conditions, the belief that can win the assent of a majority is the best available guide to collective decision making that is consistent with the other values embodied by a modern democracy, including equality and liberty. This is of course not to say that in a democracy citizens must always regard the majority view as correct or even best given the available reasons. It means rather that over the full range of cases, a belief that has won the assent of a majority is the best guide to what our reasons say we should decide. It is important to emphasize that it is open to democratic citizens to hold that in a particular case, the democratic process has failed to track the best reasons and consequently has produced a seriously mistaken result.

This point about democratic error is why, in a modern democracy, collective decisions are understood to be revisable. In fact, many of the individual rights recognized by modern democracy are aimed at enabling those who object to a policy to challenge it, even after it has been validated or selected by properly democratic processes of collective decision making. That is, a basic commitment of modern democracy is that citizens must be permitted to engage in acts of critique, protest, resistance, and dissent. This provides an additional consideration that favors majority rule. Political majorities are not set in stone. Groups of dissenting individuals, even if they begin as a tiny minority, can continue to debate and criticize a given political decision, and at least in principle transform into a majority and bring about significant social change.

In our individual lives, we can do our best to believe in accordance with our reasons, and yet still fail. Similarly, even a properly functioning democracy composed of sincere and intelligent citizens can err. No method of collective decision making can guarantee correctness every

time. Majority rule is simply the best decision procedure available, in that over the range of cases (even if not in every individual instance) it promises results that reflect our best reasons, while respecting the other values that democracy holds dear. The hope with democracy is that over time the truth will out, and when it does, we will not only have a truth, but we will possess it.

Although this response to Plato is incomplete, we think that it can be developed into a rather powerful defense of democracy. However, as with success of almost every kind, philosophical success comes at a price. As you probably noticed as the discussion developed, our defense of democracy places significant demands on democratic citizens. For example, our defense of majority rule—even the kind of majority rule that is constrained by the rights of individuals—calls for a democratic citizenry that is responsive to the ongoing arguments and criticisms presented by dissenting groups, even when such groups reflect tiny minorities. In addition, our entire discussion of democracy has presupposed that democratic citizens are fundamentally interested in reasons and arguments rather than raw power. That's pretty idealistic on our part. Some might call it dangerously optimistic.

We recognize that actual democracy is not so rosy. We realize that the politically powerful often dismiss the arguments of those less powerful without much thought. And we are not blind to the fact that democratic politics is most frequently driven by power in various forms—including money, class, status, pedigree, and so on—rather than reasons. But we also think that our account does not require us to deny any of these facts about real-world democratic politics. Here's why. The view that we have presented thus far identifies what we take to be the *aspirations* embodied in our individual and collective cognitive lives. We do not take ourselves to have been *describing* actual democracy any more than we took ourselves in our first chapter to have been describing how actual people go about forming and evaluating their beliefs. What we have been trying to do is present a model of cognitive hygiene—in both individual and social aspects—that is worth trying for.

Importantly, this model is not plucked from thin air by a couple of armchair academics. We have tried to identify and make explicit the aspirations that inhere in the everyday practices of people. It may be true that the proverbial man on the street often fails to believe what his best reasons say he should believe, but, crucially, the man on the street does not *take himself* to hold unfounded or otherwise defective beliefs. Rather, he takes himself to be successful in tracking his reasons. Otherwise, he would not believe as he does. Again, the man on the street may in fact believe on the basis of what barely could count as a reason, but he does not evaluate himself in this way. Instead, he sees his reasons as sufficient.

Consider again the political experts we mentioned earlier. They expressed unmistakable confidence in their predictions about the 2016 presidential election in the United States. Yet they were all wrong, and stunningly so.

But now notice that, even though it is clear to us in hindsight that they suffered from a form of group polarization driven by wishful thinking and social pressure, in offering their predictions, they were still talking about the reasons they had. Ezra Klein invokes his expertise, and the *Huffington Post* team insist they are looking at the available data objectively. Importantly, they do not say of themselves, in the midst of it all, "My views are all the product of a self-imposed intellectual echo chamber." Nobody ever says that kind of thing about his or her own beliefs. And here's why: in every case of belief, we take ourselves to have *not* been duped. To hold a belief is to take it to have been adequately formed. Even in the depths of profound error, people uphold the aspiration to proper cognitive hygiene. That's cause for modest optimism.

There is a further, more general consideration that is worth mentioning at this point. The prevalence of ongoing and persistent disagreement, of actual dispute among people over political and moral questions of the day, shows that people in general see themselves as beholden to the aspiration to believe on the basis of the best reasons they have. If this were not the case, it would be difficult to explain why the man on the street is in the least inclined to criticize those who disagree with him. It would similarly be difficult to make sense of many of the staple institutions and practices of our political lives, from newspapers, blogs, and political talk-shows to the hundreds of books published yearly by political commentators and pundits. In none of these cases do we allow people to assert that reasons do not matter. In fact, we demand that they provide us with reasons and are responsive to our objections.

In short, argument expresses our commitment to the aspiration to believe in accordance with the best reasons we can find. It reflects the pull we should feel for cognitive command. That argument so pervades our social and political lives demonstrates the widespread commitment to this aspiration. We have argued here that democracy is the political manifestation of the aspiration to conduct ourselves according to our reasons. As an aspiration, democracy requires us not to succeed always at rational self-government, but to sincerely and earnestly try to live individually and collectively according to our best reasons. We of course often fall short. But the fact that we fall short doesn't mean this aspiration is silly or worthless. We shouldn't give up on the aspiration of self-rule and autonomy so easily. That would be tantamount to seeing ourselves as deserving nothing better than to be ruled by others. It would be to resign ourselves to being subjects of a king or cabal of oligarchs whom we could at most hope are inclined to rule in accordance with the demands of justice. Rather, given what we have outlined here, we all have a deep aspiration to be individually and collectively rational. In this respect, we are all idealists about argument and about democracy.

Democracy is the project of self-government among free and equal citizens. Self-government among free and equal citizens inevitably involves

collective decision making amidst ongoing disagreement among citizens about what should be done. In a democracy, we try collectively to decide on the policies and actions that enjoy the support of our best reasons. Accordingly, democracy calls for vibrant but reasoned public discourse and debate; the activity of trying to root out in dialogue what reasons one has to believe one thing or another is central to democracy. We may say, then, that democracy is self-government by means of public argumentation. Hence it matters how we argue, and that we argue well rather than poorly. Caring about arguing well about public matters is among the central duties of democratic citizenship. In our next chapter, we develop an account of what proper public argument involves.

For Further Thought

1 Early in the chapter, it is claimed that engaging in argument helps us to better understand our own commitments. Arguing helps us to gain a kind of command over our own beliefs. Is this plausible? Doesn't argument often result simply in greater uncertainty and doubt?
2 How might Plato respond to the defense of democracy offered in this chapter? Does the fact that anti-democrats feel compelled to provide arguments against democracy provide an unintended kind of support for democracy?
3 The conception of democracy defended here seems to place significant demands on ordinary citizens. The democratic citizens envisioned here are highly active participants in the political life of their communities. But surely there's more to life than democracy and the duties of a democratic citizen. Some people quite reasonably prefer to spend their time in other ways, including in more or less solitary pursuits. Can the view developed in this chapter accommodate this fact?
4 In the chapter, there were two kinds of manipulation proposed: diverting and distorting manipulation. Are there other ways arguments (or pseudoarguments) can manipulate?
5 Is the value of cognitive command undone by the fact that one can have command of an issue but still be wrong?
6 How could the phenomenon of group polarization create the illusion of cognitive command?

Key Terms

Deliberative democracy	The attempt to collectively govern our shared lives according to our best reasons.
Group polarization	The social phenomenon of intellectually homogenous groups to progressively hold more extreme versions of views.

Cognitive command	An understanding of the complexity of an issue, the capacity to explain why something is true, and a cognizance of objections and counter-considerations.

3 Public Argument in a Democratic Society

We proposed in the preceding chapter that democracy is the social and political manifestation of our individual cognitive aspiration to be rational. The thought bears repeating: *Just as we individually aspire to believe in accordance with our best reasons, we collectively aspire to live together according to our best reasons.* Democracy is the social and political arrangement that enables us to pursue this cognitive goal. It is collective self-government by means of public argument among equal citizens. Consequently, democracy brings with it a duty of citizenship, specifically, a duty to try to argue well.

These sentiments may sound lofty, possibly even wholly detached from the real world of democracy. Indeed, thus far we have been talking about democracy in a way that is theoretical rather than descriptive. We have been trying to articulate a view of democracy in the abstract, or in the ideal. Sometimes it helps to talk in ideal terms because often it is by appeal to a sense of how things should be that we are able to critique how things are. That's what we have been doing. But now it is time to get real. We have spoken enough about the role of argument in an ideal democracy. What is the role of argument in actual democracy?

Giving arguments, articulating reasons, responding to criticism, and bearing the burden of having a command of information and its relevance are all important to politics. We note again that in the vast world of popular political commentary—from the daily transmissions of talk radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh and Amy Goodman, to the book-length analyses offered by best-selling authors such as Ann Coulter and Thomas Frank—argument reigns. In fact, not only do pundits and commentators engage in argument, *they claim that argument, reason, and truth are what matters.* Thus they profess to offer "no spin zones" and "straight talk." Moreover, they explicitly oppose "bias," "slant," and "fake news"; and they call out anyone who they perceive to be playing fast and loose with the facts. In short, the real world of democracy is saturated with argument. And this is precisely as it should be.

The previous paragraph might strike you as hopelessly naïve. You may think that democracy is saturated not with argument, but only with the

appearance of argument. You may continue: Presidential hopefuls don't really *argue* with each other about the important political issues of the day, they merely try to *look like* they're arguing, while in fact they are simply jockeying for rhetorical points and clever catchphrases. Similarly, you may contend that the political punditry's self-professed commitment to truth, reason, and "no spin" is simply pretense, merely a marketing strategy to sell an audience on the idea that the commentator in question is to be trusted. In short, you might think that in a democracy everyone professes to be interested in argument, reason, and truth; but in fact, the only thing anyone really cares about is power. And it might strike you that in a democracy, one gets power only by convincing large numbers of people to cast votes and engage in other activities in your favor. Hence you might conclude that the real-world democracy is not about argument at all. Then maybe you'll go further to say that our book thus far has not only been naïve, but pernicious in that it has used the language of argument to give credibility to a political and social order that is fundamentally anti-rational and concerned only with power.

This is certainly a powerful line of critique, one that goes back ultimately to Plato and complements the Platonic criticisms of democracy that were explored in our previous chapter. You could expand Plato's thought with the observation that even those who are committed to democracy and actively participate in it nevertheless harbor Plato's critical attitude toward it. Witness the regularity of the complaint from parties that lose elections that the other party did not have the better argument, but only the better campaign. Political losers often claim that the citizens didn't see through the opposition's lies and cheap tricks, and so were duped. We call it the *Plato Principle*: Those who lose elections will more often blame the citizens for being credulous and the opposition party for pandering to their baser interests than take the election to rebut their own case. The mob wins, again, is the refrain. The irony is that those who win elections generally praise the wisdom of the populace.

Yet there is a crucial respect in which the argument sketched above is incomplete. Those who observe that democracy is saturated with only the appearance of argument rather than the real thing need to account for the pervasiveness of the pretense and appearances. Why must political candidates, commentators, and pundits constantly present themselves as motivated only by reason? Why must they always dress up their plays for power and influence in the garb of argument? Why are the images of "no spin" and "straight talk" so frequently employed as marketing tools?

Here's the short answer to these questions. The appeal to argument pervades *because it works*. Like most short answers, this one isn't much of an answer. It merely presses the further question: *Why does it work?*

In the wake of the first 2012 presidential debate between President Obama and Mitt Romney, two assessments came to be widely accepted. The first was that Mitt Romney handily won the debate. The second was

that Mitt Romney's key claims in the debate were demonstrably inaccurate.[1] Neither assessment taken on its own looks particularly noteworthy. But when they are affirmed together, they sound dissonant.

Here's why. Debates are argumentative settings where one's performance should be assessed on the basis of the relative quality of the arguments one presents. The quality of an argument depends on the truth of the information presented as premises and the relevance of that information to its conclusion. So if we know that an arguer is employing premises containing important inaccuracies, we should not judge his or her arguments as successful. Therefore we should not think he or she did well in the debate. Yet this is precisely what the conjunction of the two prevalent assessments of the first presidential debate contends: Romney won the debate, but his central arguments were failures. There's the dissonance.

We can anticipate what our critics will say: "What Pollyannas these guys are!" They may then continue: "Academics are so naïve! Political debates aren't about arguments, but rather cutting a striking pose, displaying one's personality, connecting with an audience, and making one's opponents look dumb." The critics might then raise the example of the Nixon/Kennedy debates in 1960, where Nixon was considered the winner by those listening on the radio, but Kennedy won big with those who watched on television. Nixon looked tired, but Kennedy looked, well, like a Kennedy. This leads our imagined critics to conclude: "Winning over an audience, looking 'presidential,' taking a commanding tone—that's what political debate is really about. Everything else is just Ivory Tower chatter." And so goes a popular interpretation of democracy's deliberative moments. This is a resolutely cynical stance concerning democracy, and in fact it takes its cynicism to be a kind of virtue. Let's call it "just is" cynicism.

Now consider a more recent example of "just is" cynicism. In the 2016 presidential election cycle, Hillary Clinton was widely taken to have bested Donald Trump in all three debates. She had command of the issues, she responded to his reasons, and often she had surprising challenges to him and his policies. These results made measurable differences in the polls immediately after these debates, tilting thing significantly in her favor. But Donald Trump won the election. Let that sink in for a bit. A candidate who was widely taken to have lost all three debates still won the election. What does that say about the role that debates play? In this case, we have a divergence from the Romney–Obama phenomenon, since in this case, even the bad debate performance, even as a *debate* performance, did not negatively affect the outcome of the election. A regular thought was that in this case, the debates weren't really debates at all. Not even sham debates. Rather they were minimally civil (and sometimes not even that) confrontations, and to keep score on them as debates is to totally misunderstand the situation. Rather than attempts to offer reasons, they were more occasions for the airing of grievances. Once we see these events properly—that is, as confrontations—Donald Trump won them, and he

won them handily. He was aggressive, disruptive, dismissive, and full of contempt. He enacted the disdain he and so many in his campaign had for Hillary Clinton, the Obama administration's representatives, and the entirety of the progressive Left in America. Once we fix our gaze on what the objectives were, so the reasoning goes, Trump's debate performances were not failures, but were exactly what they were supposed to be. The crucial thing is that you can't just come out and *say* that, since the "debates" must yet proceed as debates. So arguments under these cases are expressions of cultural confrontation, but they must maintain the illusion that they are more than that. Anyone who falls for the illusion and keeps score like they are high school debates deserves to lose in the world of real politics.

We sketched above a special version of "just is" cynicism, one that is popular among academics and beyond the academy. It begins just like the popular version: Politics *just is* the effective exercise of power. Democracy *just is* civil war by other means. Argument *just is* the process of eliciting assent. And so on. But then the academic version adds an additional layer of cynicism: saying non-cynical things—such as that politics is about *justice*, democracy is about *self-government*, and argument is about *rationality—just is* idealistic claptrap at best, and more likely just is one further exercise of power and manipulation. That is, the academic version of "just is" cynicism claims not merely that non-cynics are delusional. It claims in addition that in fact we're *all* cynics, with criticism of cynicism being the most cynical posture of all. The view alleges that any argument against cynicism *just is* cynicism, because it's just cynicism all the way down. Non-cynicism is false-consciousness. The academic version is popular "just is" cynicism gone global.

In the previous chapters, we gave reasons why we resist the cynical turn when it comes to democracy, and here we will explain why we resist it when it comes to argument and reason more generally. The short version of our case against global cynicism is simply this: *the view that argument and reasoning "just is" cynical manipulation must itself be the product of non-cynical argument and reasoning*. In other words, "just is" cynicism is self-refuting. The "just is" cynical view about reason and argument is parasitic upon an exercise of non-cynical reasoning and argument. After all, the academic cynic takes herself to be in a position to expose or reveal something about the true natures of reason and argument. Furthermore, she seeks to correct anti-cynics. Therefore, the cynic must admit that non-cynical argument and reasoning is possible, else there can't be a set of good reasons for being a cynic in the first place. Therefore global "just is" cynicism defeats itself because "just is" cynicism about reason and argument is something that, if you take the view on and then apply it to itself, can't see itself as any kind of cognitive success.

The self-defeat problem for cynical views of argument comes in two forms. Recall that argumentative cynics claim that argument *just is* rhetorical manipulation. One problem concerns the role that argument must

play if there is going to be a case for adopting argumentative cynicism. The other has to do with the way one must see the reasons for the cynical view once one has come to adopt it.

First, if one believes that argument just is about getting others to believe one's conclusions, rather than about showing their truth or providing conditions for rational acceptance of a belief, then one must take it that this cynical view of argument itself is supported by good reasons, reasons that show—or at least sufficiently suggest—that the cynical view is correct. Accordingly, in assessing the reasons in favor of cynicism as strong enough to support the view, argumentative cynics supply killer counter-examples to their own view. They are "hoist with their own petard," as Shakespeare might have put it.

Second, if one believes that argument is just about getting others to accept one's preferred views, then one must view one's own arguments, even for that very position, as self-imposed verbal manipulation. But then the cynic must admit in her own case that she has no better reason to be a cynic than not, as there are no reasons to be had *for any view*. So the cynic must assess her own cynicism as no better founded than any opposing position. And this is not the worst of it. A consistent cynic can recognize no ground upon which to criticize non-cynical views of argument and reason. The cynic's charge that non-cynicism is *false* consciousness depends precisely on the idea that there is a *correct* view about things, one that acknowledges the evidence of the terrible truth of cynicism—namely, that nobody believes for good reasons, or anything like reasons at all. The trouble is that once "just is" cynicism has gone global, it must adopt a cynicism about argument and reason, and this in turn means that it must take a cynical posture on its own reasons. Hence it must admit that "just is" cynicism about argument and reason is also false consciousness. But then that admission would itself be subject to the cynical assessment: the evaluation of something as false consciousness is also false consciousness. Oh, the petards!

It doesn't make one a naïve professor to uphold the idea that debates are supposed to be about reasons, evidence, and truth. We all know that the election-time events that are called "debates" are actually carefully orchestrated national campaign-stops, where candidates compete on one stage by means of zingers and other rhetorical tactics for sound-bites, media coverage, and poll numbers. But *winning at a debate* is nonetheless distinct from *winning a debate*, and the world of high-stakes professional politics knows it, otherwise they would not invest so much time, effort, and energy into training candidates to achieve the former by appearing to achieve the latter. That's the reason why, despite the fact that we see that there's the merely rhetorical side to debates and so on, we have fact-checkers alongside those who announce a winner and a loser.

Imagine a political candidate giving a press conference in which she states the following:

> I am running for office because I am interested in gaining political power and the various other benefits that come from it. I have nothing to offer the electorate but catchy sound bites and flashy rebukes of my opponents. The things I say about public policy are intentionally vague and nonspecific, but always designed according to very carefully conducted marketing research aimed at discerning what you find most pleasing to hear. I look good while shaking hands and kissing babies, and I speak in a commanding tone of voice. But that's it. Now, vote for me.

Could a political campaign survive such a pronouncement? We think not. Were politicians to say this kind of thing, they would instantly undermine their chances for election. In order to maintain credibility and succeed politically, our politicians—and, in addition, our pundits, commentators, talk show hosts, journalists, activists, and fellow citizens—must present themselves as sincere and honest arguers, people who are interested in following where the best reasons lead. Why is that?

As we have already indicated, we think the answer lies in the fact that, no matter how cynical a view they might hold of the real world of democracy, democratic citizens whole-heartedly endorse the ideal of democracy that we have described. That is, politicians and others must uphold the ideals of reason and argument, and they must present themselves as committed to them, because democratic citizens endorse and insist upon those ideals. As citizens, we demand that our social and political world reflect and respect the norms and ideals that guide our cognitive lives more generally. To be sure, it is correct to think that the real world of democratic politics is most often little more than a rough-and-tumble contest for power in which the lofty ideals of proper argument are merely professed but not respected. Moreover, it is certainly more than likely that we will think all the things our hypothetical candidate is true of a large number of actual candidates. But as democratic citizens, we are bound to see all of this as lamentable, improper, and a symptom of democratic failure. The fact that we can make sense of the pair of dissonant claims from before—"Romney won the second 2012 debate" and "The things Romney said were false" and "Trump lost all the 2016 debates" but "Trump won the 2016 election"—means that we uphold the ideal, yet still recognize the ways in which the real world of politics falls short. Even if it is in fact most often mere posturing, those engaged in politics must make constant appeal to reason, truth, and argument because such appeals work; and they work because democratic citizens endorse the idea that democracy is the project of collective self-government by means of argument. Earlier, we said that you have to articulate the ideal in order to criticize the real. Now you can see how that goes.

We here confront both good news and bad news. The bad news is that our democracy regularly disappoints us. Abominable people win elections, despite ample evidence that they are incompetent and morally below

standards for holding public office. And awful laws are passed, ones that no just state should even consider. It is not just bad from a theoretical perspective; it's often scaldingly painful to bear. For many, we've described their experience of seeing Donald J. Trump elected president in 2016, as they see him not only as someone not qualified for the office, but as someone whose policies distinctly harm them and their families. This is truly awful news.

But there's good news hidden in the bad. The good news is but a glimmer in the background, and it's this: it is still possible to think things should be and can be otherwise. And we can communicate that not only to each other, but we can do so even to those who may not yet know or even to those who disagree. That we can say to ourselves, as so many have in the wake of the Trump White House, "this is not normal." That the president, say, expresses contempt for the norms of reasonable exchange as vehemently as he has for women and immigrants does not make it *normal* in either case. This is because we yet expect better, hope for and hold out for those norms of exchange to again effectively bind us all. The good news is that the habits of public reason die hard. Even those who adopt a posture of hostility toward the Press and other fundamental institutions of democracy must nonetheless frame that hostility as driven by a deeper loyalty to those very institutions. To criticize *The New York Times* as "fake news" is still to present oneself as upholding the ideal of a free Press.

Yes, we know, this is cold comfort amidst a landscape as averse to progressive viewpoints as this, and with so many who refuse to abide the demands of public reason. But progress out of this situation, rectifying wrongs done, and addressing problems that linger is possible only if we deliberate together effectively. And what does that mean? Keeping those skills sharp is still important, even if the last election ran contrary to those norms. Because without them, there's no path out.

The insistence that our social and political worlds reflect the norms that govern our cognitive lives gives us a clue to how argument in democracy should proceed. Sometimes it helps to look first to breakdowns and failures in order to get a grip on what success is.

It might seem very strange to proceed in this way—to look to places where things aren't working in order to see how they should. But, in some ways, that's the way we come to understand many of the norms that run our lives. We don't often explicitly acknowledge the multitude of norms that govern our everyday knocking about in the world; only when they break down does it become clear to us that we follow them and rely on them. Consider etiquette. You can be a perfectly nice and considerate person in conversation, but if you stand too close to people (say, close enough for them to feel your breath on their face) you'll make them uncomfortable. So there's a rough appropriate distance you should stand from someone in conversation. We discover that when the rough rule is broken. Or consider another face-to-face conversational norm, namely,

that of maintaining the right amount of eye-contact. Those who never look us in the eye make us feel uncomfortable, but not nearly as uncomfortable as those who stare us in the eyes the whole time. The former may be a sign of indifference to the conversation; the latter may be a gesture of hostility. Regardless, it becomes clearer to us that there is a rough norm with respect to eye contact (not too much, not too little) when we encounter cases where it is violated. One might say that this is characteristic of successful social norms: they're generally invisible to us until they're violated.

Now, recall our discussion from the previous chapter about manipulation. There we identified two broad categories of manipulation: *diversion* and *distortion*. The former kind of manipulation attempts to produce belief by diverting our attention away from the quality of the reasons that are available. The latter attempts to produce belief by distorting our sense of what reasons there are. If these two kinds of manipulation represent very general ways in which argument goes wrong, we can appeal to them in identifying two similarly broad argumentative norms, which we will call argumentative *earnestness* and argumentative *responsibility*.

In argument, we are called upon to assess reasons for belief. Manipulation that proceeds by way of diversion attempts to cause us to lose sight of the quality of the reasons that are being offered. Accordingly, argumentative *earnestness* is the norm associated with giving due attention to the quality of the reasons before us. Earnest arguers exhibit the resolve to focus on reasons and not be distracted by rhetoric, biases, prejudices, and other diversions. Moreover, earnest arguers follow where the reasons lead; they do not dogmatically cling to their beliefs in spite of compelling counterevidence, nor do they dismiss as irrelevant considerations that run counter to their beliefs.

But argumentative earnestness is not enough for overall cognitive success. In argument, we not only need to evaluate the reasons we happen to have before us, we also need to take steps aimed at bringing to our attention the full range of reasons there are. That is, in evaluating reasons for belief, we need to begin from a sufficiently broad set of reasons. In order to do this, we need to avail ourselves of the cognitive resources of other believers, especially those with whom we are likely to disagree. Argumentative *responsibility* hence is the norm that counteracts the distorting kind of manipulation. Instead of merely cherry-picking the facts that support their views, responsible arguers endeavor to bring into consideration *all* of the available reasons relevant to the issue at hand, and so seek them out.

These norms of argument have both internal and external aspects. That is to say, these norms operate both within an individual's own deliberations and in contexts of interpersonal argument. Argumentative earnestness operates internally as a set of cognitive habits that tend to keep our attention focused on reasons. Internally, the earnest arguer exhibits a kind of careful attention and perspicuity in assessing reasons. Moreover,

earnestness involves a kind of intellectual courage; the earnest arguer does not succumb to peer-pressure, is aware of and can correct for her own biases, and knows how to separate reasons for belief from non-rational appeals. Externally, the earnest arguer both appeals to the reasons that count in favor of her views, and attends to the reasons others raise in support of theirs. Moreover, the earnest arguer is suspicious of bandwagons and groupthink. She appreciates skepticism in the face of consensus, and recognizes the value of dissenting views.

Argumentative responsibility manifests internally as a kind of intellectual patience and thoroughness. It is the habit of refusing to rush to judgment, of suspending belief until a sufficiently broad range of considerations has been evaluated. Externally, argumentative responsibility manifests in an eagerness to listen to and fully consider the reasons of the opposition. More importantly, the responsible arguer not only seeks out the reasons of those with whom she disagrees, she seeks out the best opposing reasons. In fact, the responsible arguer may even take it upon herself to imagine a better version of the opposition's case than the opposition, as constituted, actually give.

Admittedly, these characterizations of proper argument are very general. In fact, as an account of what it is to succeed at argument, they may seem positively mistaken. Some may charge that our dual norms of earnestness and responsibility are insufficient for the simple reason that it is possible for an individual arguer to manifest these qualities and yet fail to believe the truth and avoid believing what is false. Successful argument, a critic might hold, should be understood like a system of solid pipes—whatever you put in on the one end, you get out at the other. The critic might continue to say that our conception of argumentative success has no *truth preserving* mechanism. On our view, it is possible to succeed at argument and yet move from true belief to false belief. Our critic might wonder: If that's success, what does failure look like?

This line of objection is too hasty. Systems of logic aspire to articulate the formal rules for demonstrating the truth of one proposition given the truth of others. Although this is an important aspect of reasoning, our aim at present is different. Remember that in discussing argumentative success, we are attempting to identify the norms of cognitive hygiene. Our claim is not that those who embody argumentative earnestness and responsibility are guaranteed to arrive at the truth. Nor are we claiming that the earnest and responsible arguer will most likely arrive at true beliefs. The claim rather is that earnestness and responsibility are two especially salient virtues in managing our intellectual lives. Their importance lies in the fact that, by embodying these qualities, individuals gain a kind of intellectual self-control. The earnest and responsible arguer pursues the goal of believing the true and rejecting the false by employing a set of strategies for forming and evaluating beliefs that keep her on the trail of reasons. Argumentative success of the kind we are interested in examining in this book consists in gaining *command* of one's beliefs in the way we described

in our introductory chapter. Cognitive command is not only a matter of believing what is true; one must also understand one's belief, see how it fits with other beliefs, and have a story to tell of the belief's significance.

On our view, this kind of intellectual self-control is the best means we have for pursuing the truth, even if in many individual instances it misses that mark. Again, the idea of cognitive *hygiene* is crucial. We are trying to identify belief-forming and belief-evaluating policies that are most likely to prove sound over time. And believing the truth and rejecting the false is, after all, not a one-off task. It is, like physical health, an ongoing project.

However, having said this, it also bears mention that the two argumentative norms that we have identified carry with them rather significant implications. Notice how earnest and responsible arguers are bound to insist on social and political arrangements that protect and enable the dissemination and sharing of information. That is, in order to argue earnestly and responsibly, we must be able to see ourselves as functioning within what we might call a *healthy social epistemic environment*. Such an environment is one that we can reasonably count on to provide and make accessible reliable information and a broad range of reasons pertaining to public and other matters. Think of it this way: In a highly propagandized society, where all forms of communication are carefully controlled by a central political body, and where dissent from official pronouncements is strongly discouraged, one cannot be an earnest and responsible arguer. The reason is simple. In order to follow the reasons where they lead, one must be free from the threat of political persecution for one's beliefs. Similarly, in order to try to bring under one's consideration all of the available reasons, one must have a reasonable expectation that with due effort, one can get access to a sufficiently broad representation of all of the reasons that are relevant to the question at hand.

We might say, then, that these basic norms of argument—earnestness and responsibility—can be exercised and satisfied only within a certain kind of social and political order. More specifically, one can argue well only within a social and political environment in which information can be openly exchanged, opinion can be freely expressed, inquiry and dialogue can be widely engaged, and dissent is strongly protected. In short, the familiar and central freedoms protected in a democratic society—free speech, a free press, freedom of association, freedom of conscience, and other constitutional guarantees of individual rights—not only reflect the cognitive norms that we already accept as appropriate for the conduct of our individual lives, they enable us to live by those norms. To put the point in a slogan, *one can argue well only in an intellectually open society.* And democracy is that political order in which intellectual openness is most explicitly encouraged and protected. Hence a surprising conclusion emerges. Despite all of the ways in which one might reasonably think that the real world of democracy is intellectually vicious, it also provides the social and political prerequisites for the proper conduct of our intellectual lives.

In making the case for thinking that democracy is so tightly connected to our aspiration to be successful arguers, we have emphasized the benefits that democracy confers upon individuals. To summarize, in a democratic society, there are official legal protections for individuals that enable them to engage in proper argument; moreover, those protections also enable what we above called a *healthy social epistemic environment* in which individuals share information, reasons, and arguments. It is important to realize that the cognitive benefits of democracy depend upon its social epistemic environment being healthy. That is, our claim is not that a social and political order that characterizes a democracy is sufficient for cognitive health. The claim, rather, is that the democracy *makes possible* the exercise of proper argument. Yet, to return to a point we raised in our introductory chapter about our mutual interdependence, a lot about our own individual success hangs on how others act. We cannot be successful arguers in isolation from others; similarly, we cannot be successful arguers in isolation from other successful arguers. This is because the basic norms of proper argument—earnestness and responsibility—can be satisfied only in the presence of others who are also trying to satisfy them.

From this it follows that we each have a responsibility to do our part in contributing to and maintaining the health of our social epistemic environment. Think again about the analogy between cognitive health and physical health. In order for you to maintain your physical health, the physical environment in which you live must be of a certain quality, and you depend upon others to do their share in helping to maintain the conditions under which physical health is possible. Moreover, you have a duty to do your own part as well. Just as you rely upon others to not poison the physical environment, you too have a duty to do the same. Things are similar with the cognitive environment. We must rely on others to be honest, to share relevant information with us, and to exercise the requisite care for accuracy and precision when they do so. One who is surrounded by liars, fabricators, or careless thinkers is severely hampered in the exercise of argumentative earnestness and responsibility. Likewise, one who routinely dissembles, misleads, misrepresents what she knows, and spreads unsubstantiated rumors as if they were known to be facts pollutes the cognitive environment, and thereby hinders the ability of others to sustain their cognitive health.

In this way, we each have a responsibility to others to try to argue well, and this involves trying to help others to argue well by sharing with them our reasons and information. But in addition, we have a responsibility to not simply contribute to the collective resources that compose the social epistemic environment. We must also attempt to draw contributions from others.

This is a significant implication of what has been said thus far. People tend to think that in a democratic society, our individual responsibilities consist exclusively in duties not to interfere with others when they are

acting within their rights. And of course it is true that as democratic citizens, we do have such duties of non-interference. But on the view we have been developing, we have duties to positively contribute to the health of the shared social epistemic environment. And this requires us not only to not interfere with others, but also to help them exercise their capacities for argument.

An example might help clarify this point. On the account we have proposed, one of the reasons why democracies recognize freedom of speech is that this freedom is necessary if citizens are going to be able to share in self-government according to reason. A society in which the expression of certain views is forbidden is a society in which individuals cannot be earnest and responsible arguers. But notice that the cognitive benefit associated with free speech is not realized unless citizens listen to each other. That is, free speech requires more of us than to simply allow others to speak; if the policy of protecting free speech is to have the right impact on our social epistemic environment, free speakers need listeners. Perhaps they also need listeners who are ready to criticize, question, examine, and evaluate what is said. In short, if freedom of speech is going to deliver the cognitive benefits it promises, there must be *engagement* between speakers and an audience. With some freedoms, then, come some responsibilities.

This point about our responsibilities to listen and criticize seems especially apt in the cases of those who express unpopular, uncomfortable, or heretical ideas. Recall that argumentative responsibility requires us to seek to bring a sufficiently broad range of reasons into our evaluations of what to believe. In a way, then, proper argument involves trying to discover the reasons of those who hold opinions that are most unlike our own. That is, we contribute to the health of the social epistemic environment by expanding the breadth of our access to the cognitive resources of others, especially those who are unlike ourselves. In short, we have a responsibility to understand them, and if we continue to think they are wrong, we must find compelling criticisms of them.

These points can be encapsulated by thinking of three kinds of contributions to the social epistemic environment: *input, output*, and *uptake*. To argue well, we must be ready to express our reasons, to share our information with others, and to articulate our questions about and criticisms of the views of others. That is, we must provide certain kinds of *input* into the social epistemic environment. We must also draw resources out of the environment as well. That is, it is not enough to listen to the reasons of others; we must engage with and be responsive to them, we must be sensitive to the *output* of the environment. Finally, it is not enough to confine ourselves to argument with those with whom we know we have only minor disagreements, if any at all. We must seek to engage with unfamiliar others and those who possibly hold uncommon views. That is, we must seek to expand our *uptake* from the shared social epistemic environment.

One way of thinking about the interplay of input, output, and uptake is to imagine a society with the concept of disagreement and reasons, but not of argument. Individuals have their own reasons for their commitments and can make those commitments explicit to each other, but they don't have the vocabulary to put those reasons to public use in justifying their commitments. So when people disagree in this society, they don't have the tools to make explicit why they do so, only that they do so. So described, the only tools these have for managing disagreements will be either negotiating tactics (so, not addressing the disagreement, but mitigating its consequences) or in simply silencing what some part has to say. In this society, there are tools for input and output, in that disagreements can be registered, but both input and output are significantly diminished if reasons aren't part of the story told—because now we can't tell what quality of contributions are being made. Uptake, however, without reasons, is eradicated. If we don't see the *why* of a counterpoint, it comes across as noise at best. Uptake requires understanding a view and representing it as the product of rationality, and without that, our fellow citizens are little more than fair or foul weather.

Our view of proper argument in a democratic society should now appear rich and complex. It is also demanding. In fact, it may even strike you as overly demanding, requiring too much of citizens. To be sure, we concede that it is indeed a demanding view both of proper argument and democratic citizenship. But there's no reason to expect cognitive management to be easy. To again draw on the analogy with the body, the most effective exercise regimens test our physical endurance and capacity to tolerate pain. So too, the exercise of our cognitive capacities is not easy, and may be sometimes even uncomfortable. But it is what's required if we are going to maintain our cognitive health. Some exercises push us. Feel the burn.

If this seems too harsh, consider also that the demands of proper argument present us with requirements to try. Trying to believe according to the best reasons available is clearly consistent with failing to do so. Of course, the trying has to involve a sincere effort to argue earnestly and responsibly. One cannot merely "go through the motions" and discharge one's cognitive duties. But neither does one need to succeed across the board in doing everything one could do in evaluating one's reasons. As with life more generally, in our cognitive lives there are honest errors, and various other ways in which we fall short but nonetheless have behaved as we should. Furthermore, there are other legitimate goals in life besides those associated with gaining epistemological self-control, and these other worthy aims can place constraints on how far one must go in order to satisfy one's cognitive duties. So whereas proper argument is difficult, and the requirements to be earnest and responsible are not easily met, we think nonetheless that the aspiration to exercise proper cognitive hygiene is not overly demanding or all-consuming.

Finally, notice once again that argumentative earnestness and responsibility are norms we already hold ourselves to. Think back to the politician we imagined earlier who explicitly professed to have no concern for reasons and argument, but instead claimed to be simply hungry for power. Recall that we allowed that there may be some politicians who in fact satisfy this description. But we also noted that no politician could *express* a total lack of concern for reasons, and a single-minded interest in power, and still expect to succeed politically. This is because we insist that others try to argue properly, especially when they are attempting to gain political power over us. A similar point can be made in the more general case of our fellow citizens. We hold them to the norms of proper argument, especially in cases where they are expressing views about political matters. Correspondingly, when a fellow citizen speaks to public matters in the presence of others, she is likely to present her views as enjoying the full support of all the best reasons. She is also likely to present the opposing views as far less well-supported by reasons. And were a fellow citizen to claim to have no regard for reasons, and the comparative merits of the reasons for and against her views, we would rightly dismiss her as someone not worth listening to.

This brings us to a crucial point. We have claimed that the argumentative norms we have identified are in the everyday activities of ordinary people who are trying to figure out what to think about some matter or other. We have presented a case for thinking that democracy is that mode of social and political organization which enables us to respect these norms at the level of collective decision making. Yet there's an aspect of democracy that complicates this picture. To explain: When an individual is attempting to figure out what to believe about, say, how best to grow tomato plants in his garden, he would certainly do well to consult others, including others who know about gardens and tomato plants. However, if this individual were to dismiss the advice of successful gardeners and instead consult the local tarot-card reader, we would surely think him silly. But as the loss is his alone to bear, we would leave it at that.

Democracy is different. In a democracy, what people believe about public matters, and how they go about forming and evaluating those beliefs, is a matter that affects us all. This is because, in a democracy, what citizens believe about public matters helps to determine what our shared policies, laws, and institutions will look like. Unlike our gardener, when citizens decide what to believe about public matters, they contribute to a system of *collective decisions*, a system which makes decisions that typically we all must abide by. In fact, in a democracy, collective decisions often produce policies that are backed by the power of law. Consequently, democratic decisions often result in laws that force individuals—including those individuals who sincerely disagree with them—to act in certain ways.

Hence we see that there is a crucial difference between political argument and other argumentative contexts. In political matters the stakes are

high, in that what we collectively decide will deeply affect others. This explains why most of the informing examples in this book make reference to *public* argument.

Argument is public when it is carried out in public and is about matters of public concern. On the view we have been developing, public argument is the core of democratic politics. Accordingly, the importance of arguing well in these public contexts is greatly intensified.

Public arguers must not only try to discern what the best reasons say they, as individuals, should believe; they must also consider what the best reasons recommend for us, the democratic polity. And this introduces complications. Often what our own best reasons say *we*, as individuals, should believe differs from what the best reasons for *us* recommend. This is because certain reasons might apply to us as individuals that do not apply to us as members of a democratic citizenry. The most obvious example of this phenomenon arises in the case of citizens who are also religious believers. To be a member of a religion is in large part to recognize certain kinds of reasons as salient or even decisive. Consider an obvious example. For certain denominations of Christianity, that the Bible forbids action X is a conclusive reason to refrain from Xing. Accordingly, individuals who belong to the relevant Christian sect must adopt a policy of refraining from doing X. The complication emerges once one realizes that not all of one's fellow citizens are members of that Christian sect, and thus the fact that the Bible forbids action X cannot act as a reason for *them* to refrain from Xing. Indeed, for many citizens in a modern democratic society, what the Bible says is irrelevant to questions about personal morality and public policy. And democratic citizens need to recognize this fact. If democracy is about collective self-government and collectively reasoning, the reasons should be accessible and acceptable to those who are party to the decisions.

This brings us back to a point we made in our Introduction about the *dialectical* demands of argument. When we are giving arguments, we are not merely presenting our own reasons for accepting some conclusion; we are also trying to present reasons to others so that they might come to rationally adopt our conclusion. As we noted at several points earlier, argument is most frequently engaged in as a response to disagreement. Argument aims to resolve disagreement by providing at least one party to the dispute with reasons to change his or her mind. In order to accomplish this, arguments must present disputants with the reasons that they can recognize as reasons. Accordingly, to argue against the permissibility of stem cell research strictly on the basis of papal authority in a dispute with non-Catholics is to fail at argument. "The Pope has decreed that stem cell research is forbidden" can be recognized as a reason only by Catholics. Consequently, an argument against stem cell research that draws exclusively from this kind of premise fails entirely to engage the dispute at hand. To put the point more generally, when offering public arguments,

one must not only provide good reasons in favor of one's views; one must also attempt to supply one's fellow citizens with reasons that they could recognize as good reasons.

This means that public argument is different from the kind of argument that individuals might engage in when they are deciding for themselves the rules and policies by which they will live as individuals. When we engage in *public* argument, we are aiming to discern what the best *public* reasons say we should adopt. A public reason is a reason whose force does not depend upon one's acceptance of a religious or moral viewpoint that democratic citizens are at liberty to reject. To return to our example, being Catholic is not a requirement for democratic citizenship. Consequently, reasons whose force derives strictly from some element of the Catholic faith are not public reasons. Such reasons therefore are not reasons *for us* as democratic citizens, even though they might be especially strong reasons for those of us who are Catholic.

To put the matter in a nutshell, when we engage in public argument, we are looking to evaluate the reasons that *democratic citizens can share*. These are reasons whose force derives from the moral and political commitments of democracy as such, reasons that speak to the demands of equality, liberty, justice, and citizenship. Although religious citizens are certainly free to announce and profess reasons deriving from their religious convictions in public settings, they are bound as dutiful democratic citizens to look toward public reasons when arguing with their fellow citizens about public matters.

To conclude this chapter, we raise another critical thought owing to Plato. A critic might agree that perhaps individuals are indeed beholden to a certain set of norms that govern belief formation and evaluation. She might continue to argue that the fact that these norms have a grip on us does indeed require us to try to argue well, and even contribute to the health of the shared social epistemic environment. However, she might add, that these are duties to *try* to properly argue means that they are too easily satisfied. This is especially evident once it is noticed that it is easy to present oneself to others as if one were an expert, and it is easy to give the impression to others that one has properly evaluated all of the best reasons on offer from one's opposition. Expertise is as easily counterfeited as it is valuable. Consequently, the critic may allege that proper argument is easily mimicked. And democracy gives political power to those who are best at simulating proper argument. So democracy is ultimately self-undermining.

This is, once again, a powerful line of critique. So powerful, in fact, that we must concede much of it. It is true that in a democratic society political power is tied not to knowledge or expertise, but to the ability to convince others that one has knowledge or expertise. And it is also true that there are many highly effective ways in which clever speakers can convince large numbers of people to believe as they say. What's more, we concede that democratic politics very often proceeds by way of proper argument's mimics. That is, much of

democratic politics is conducted with imposters of proper argument. When successfully deployed, these imposters allow a speaker to present himself to an onlooking crowd as fully compliant with the norms of proper argument, when in fact he has flouted them. We might say, then, that in placing argument at its center, democracy creates an opportunity for smooth talkers with handsome faces; it opens the possibility for rule by those who can best simulate argument.

That's a significant concession to our envisioned critic. However, we decline to follow the critic in drawing the conclusion that this much provides a knock-down objection to democracy or to the norms of public argument. The key to responding to this line of criticism, we hold, is to develop a systematic conception of the ways in which proper argument is mimicked. In turn, we think it is important to highlight some common errors in public argument and some techniques for their correction. We take ourselves to have thus far laid out in sufficient detail the conceptual apparatus driving our conception of argumentation. We will pause to consider a limit case for our conception of argument, that of deep disagreement, in the next chapter. Part II of the book is devoted to the identification and analysis of the ways in which argument is simulated, mimicked, and counterfeited. Each of the following short chapters is devoted to a single imposter. As it turns out, these are relatively easy to detect once their natures are identified and explained. The aim is to give our fellow citizens an easy way to detect them, avoid them, and criticize those who deploy them. Part III of the book is about the way forward, once we've seen the troubles—how do we repair arguments and the civic culture of argumentation, if it is so common that we have pathological arguments and they seem to be endemic to critical reflection?

For Further Thought

1 How might a cynic about argument and reason respond to the arguments presented at the beginning of this chapter? Does the claim that global cynicism is self-undermining support non-cynicism? Or might it be a further reason to be a cynic?

2 According to the view presented in this chapter, each of us is under an obligation to contribute to the overall health of our shared social epistemic environment. This requires us, in part, to seek out proponents of odd, unorthodox, and unpopular viewpoints so that we may listen to their views and feel the strength of the considerations in favor of them. Does this view entail that each of us is obliged to attend speeches given by racists, sexists, Holocaust-deniers, and the like? Must we, as democratic citizens, constantly expose ourselves to objectionable, offensive, and defamatory viewpoints?

3 In this chapter, it was argued that democratic citizens are required to present *public* reasons when arguing with their fellows about political

matters. This means that they must avoid presenting arguments that employ premises deriving from their own religious viewpoint. But doesn't this restriction constitute a violation of citizens' rights to freedom of expression, freedom of religious exercise, and freedom of conscience?

4 Is the "good news about the bad news" view just more academic idealism? If so, is there a form of "resistance" that does not rely on norms of reason and argument?

Key Terms

Argumentative cynicism	The view that argument just is the expression of political power (or cultural contempt or mere rhetorical manipulation).
Argumentative earnestness	The virtue of attending to the quality of the reasons given.
Argumentative responsibility	The virtue of searching for all the available reasons that bear on an issue, not being satisfied by a small sample of the reasons given.
Social epistemic input	The information we as arguers and speakers provide to an intellectual environment. Our testimony, arguments, objections, requests for reasons and clarifications.
Social epistemic output	The information others provide to an intellectual environment.
Social epistemic uptake	The attempts individuals and groups make to understand social epistemic input and output in ways that are productive of identifying issues and developing resources for rational resolution.
Public argument	Arguments carried out in public concerning matters of public interest that are constrained by the rule that reasons given must be publicly accessible.

Note

1 The *New York Times* fact-checker for the first debate is here: www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/10/04/us/politics/20120804-denver-presidentialdebate-obama-romney.html

4 Deep Disagreements

We all have had moments when we feel that those with whom we disagree not only reject the point we are focused on at the moment, but also reject our values, general beliefs, modes of reasoning, and even our hopes. In such circumstances, productive critical conversation seems impossible. For the most part, in order to be successful, argument must proceed against a background of common commitments. Interlocutors must agree on some basic facts about the world, or they must share some source of reasons to which they can appeal, or they must value roughly the same sort of outcome. And so, if two parties disagree about who finished runners-up to the Hornblowers in their historic Sportsball League championship last year, they may agree to consult the league website, and that will resolve the issue. Or if two travelers disagree about which route home is better, one may say, "Yes, your way is *shorter*, but it runs though the traffic bottleneck at the mall, and that adds at least twenty minutes to the journey." And that may resolve the dispute, depending perhaps on whether time is what matters most.

But some disagreements invoke deeper disputes; disputes about what sources of information are authoritative, what counts as evidence, and what matters. Such disputes quickly become argumentatively abnormal. And so if someone does not recognize the authority of the Sportsball League's website about last year's standings, it is unclear how a dispute over last year's runners-up to the Hornblowers could be resolved. What might one *say* to a disputant of this kind? Does he trust news sites, television reporting, or Wikipedia entries concerning the SBL? Does he regard the news sites and the league website as reliable sources of information concerning *this* year's standings or when the games are played? What if our interlocutor in the route-home case doesn't see why the quickest route is preferable to the shortest? Maybe our traveling companion regards our hurry-scurry as a part of a larger social problem, or maybe wants to enjoy the Zen of a traffic jam. Sometimes a disagreement about one thing lies at the tip of a very large iceberg composed of many other, progressively deeper, disagreements.

The puzzle about deep disagreement is whether reasoned argument can work at all in them. There is a widely held view, perhaps at the core of deliberative views of democracy, and certainly central to educational

programs emphasizing critical thinking, that well-run argument is at least never pointless, and often even productive. And many hold that it's important to practice good argumentation, especially in cases of deep disagreement. Call this view *argumentative optimism*. The trouble for this optimism is that as disagreements run progressively deeper, it grows increasingly difficult to see how argument could have any point at all. Again, in deep disagreements, there isn't enough shared commitment for there to be any place where arguments can resolve anything. This result, in turn, encourages us to regard interlocutors as targets of incredulity, bemusement, and perhaps even ridicule, contempt, or hatred. There's little, many think, one can *argue* or *say* that is going to rationally resolve certain disagreements. That's just how far gone the other side seems. In the end, it all may come down to who's got better propaganda, more money, or, perhaps, the better weapons. Call this view *argumentative pessimism*.

A famous argument for pessimism is given by Robert Fogelin in his essay, "The Logic of Deep Disagreements." The core of his case is as follows:

1 Successful argument is possible only if participants share a background of beliefs, values, and resolution procedures.
2 Deep disagreements are disagreements wherein participants have no such shared background.
3 *Therefore*: successful argument is not possible in deep disagreement cases.

Fogelin holds that "deep disagreements cannot be resolved through the use of argument, for they undercut the conditions essential to arguing" (1985: 5). And so, as Fogelin reasons, given that no rational procedures for resolution offer themselves for those in deep disagreement, we are in a difficult situation. He observes: "[I]f deep disagreements can arise, what rational procedures can be used for their resolution? The drift of this discussion leads to the answer NONE" (1985: 6). Presumably, when we face a deep disagreement and cannot argue any further (on Fogelin's reasoning), we must decide what to do next. Do we just give up the argument? Do we also give up the disagreement? If we can't give up the disagreement, what do we do? Could we use further means, non-argumentative and non-rational strategies? Fogelin approvingly quotes Ludwig Wittgenstein on this: "At the end of reasons comes *persuasion* (Think of what happens when missionaries convert natives.)" (1985: 6). What exactly is *persuasion* here, and how is the model of missionaries supposed to help? Fogelin's conclusion is that we need to look to persuasion, but he's not provided much beyond that. Here's how many have reasoned beyond Fogelin's conclusion.

4. In disagreements needing urgent resolutions that also do not admit of argumentative resolution, one should use non-argumentative means to resolve the dispute.

5. *Therefore*, in urgent deep disagreements, one should use non-argumentative means to resolve the dispute.

Fogelin did not explicitly endorse any particular non-argumentative means (beyond whatever missionaries use on "natives"), nor did he clarify how one might determine that a disagreement is deep (as opposed to merely hard) or urgent. But we can see that a form of argumentative pessimism can put us on the way to a more wide-ranging attitude toward argument, namely that it stands in the way of quickly and decisively resolving disagreements. The better option with deep disagreement, so says the more radical argumentative pessimist, is to make sure one's arsenal of rhetoric and propaganda is ready to hand in deep disagreements. Argument is, from the perspective of the pessimist, pretty much a waste of time. Persuasion is the key. Moreover, if the disagreements are deep, that usually means that there's a lot at stake. Best to win, even if it means that one has to bend the rules of argumentative exchange. Regardless, it is clear that argumentative optimists face a challenge in the face of deep disagreement and the radical pessimist's line of thought. How might they respond?

For starters, optimists should ask whether deep disagreements, so described as cases with *no* shared background, really exist. And so, an optimist could concede Fogelin's point, and yet contend that in fact *no actual disagreements are so deep that there are no shared background commitments*. One way the optimist could argue for this thought is as follows: In cases of persistent and hard disagreement, interlocutors seem not to share enough *meanings* in common to have their dispute count properly as disagreement. That is, in order for two parties to *disagree*, there must be a sufficient degree of other kinds of cognitive overlap, otherwise there is no disagreement at all, and the parties simply "talk past" each other. In other words, when one party asserts "Birds fly," and the other says "Birds don't fly," they apparently disagree. But if it is discovered that the two parties do not share in common a broad conception of what it is to fly, what things are birds, what authorities to consult, or whether one of them *really did see a seagull up in the air just the other day*, we should conclude that there is no *disagreement* after all, but rather a case of mutual unintelligibility. Perhaps it's worse to countenance the possibility of mutual unintelligibility than deep disagreement, but it's one way to retain argumentative optimism. The deeper the disagreement, the harder it is to see it as *a disagreement*.

This means that insofar as we see disagreements as *disagreements* at all, we must take the disputants to share enough in the background to allow them to talk about the same things; that is, in order to see parties as *disagreeing*, we must take them to inhabit the same world and talk about it in enough of a similar way that they can recognize that they have a disagreement. Consequently, we can never see disagreements as so deep that there's no shared commitment at all. Where we see disagreement, we see (at least in principle) resolvability.

A different optimistic strategy is to reject Fogelin's first premise. One might say that argument isn't *only* about resolving disagreements. An argument, as an exercise of manifesting our rationality, may improve our understanding of our own views and those of others. In an exchange, we may, in thinking about an issue, actually *create* common ground in developing a shared culture of reasoning together. Consequently, argument can be productive in deep disagreement cases, but it takes a longer-run view. But even if argument isn't productive of agreement in the end, there are other goods that argument can promote, and mutual understanding and the capacity to see the disagreement as the product of rational creatures who can reasonably disagree is a good, too.

Further, the optimist may reject even the fourth premise. She may deny that when argument gives out in urgent cases, one may resort to some form of non-argumentative persuasion. The optimist could insist that the fourth premise states a dangerous policy, since one may have misidentified merely difficult or hard cases as instances of deep disagreement. That, certainly, is a bad error to have taken what was a rationally resolvable disagreement to be rationally irresolvable. That's because you've missed an opportunity to reason with someone who may have something to say to you that's worthwhile, and you've treated someone you could have moved with reasons as someone who can only be moved by something other than reason. That's bad.

Additionally, the optimist might claim that resorting to propaganda, rhetoric, verbal coercion or other non-argumentative means gives up on the plausible thought that even in cases of severe and stubborn disagreement, parties still can learn from each other. The pessimist's policy presumes that when disputes seem irresolvable, the only alternative is to simply defeat or at least neutralize one's opponents. But notice that these tools, *were they used against us*, would strike us as objectionable.

It's worth pausing to let this last thought sink in. When we are thinking about rules for good argument, we should be thinking not only about rules that we would want us to be using *as arguers*, but we would also want there to be good rules for arguers to follow when they are *addressing arguments to us.* Our dialectical view of argument essentially takes argument as an interpersonal *process*, and that process is best considered as a *turn-taking* game of giving and asking for reasons. In argument, we take turns giving and receiving reasons. And we need the rules of argument to be straightforward enough as to not be too onerous for arguers, but also flexible enough so that we as hearers aren't forced to accept reasons that we can't see the point of. So the point is that as *hearers* of arguments, we wish that we be presented with cases that appeal to *our reason*, instead of manipulate us with fear or propaganda.

The dispute between argumentative pessimists and optimists is itself stubborn and unlikely to be soon resolved. But in light of the dangers of prematurely adopting pessimism, this tie, we think, goes to the optimist.

The problem concerning deep disagreement can be formulated in a different way. It is a common enough experience we've all had while arguing with those with whom we have serious disagreements: as a controversial view is supported, even more controversial reasons are given, to be followed by more and more controversial commitments. As we noted earlier, a regular strategy in what might be called *normal* argument is that arguing parties trace their reasons to a shared ground of agreed-upon premises and rules of support, and then they test which of their sides is favored by these reasons. But disagreements that are *deep* are those where shared reasons are not easily found. And consequently, it seems that under these conditions, argumentative exchange is doomed to failure.

Of late, our interest in deep disagreement has not been purely academic. With Donald J. Trump winning the 2016 U.S. presidential election and the rise of the alt-right movement in American politics, we found that we face very real cases of what had seemed a sheer theoretical posit. In particular, the intellectual movement of the self-styled "neo-reactionary right" and the "Dark Enlightenment" seemed to be exemplary. We have given an argument above for argumentative optimism in the face of deep disagreement, so our theory now has a real test case.

When we started reading around in the neo-reactionary corpus, we found ourselves in what felt like an upside-down world—all the dialectical elements of the argument were familiar, but none of the premises presented as truisms seemed remotely plausible. Liberal democracy was taken to be obviously wrong-headed, and the attitudes of totalitarian programs were presented as equally obviously right. The regular defaults that some measure of equality of consideration is required by justice and that peoples' voices matter are openly held in contempt. The journalist James Duesterberg captures his experience first reading the literature of the Dark Enlightenment:

> Wading in, one finds oneself quickly immersed, and soon unmoored. All the values that have guided center-left, post-war consensus … are inverted. The moral landmarks by which we were accustomed to get our bearings aren't gone: they're on fire.[1]

This *Alice through the looking glass* experience is something that those on the neo-reactionary right anticipate in their reading audiences. But the writers in this genre have no plans of showing their readers the way back to the world they've left behind. In fact, this break with the world of purportedly liberal norms is one of the core commitments of the neo-reactionary program. Importantly, their view is that we all have been brainwashed by a quasi-religious political superstructural institution ruling the Western world—what those in the neo-reactionary movement call *The Cathedral.*

To start, the Cathedral is more a roughly ideologically confederated set of institutions: civil service, the university system, the media, and many

religious movements. There are no legally binding or formal connections between these entities, but rather, they are all blind allies in a great, but unconscious, collaboration in illusion. It is a common strategy to analogize the Cathedral to religious commitment seen through naturalistic eyes. Religions aren't invented *as lies*, despite their being false. Rather, they arise as short-hands for why some norms are binding. Originally, this was simply religion *simpliciter*, but according to Mencius Moldbug, the Dark Enlightenment's prime mover on the blogosphere, the religious movement has morphed into a kind of secular religion of political idealism.

> You can go from religion to idealism and back simply by adding and subtracting gods, angels, demons, saints, ghosts, etc.[2]

The upshot is that contemporary progressivism, in the eyes of the neoreactionaries, is a "nontheistic Christian sect." The worship of diversity and intersectionality, the insistence on political correctness, are all religious rites, ones where the meanings of the words do not really matter, but whether one chants them at the right times and at the proper cadence.

Consider the Cathedral, then, on analogy with some of the great philosophical set-pieces about grand-but-undetectable illusions. Plato's Analogy of the Cave in the *Republic* has the prisoners participating in games of shadow-image identification, and since they've never seen the real things the images are of, they cannot even fathom the idea of illusion. Of these sorry folks, Socrates has a dark aside, "They are like us" (*Republic* 515a). The movie trilogy *The Matrix* is premised on our lives taking place in a large-scale computer simulation, one about which one may have but only suspicions. And so, too, is the Cathedral—as Nick Land, the author of *The Dark Enlightenment Manifesto* notes, "the Cathedral has substituted its gospel for all we know."[3]

In order to fill in the Dark Enlightenment picture, a further trope from the literature of grand illusions needs to be mentioned. In Plato's *Republic*, one of the prisoners is released and is dragged out of the cave, to a blinding, painful light. In *The Matrix*, Neo is given a choice between a red pill and a blue pill. He chooses the red pill, which shows him what the Matrix is; the blue pill would have put him back deeper in the illusion. The neoreactionaries, too, need a symbol for those who have foregone the comforting and tempting illusion of the Cathedral. They use a term from *The Matrix*, that of the *red pill*. Mencius Moldbug makes a contrast in selling his version of the red pill, because it turns out that there are *many* out there selling red pills.

> We've all seen *The Matrix*. We know about red pills. Many claim to sell them. You can go, for example, to any bookstore, and ask the guy behind the counter for some Noam Chomsky. What you'll get is blue pills soaked in Red #3… . [W]e provide the genuine article…

Seeing the Cathedral from the outside, neo-reactionaries feel they are shaken from an impossible but too comfortable dream. A similar vocabulary is necessary *internal* to the Cathedral—there are "woke" progressives, but this is more testament to the perverse incentives internal to the institution. That is, the best way to hide the illusion of the Cathedral is to acknowledge that there are illusions, but hold that they consist in not being aware of and committed to the core theses of Cathedralism.

Let's call the complex of all these elements of the grand-but-undetectable illusion line of argument (the commitment to the illusion, the prospects of being brought out of it, and that there are illusions of enlightenment within the illusion) *red pill rhetoric.* The basic program of those using red pill rhetoric is that those on the other side are so badly brainwashed, they, for the most part, are in a position where only the most invasive methods are capable of reaching them to turn them from the truth. The mode of engagement using red pill rhetoric is to start with the thought that one's intellectual opponents suffer from false consciousness, and so the failure of one's arguments shouldn't be evidence of them being bad, but rather evidence of how far gone the other side is.

Despite the depth of these disagreements between the progressive left in America and those on the neo-reactionary right, there are still prospects for productive argument here. One source of hope is the fact that so many neo-reactionaries already take themselves to engage in argument with the liberal progressive movement. As noted by Foseti, a reviewer of the Moldbug blog:

> It's important to remember this fact. The past year has seen an explosion of "reactionary" writing. And I'm left feeling … unsettled. The explosion of high-quality Rightist thought is fantastic and should be enthusiastically applauded by anyone outside of the Cathedral (or anyone that enjoys a good argument—is that redundant?).[4]

The thought that it is *redundant* to think that those outside the Cathedral enjoy good argument should be reason to hope that there are lines of argument that can be open between progressives and neo-reactionaries. How could they enjoy a good argument unless argument was not only possible but actual?

The main challenge to those using the trope of red pill rhetoric at this stage is a form of leveling skepticism. Recall that Moldbug had acknowledged other competing red pill narratives, which he'd said were really "blue pills soaked in Red #3." But doesn't the progressive left say the same of the reactionary right? That they are false enlightenments? Moreover, if we *really are under such circumstances of deep and internally undetectable illusion*, how can *they themselves* know they really are out of the purported illusion? Thousands of students every year are taught about Plato's allegory of the cave, and *The Matrix* is a piece of pop critique

culture—hasn't the "it's all an illusion" narrative been coopted by the illusion itself? Think about it for a second: if you were designing an illusion to trap human minds, wouldn't you build into the illusion versions of those who say that it's all an illusion, but just push the deceived deeper into the illusion? Moldbug observes the skeptical scenario, but only looking at his competition:

> [Y]ou have no *rational reason* to trust anything coming out of the Cathedral—that is, the universities and the press. You have no reason to trust these institutions than you have to trust, say, the Vatican.

But under these conditions, we have no rational reason to trust Moldbug, either. The problem with high-grade skeptical tropes in red pill rhetoric is that once they are in place, they do not discriminate. The neo-reactionary narrative gets the same treatment as that of the most lefty social justice warrior—namely, that of the jaded eye of one suspicious that it's all overblown rationalization. The leveling skeptical consequence is that we are all returned to argumentative *status quo ante*. No one gets to claim to have genuine red pills any more than anyone else. Nobody gets to say, now, that the other side suffers from a false consciousness that they themselves have overcome. We are all on the same level, all with the burden of proof.

Now the leveling skeptical argument is both good news and bad news. The good news is that there are argumentative possibilities in these deep disagreement cases, and they are ones that both sides can see the consequences of. The bad news is that the consequences are skeptical, at least in the sense that when both sides use this rhetoric in these circumstances, the result is that the argument ends in stalemate. Now, that's bad news in the sense that we don't have a resolution that favors one side over the other at this stage, but there is more than one way to resolve an issue. Sometimes, the best answer to an issue is that we need more information—neither side, at this stage, has the better case. We need to keep talking, keep finding new evidence, new considerations. Just because we don't know *now* who has the better case, that doesn't mean we won't *ever*. And so, despite the skeptical conclusion of the leveling argument, there are some reasons still to be argumentatively optimistic.

Some further evidence for argumentative optimism arises from how we have outlined the dialectical state of play. Deep disagreement, from the theoretically optimistic perspective, is a mere theoretical posit, an antinomy of reason taken too far. Insofar as depth of disagreement is gradable and comparative, the theoretical worry about what one might call *Absolutely Deep Disagreement*, as disagreement with no in-principle overlap of premises to reason from and no disagreements possibly deeper, is purely a matter of conceptual possibility. *Actual* disagreements never reach this state, if only because in order for us to recognize disagreements *as disagreements* (where we share enough semantic overhead to contradict each

other) we must share enough commitments in common to start to arbitrate the disagreements. Earlier, we gave a kind of purely theoretical argument for this thesis, but now, we have a case in point. In fact, the advent of the rhetoric of red pills is testament to this. For the rhetoric of the red pill to work, we need notions like the appearance/reality distinction, the idea of being duped, and the idea of there being someone who sees it all for what it is and arrives to perform some consciousness-raising. All those elements of what might be called the *dialectic of false consciousness and its correction* must be in place for any of those narratives to exist or to make sense to their audiences.

The truth of the matter is that we do share those concepts, and those shared concepts bespeak yet more in common, such as a love of truth, a desire to know what one's position in reality and society is, and a desire to have some measure of control over it. That is, the background agreement is on all those norms of cognitive hygiene, cognitive command, and rational self-control we've been going on about throughout this book. How about that?

With this broad class of background concepts in place, we can see that the disagreement between liberals and neo-reactionaries is perhaps *deep*, but it is not one that approaches *absolute depth.* The theoretical program with deep disagreement optimism is that many disagreements are deeper than others, in the sense that there are disagreements with more contested argumentative moves than others. In a word, as the disagreements get deeper, they become *philosophical*. This, of course, should come as no surprise, since philosophy arguably began and thrives in the spaces where we attempt to wrestle with the Big Questions that separate us. But we argue all the time about Big Questions—philosophy wouldn't be possible if we couldn't.

Our optimistic response here to deep disagreement does not guarantee that arguments will eventually resolve the disagreements; and given the leveling skeptical argument earlier, it may be that there are no solutions coming. But this does not imply that argument is impossible under such conditions. In fact, the skeptical *argument* itself shows that argument is possible. Let that point sink in for a bit.

We are aware that many will find our case for argumentative optimism out of tune in these politically dark days. In fact, we expect that some will see our line of thought as complicit with the objectionable politics of the powerful and the moral failures of those with the loudest voices, since the argumentative stance we advocate does not sufficiently *resist* their power. But the moral situation should make this point clearer, since if we find those who propose authoritarian policies morally blameworthy, we must think them rationally responsible for the policies they endorse and the thoughts and reasons they act on. But if we hold them rationally responsible, we must think that if they had different reasons manifest to them, they could and should act

otherwise. If we, ourselves, have those reasons and the voice to get them out in argument, then we are obligated to do so. And so optimism about argumentative possibilities and prospects in deep disagreement is not pie-eyed Pollyanna-ism in the face of argumentative tragedy, but rather it is the view that well-run argument matters and is important to value, especially in the dark days.

For Further Thought

1 If depth of disagreement is gradable (some disagreements are deeper than others), then does it follow that argumentative optimism is only just a theoretical view?
2 The symmetry of dialectical norms requires that a rule for arguers should also be one that hearers of arguments can endorse. Notice that this now constrains what kind of reasons can be given. Does this amount to another version of the rule of public reason, or does this rule have a different outcome?
3 Can there be absolutely deep disagreements, only they are very hard to articulate?
4 Can members of the Dark Enlightenment reply to the skeptical challenge given? If they do, is their answer in the service of the democratic norms they say they reject?

Key Terms

Deep disagreement	A disagreement wherein the two parties do not share enough commitments or argumentative procedures to resolve the issue by argument.
Argumentative optimism	The view that either there are not deep disagreements or that argument is possible and worthwhile even when faced with deep disagreement.
Argumentative pessimism	The view that argument is either not possible or is pointless in cases of deep disagreement.
Dialecticality requirement	Arguments must be materially and logically successful in ways that their audience can recognize, and further, they must address concerns and challenges posed by the audience.
Red Pill Rhetoric	The argumentative technique of taking those with whom one has a deep disagreement to be deeply deluded and caught in a false-consciousness.

Notes

1 https://thepointmag.com/2017/politics/final-fantasy-neoreactionary-politics-liberal-imagination

2 http://unqualified-reservations.blogspot.com/2007/05/
3 http://www.thedarkenlightenment.com/the-dark-enlightenment-by-nick-land/
4 https://foseti.wordpress.com/2014/01/06/review-of-unqualified-reservations-part-1/

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Fogelin, Robert (1985) "The Logic of Deep Disagreements." *Informal Logic* 7:1. 1–8.