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Emotional Backing and the Feeling of Deep Disagreement

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ABSTRACT: This paper discusses Toulmin's (1964) concept of backing with respect to the emotional mode of arguing. Specifically, I examine an example from Fogelin (1985) where emotional backing justifies a warrant concerning when we should judge that a person is being pig-headed. While his treatment of this kind of argument can be supported by contemporary emotion science, it needs to be supplemented by therapeutic techniques whether or not our goal is to rationally resolve such arguments. This is shown through a comparison with an analysis of an emotional argument from Gilbert (1997). The introduction of psychotherapy into argumentation theory raises the question of the extent to which ordinary arguers can use such techniques. This is an issue I have explored before (Friemann, 2002) in terms of intractable quarrels. Seeing how psychotherapeutic techniques can be used in an intractable quarrel, I ask whether or not this is fruitful in the context of Fogelin's idea of a deep disagreement.

KEY WORDS: emotion, Fogelin, deep disagreement

INTRODUCTION

Fogelin's (1985, p. 5) Wittgensteinian claim in 'The Logic of Deep Disagreements,' is that deep disagreements cannot be rationally resolved because the conditions for argument do not exist. To explain this he first describes a disagreement that is not deep because the essential condition for argument is met: there is a shared background of beliefs and preferences (Ibid.). His suburban vignette is quoted in full.

A is asked why he is taking a particular road and he responds, 'I want to pick up the fish last.' We can imagine this being a conclusive reply. On the other hand, it might be met with the rejoinder, 'No, go to the Grand Union last; I don't want the ice cream to melt.' This too might be conclusive. But things could also become complicated. A might point out that the traffic that way is horrible this time of day, and it would be better to wait a bit to let it clear out. And he might be crushed by the reply 'Today is Saturday.' People being what they are, we can even imagine this discussion becoming quite heated. (Ibid., p. 3)

Now while Fogelin does not come out and say that A is being pig-headed, we can easily understand the example to fit his analysis of a charge of pig-headedness six paragraphs later.

Suppose, for example, that I accuse someone of being pig-headed. This is not a generous thing to say, but it is not a free floating insult either. To call someone pig-headed is to make quite a specific charge: he continues to cling to a position despite the fact that compelling reasons have been brought against it. But compelling to whom? We are saying that they ought to be compelling for *him*, or else it wouldn't be right to call him pig-headed. He knows that they are true and in other, less interested, contexts would recognize their force. (Emphasis in original) (Ibid., p. 4)

So, if the disagreement about fish and ice cream is revised in order to reveal pig-headed behaviour, we end up with a picture of the emotions involved. (Since Fogelin identifies A as male, and the setting to be a suburban one, I will let Alex stand for A, and assume he is driving with his partner B.) B asks Alex why he is taking a certain road and he says, 'I want to pick up the fish last.' His partner tells him to take another road because she does not want melted ice cream. Alex disagrees, citing horrible traffic as his reason. B responds by saying it is Saturday, and Alex is crushed. It is reasonable to think that the idea of being crushed in this context refers to the feeling of shame. If Alex is feeling shame then he was invested in the argument. Next, Alex angrily denies that B is right while B accuses him of being pig-headed.

This argument is in a normal argumentative context because B makes an appeal to common ground (Ibid., p. 4). So B knows, and knows that Alex knows, that if it were not for his anger at being embarrassed, he would agree with her about which road to take, since they share views on weekend traffic patterns. Thus the form of B's argument is this: 'Alex, you are being pig-headed (claim), since by your own beliefs you should accept what I am saying about which road to take (data).' The warrant for this argument is: people who resist an argument that should persuade them because it accords with their own beliefs, are being pig-headed. The backing for this warrant concerns the field of logic, because the concept of inconsistency is a factor, and the various sources of information from which we compile our understanding of emotion. (C.f. Gilbert, 1997, p. 90-91 for a brief outline of the latter). In commonsense terms we can understand what it means for someone to feel shame and then get angry; and depending on our goals, our analysis of this argument with respect to backing might stop at the mention of these fields. However, Fogelin's main claim is that an argument such as this between Alex and his partner can be resolved because there is common ground. Before we pass over to deep disagreements, we should see what is involved in resolving arguments in normal argumentative contexts. If resolution is our goal, then which backing is chosen becomes quite important, for there are competing theories of emotion and some may be more adequate than others. Also, the way a particular emotion theory is used becomes important as well, for an adequate theory may be used for purposes for which it is unsuited. Since Fogelin's example of fish and ice cream is an emotional argument, I will only concern myself with emotional backing and ignore the logical backing.

EMOTION SCIENCE

This is not the place for a full dress treatment of emotion theory, but two main ideas are relevant: 1) feeling is not really distinct from thinking, 2) there is an important distinction between primary and secondary emotions. Although the scope of the first claim is wide, we will discuss it when we examine deep disagreements. Thus I turn my attention to the second claim, which can be the basis for our commonsense understanding of how Alex first feels shame and then anger. Damasio's (1994; 1999) attempt to explain emotion is one of the most significant and popular. Within the category of emotion he distinguishes between primary or universal emotions like happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, and disgust, with secondary or social emotions like jealousy, embarrassment, guilt, and pride. Although emotions are evolutionarily more advanced than instincts and reflexes, the way primary emotions are described may lead one to think they have much in common with them. Primary emotions are hardwired: once we are aware of a certain type of stimulus our bodies automatically react in a pre-organized fashion. However, because of their automatic nature, false positives are a possibility, our bodies can react with fear

in situations where the stimulus turns out not to have been a fearful one; yet our bodies react fearfully anyway.

Evolutionarily speaking, we can imagine a progression from simple nonconscious organisms that can only rely on a repertoire of reflexes and instincts, to higher nonconscious organisms that react through their primary emotions, yet they are not aware of them. But once organisms begin to perceive their primary emotions, then it is possible for the organisms to make systematic connections between a certain stimulus and its bodily reactions. It does not seem possible for organisms to make this connection without feeling their primary emotions, for without the consciousness of bodily changes the organism is simply reacting. The benefit of making systematic connections is that now the organism can anticipate the stimulus in its mind, and feel the way that stimulus organizes its body without having to be in the presence of the actual stimulus. And anticipation has obvious survival value. For humans, when we consciously think about something our bodies will react in particular ways; and how it reacts is to a significant degree a learned process. Damasio calls these acquired reactions secondary emotions.

Now the preceding alone does not get us to our commonsense understanding of Alex's pig-headed behaviour, for anger is identified by Damasio as a primary emotion, and shame as a secondary one. Thus we might think that the order in which the emotions are felt should be reversed: first anger is felt and then Alex's acquired reaction to it is shame. Now while this order is certainly possible, for we can feel shame for getting angry, we should not think that emotion science suggests so rigid and simple a model. The account is much more complex, and it would be beyond the scope of this paper to delve into that account. However, fortunately we can show a little more fully the relevance of the distinction between primary and secondary emotions for our commonsense view if we look to how psychotherapy and psychology has used emotion science.

In a previous paper (Friemann, 2001) I suggested that it would be fruitful for argument theorists interested in reducing conflict to draw from Leslie Greenberg's (1988; 1993; 2002) Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT). The core idea we can take from EFT is its use of the distinction between primary and secondary emotions. Actually, Greenberg and Johnson (1986) explain why it is important to differentiate between three classes of client emotion in therapy. Along with the primary emotions, which are seen as conveying 'biologically adaptive information that aids in problem solving and constructive relationship definition' (Ibid., p. 5), there are secondary, and instrumental emotions. Instrumental emotions are easiest to explain: these are emotions that a person adopts like a role to achieve some effect. Greenberg and Johnson (Ibid.) give the example of someone expressing helplessness in order to gain sympathy. Since the person is aware of what he or she is doing, such emotions are 'relatively easy to interrupt or divert people away from' (Ibid.). Secondary emotions are often the ones that provide the motivation for therapy. Greenberg and Johnson give the example of anger at one's spouse. This type of anger is obviously conscious, and if it is a defensive coping strategy, it is a secondary emotion. These emotions should not be heightened, they should be bypassed because to explore them could be detrimental to therapy. The key to the usefulness of EFT in terms of our commonsense understanding of Alex's emotions is that any emotion can be primary, secondary, or instrumental. 'It is not the emotion itself that can be categorized as primary, secondary, or instrumental: All emotions, basic or complex, can be primary, secondary, or instrumental' (Greenberg, 2002, p. 46). What puts an emotion into a specific category has to do with what emotion is experienced first.

These primary feelings tell people who they really are and what they are most fundamentally feeling in any given moment. These can be basic emotions, such as anger or fear, or they can be complex emotions, such as jealousy or appreciation, as long as they are the person's first response. (Ibid., p. 44)

Given this understanding of the difference between primary and secondary emotions, we can say that Alex saw he was losing the argument and shame was his primary response; this was quickly covered up by a secondary response of anger. Greenberg's interest in the surface/ depth dynamic here lies in the fact that people often do not notice their primary emotional response to situations. If Fogelin intends his example to be a case of pig-headedness - and I think he does - emotion science provides the background understanding of how this situation can arise. And if Fogelin is interested in rationally resolving the kind of emotional argument that I have supposed Alex finds himself in, then he should follow this line of thought and pay attention to the primary emotion.

LIISA AND CYNTHIA

On the other hand emotional arguments of the type we are considering, i.e. where someone does not accept an argument, and the person who offered the argument thinks he should on the basis of his own beliefs, may not be genuine cases of pig-headedness. And the interesting thing is that we may miss this fact unless we are paying attention to emotion. Thus even if we are not interested in resolving an emotional argument like the one between Alex and his partner, we still need to use the therapeutic techniques that should be employed if we wanted to resolve it. This is because by using such techniques we can find out whether or not the emotional argument is really a case of a person being pig-headed. This can be seen through an example from Gilbert. In 'What's In a Name' (Gilbert, 1997, pp. 126-127) Liisa and Cynthia are arguing about changing the name of a club newsletter. Their entire exchange along with Gilbert's comments in italics are reproduced here.

1.Cynthia: Liisa, why do you think changing the name from *The Weaver's Club Newsletter* to *Woven Words Magazine* is a bad idea?

Cynthia begins by trying to determine Liisa's position and goals.

2.Liisa: Because the old name has a certain tradition. There are connections to it, and I don't like throwing out the old for no good reason.

3.Cynthia: I can sympathize with that, but we are a new club, aren't we?

4.Liisa: Yes, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't keep some connection to the past.

Liisa is sticking to her position and her motive.

5.Cynthia: But since the name of the club is totally different, shouldn't the magazine reflect that? I mean we aren't called The Weaver's Club anymore, so maybe the old name on the magazine should change?

6.Liisa: [with some heat]: And why call it a magazine? What's wrong with 'newsletter'? Why change everything?

Cynthia is nonplussed by this turn. Liisa seems to be overreacting, which may mean that there is something going on at a deeper level or in a different mode.

7.Cynthia: Why does calling it a magazine change anything? It just sounds classier, don't you think?

More information about Liisa's position is needed.

8.Liisa: It sounds harder, that's what. I edited a newsletter for two years, and now everyone wants me to edit a magazine! That's a lot bigger job.

Now Cynthia begins to see Liisa's problem. The name change represents more to Liisa than just a new title.

9.Cynthia: I see. So calling it a magazine makes it feel like a lot more responsibility?

10.Liisa: Magazines are big and glossy. I can't do something like that. What do I know about it?

Now, having gotten further down into what is at the root of Liisa's position, they might be able to find some way through the argument.

Now clearly this argument has to be modified if it is going to parallel the argument between Alex and his partner. Cynthia's sense that there is inconsistency between Liisa's beliefs has to be increased, so that it is clear to Cynthia that Liisa should agree with her if it were not for her emotion getting in the way. So we can imagine that Cynthia judges Liisa to be inconsistent on the basis of what she has already heard Liisa say about this issue. Suppose Liisa had said to others that the change to 'Woven Words' was acceptable to her, thinking that the 'Newsletter' part would be kept. And we must further suppose that the reason Liisa gives for her assent has something to do with the fact that a change in the club should be reflected in the name. And so Cynthia's questions in turn (1), (3) and (5) reflects her belief that Liisa is being inconsistent. But of course, Liisa cannot in fact really be inconsistent (and be aware of this), if Cynthia's judgment that she is being pig-headed is false. To this it may be objected that if the source of error is a false belief of Cynthia's, then it is to the beliefs that we should turn and not the emotion. After all, if Cynthia believes something false about Liisa, we should expect this to come up in the discussion, especially since Cynthia is likely to press hard on the perceived inconsistency. At some point Liisa should say that she does not believe what Cynthia thinks she believes.

In response to this it can be said that it is just a fact that some arguments are more complex than others. In the argument over fish and ice cream we can easily determine that Alex is being pig-headed, partly because the beliefs that are involved are fairly simple ones. That is, Alex's partner can be pretty certain that he does not like bad fish, since if he did, she would have found out about it before. The more complex the emotional argument, the easier it is to miss the fact that the basis of someone's opposition to you is a false belief. The following quote from Greenberg et al. addresses this point.

Emotion clearly affects cognition and does so in a complex and differentiated fashion that researchers have only recently begun to investigate. It is clear however that once an emotional state has been elicited - by whatever means chemical, physiological, or cognitive - the person's subsequent cognition is immediately affected. First, the organism's current goal is altered in response to the newly emerging affective state. Second, the person's train of thought is altered in a manner related to the ongoing affective state. (Greenberg, Rice, and Elliott, 1993, p. 52)

Before Cynthia confronts Liisa, Liisa must have found out that the intention was to change not just the first part of the name, but also change 'Newsletter' to 'Magazine.' In order for Cynthia to confront her about this, Liisa must have made her opposition known somehow. Thus in turn (1) Liisa's goal is to offer a response to Cynthia and hope she would not be pressed about it. That is, she does not want her real feelings known. Taking the Greenberg et al. quote to heart, Liisa's goal will change at turn (6). And it does; after hearing the dreaded word 'magazine' twice in Cynthia's turn (5), she now shows a willingness to uncover the real issue. The information she gives to Cynthia in turns (8) and (10) reveal that she is no longer having the same conversation as she was before turn (6). In (8) and (10) Liisa is not giving reasons for why the name of the club's organ should stay the same; she is expressing her fear that she did not have the ability to handle the job. Turn (6) is important because the text indicates that Liisa speaks 'with some heat.' Now here is the point, if Cynthia were to focus on the beliefs of Liisa, then she would judge her behaviour as pig-headed. This is because she had just given a reason in turn (5) for why the name should be changed that she thinks accords with Liisa's own beliefs. And now the only reason Liisa is holding out is because she feels her own inconsistency and subsequent

shame, which leads to anger. If Cynthia were to take this road she would likely have missed what Liisa's emotion was telling her about her beliefs.

Gilbert's original example demonstrates the technique of position exploration, which takes interlocutors to be experts on their own experience. Cynthia takes her cues entirely from Liisa's responses. A basic tenet of his coalescent argumentation (CA) is to be mindful of the signals interlocutors give when they are thinking about things in a different mode, or on a deeper level. Once a coalescent arguer notices that this is going on, he or she can incorporate a technique of Rogerian empathy like empathic responding into his or her responses. Such therapeutic techniques are not only useful when our focus is resolution, but as we have just seen, they are also useful in determining what is going on the first place.

The fact that psychotherapeutic techniques may be necessary in order to understand an emotional argument, let alone resolve it, raises the issue of how ordinary arguers are going to be able to deal with this. (My use of the phrase 'ordinary arguers' is taken from van Eemeren and Meuffels, 2002, p. 45). It seems to me that the only thing we can do is to try to make accessible whatever techniques we pull from psychology and psychotherapy. I tried to do this in a previous paper (Friemann, 2002) for a specific type of emotional argument between couples that I called intractable quarrels (IQs). Relying on basic principles of systems therapy theory, I suggested that argument theorists should look to psychotherapy for insight. I am more sure of this than ever, for I now think Greenberg's EFT can be integrated into an accessible set of ideas for argument scholars. However this is not what I wish to discuss. I will assume that it is legitimate to claim that psychotherapeutic techniques are relevant for emotional arguments, and move to the issue of Fogelin's notion of a deep disagreement.

DEEP DISAGREEMENT

Now that we understand what Fogelin means by a disagreement caused by someone being pig-headed, we can contrast it with a deep disagreement (DD). Alex was being pig-headed because he shared common ground with his partner, and his feeling of shame was quickly masked by anger, resulting in his rejection of his partner's argument. In the language of emotion science, Alex's secondary emotion covered up his primary emotional response. Now in a DD there is no common ground (Fogelin, *Op. cit.*, p. 5). And, importantly, emotion does not get in the way.

But we get a very different sort of disagreement when it proceeds from a clash in underlying principles. Under these circumstances, the parties may be unbiased, free of prejudice, consistent, coherent, precise and rigorous, yet still disagree. And disagree profoundly, not just marginally. (*Ibid.*)

By my lights Fogelin is trying to eliminate the emotional aspects here, so the picture one gets is a disagreement between, say, two academics who have known for years that their positions on some issue is incompatible, and thus there is no point in arguing over it.

Now recall that at the beginning of section 3 on emotion science, I said that there are two main ideas from emotion theory that are relevant. I can now discuss the first one: feeling is not really distinct from thinking.

Damasio's denial of the traditional philosophical dichotomy between reason and emotion stems from his reconciliation between more traditional cognitive science perspectives, and a Jamesian view of emotion. Damasio (1994, p. 128) wants to challenge a seemingly sensible view with respect to evolutionary brain development and function: the notion that the evolutionarily older and lower brain regions are responsible for basic bodily regulations like emotions, and that

the newer and higher brain regions are responsible for reasoning and wisdom. The take away message from his first book, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (1994), was that this view is wrong: emotion is necessary in order for rationality to operate properly (Damasio, 1999, p. 42). He provides two stunning examples that lead to this conclusion: Phineas Gage (1994, pp. 3-33) and David (1999, pp. 43-47). Through Damasio's explication of these examples, a powerful case emerges against the traditional philosophical (and general western intellectual) prescription against contaminating reason with emotion.

Damasio challenges the Cartesian idea that reason and feeling are biologically distinct (Damasio, 1994, p. 168). He states that it is part of commonsense to believe that the following two situations involve thinking and deciding that are automatic and rapid, and hence have to do with the body: blood sugar drops and we decide to eat; some object falls and we move away to avoid getting hit (Ibid., pp. 166-167). He also thinks it is commonsense that the following third group of situations demand a kind of thinking and deciding that is fundamentally different from the kind needed for success in the first two situations: designing a building, solving a mathematical problem, composing a musical piece or writing a book (Ibid., p. 167). In order to deal with these situations we '...rely on the supposedly clear process of deriving logical consequences from assumed premises, the business of making reliable inferences which, unencumbered by passion, allows us to choose the best possible option, leading to the best possible outcome...' (Ibid.). Yet, for all the differences between the first two and the third group of situations, Damasio (Ibid., p. 168) claims that '...there may well be a common thread running through all of them in the form of a shared neurobiological core.' Damasio's mention of this 'shared neurobiological core' seems to suggest that thinking and feeling have at least some processes in common. If this is right then he is taking a position on one of the most important debates in emotion theory: whether or not emotion is a natural kind. However we do not need to go into that controversy to see that Damasio's position allows us to say that at least theoretically, cognition should not be split off from emotion. Some researchers in cognitive science have taken the strong position that our theorizing about cognition should always be done with the body - and hence emotion - in mind (Varela, F. J., Thompson, E. and Rosch, E., 1991). Thus according to the proponents of embodied cognition we are always emotional, even if commonsense would not judge us to be emotional.

Yet we should not exaggerate. In a commonsense way it is perfectly acceptable to grant Fogelin the idea that DD's can be devoid of emotion. At the same time however, it is not really emotion per se that is ruled out of a DD, just the emotions that arise through the dynamic of secondary emotions masking primary ones. For since the important point about a DD is the fact of no common ground, ideally there is no possibility of inconsistency. (I say ideally because as we say in my revision of the Liisa and Cynthia example, a false belief about someone can cause one to perceive inconsistency in a person where there is none). And if there is no inconsistency, there is no shame accompanying the feeling that one is losing the argument. Hence there is no anger caused by shame either. But this does not mean that the academics cannot get angry at each other; it just means that they will not do so for a particular reason.

Now it seems to me that Fogelin is taking an objective perspective from which to view a DD. And from this vantage point he is right: DD's cannot be rationally resolved. Does this mean that psychotherapeutic techniques have no place in a DD, and that we can only rely on non-rational persuasion? This would be the case if such techniques had their application only in resolution contexts. And we have seen that this is not the case. From a subjective perspective, how can we tell whether or not we are in a DD? If we modify Fogelin's notion that a DD is

emotion free to bring more reality to it, then anger can occur, it will just have to be primary anger. Aristotle thought that anger is caused by our belief that we or our friends were treated unfairly. I assume that it is possible that one of our hypothetical academics could perceive the other as being unfair to him or her. Now, is it possible to think up a sufficiently complex example where primary anger expressed by one academic to the other, can get misconstrued by that other such that he believes that the first academic is getting angry and hence not accepting his claims, because she feels that she is losing the argument? I think so, for all we have to do is think about the situation where these academics are new colleagues as opposed to old ones. And if we give them positions on an issue that are in fact incompatible, we have a situation where if they interact at all, the second might well come to hold a false belief about the first. This false belief of course would be that the first academic is being pig-headed. If this is plausible then we have a parallel case for our modified example of Liisa and Cynthia. In that example emotion obscured the fact that there was common ground, and in this case of the DD, I am claiming that at least for a while, emotion can obscure the fact that there is no common ground. In the DD then, the second academic feels he is in an argument because he misconstrues primary emotion as secondary emotion.

Now I am not supposing that the main reason we should want to be able to recognize the expression of primary emotion is to find out whether or not we are in a DD. Fogelin does not claim DD's are common. And it might not be thought worth the effort for such a meager payoff. However, knowing that one is in a DD through the ability to recognize primary emotional expression, only appears unimpressive because of the way Fogelin has conceptualized the DD. In less extreme contexts the ability to mark the difference between the two kinds of emotion can help very much in figuring out just what is really going on in an argument. And finally, the skill of differentiating between primary and secondary emotion is crucial to conflict resolution.

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