



## Open Research Online

### Citation

Whittaker, Leo (2022). To what extent can qualitative argumentation analysis be used to identify philosophical frameworks underpinning opposing arguments? Student dissertation for The Open University module YXM830 Advance your independent learning.

### URL

<https://oro.open.ac.uk/91215/>

### License

(CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0) Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

### Policy

This document has been downloaded from Open Research Online, The Open University's repository of research publications. This version is being made available in accordance with Open Research Online policies available from [Open Research Online \(ORO\) Policies](#)

### Versions

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding

## Contents

Contents.....	2
1 Introduction .....	3
2 Concepts.....	3
2.1 Research Paradigm .....	3
2.2 Deep disagreement.....	4
2.3 Summary Conclusion .....	5
3 Tools from argumentation .....	5
3.1 Toulmin model .....	5
3.2 Unexpressed premises.....	6
3.3 Summary conclusion .....	8
4 Synthesis of tools and concepts.....	8
5 Discussion.....	9
5.1 Strengths .....	10
5.2 Weaknesses .....	10
5.3 Implications.....	10
5.4 Opportunities for further research .....	10
6 Conclusion.....	11
7 References .....	12

## 1 Introduction

The following essay explores the research question ‘to what extent can qualitative argumentation analysis be used to identify philosophical frameworks underpinning opposing argument?’. This question entertains the possibility that the discourse of an argument can be used to infer the ontology, epistemology, methodology used by the individual making some claim. Secondly, taken together, these components represent a philosophical perspective, which may be mapped back to a commonly recognised research paradigm.

Establishing whether argumentation can identify the paradigm of an argument, this would then support future research of whether a difference in philosophical perspective significantly contributes to the persistence and depth of a dispute. The hypothesis is that by moving the discourse away from the focus of the dispute toward the underpinning epistemologies of each standpoint, this may open up avenues for a resolution of persistent, seemingly intractable disagreements. This subsequent inquiry would likely need primary research to be carried out, and so is beyond the scope of YXM830.

The problem that this research intends to ameliorate is that of increasing polarisation along political lines and across social issues (Miller and Bermingham, 2021). This polarisation can be observed online, particularly within social media where pro-attitudinal content appears to exacerbate these issues (Kubina and von Sikorski, 2021).

The intended audience for this research is the masters level student considering research that may add to or instigate controversy. This research may be of interest to those seeking to understand how seemingly persistent disagreements could be approached.

This essay begins with exploring some key concepts from argumentation and research philosophy before giving an illustration of how tools from argumentation might be used to identify the epistemology of an argument. A discussion on the extent to which the initial research question is answered follows this before a critical review of the research itself is considered. Finally, the implications for the audience are offered before an outline of possible future research paths given.

## 2 Concepts

This section will briefly review some key concepts encountered through reading undertaken to answer the research question. These are the concepts of research paradigm and deep disagreements.

### 2.1 Research Paradigm

The intention is to use commonly identified research paradigms from social research to act as a representation of an individual’s worldview. This approach offers a rich theoretical structure and taxonomy to describe underlying beliefs of an argument.

A paradigm (L’Huillier, 2008) or worldview is a set of assumptions and beliefs that are employed by researchers, either explicitly or implicitly, to guide their research. Guba and Lincoln (1994) claim that these beliefs are ultimately accepted on faith as they cannot be established as ‘undeniable truths’ as all are human constructions subject to human error. Nonetheless, these paradigms shape our experience and endeavours.

Guba and Lincoln contend that the beliefs that define a paradigm can be summarised by answering three questions:

“1. The ontological question. What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?...2. The epistemological question. What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known?...3. The methodological question. How can the inquirer...go about finding out whatever her or she believes can be known?” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.108)

The paradigms explored in this research largely centre around those in table 6.2, Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.112), positivism, post-positivism, constructivism and critical theory. Whilst this is not an exhaustive list, it should be sufficient to establish a ‘proof of concept’ to answer whether argumentation analyses can be used to identify the philosophical underpinnings of arguments.

## 2.2 Deep disagreement

The concept of a deep disagreement was introduced by Fogelin (1985) to refer to a dispute which could not be rationally resolved due to a clash of ‘framework propositions’. A framework proposition is a foundational value or belief that cannot ultimately be rationalised, in the same way that Guba and Lincoln (1994) refer to beliefs underpinning paradigms.

Additionally, Fogelin expands on these framework propositions as being established within ‘a whole system of mutually supporting propositions (and paradigms, models, styles of acting and thinking)’ (Fogelin, 1985, p.6). Essentially, the commitment to these foundational values and beliefs become entwined with the individual’s identity and social standing. Figure 1 gives an impression of the influences on the protagonist’s adherence to their standpoint from the network of commitments, described by Fogelin. This indicates that within deep disagreements, one or both opponents may be subject to a conflict of interest preventing their accepting the other party’s premises, claim or simply withdrawing their own.

This idea is further supported by Zarefsky (2010) who warns that deep disagreements can be politically convenient, offering an example of political actors cultivating a polarising controversy, real or pantomimed, to energise support from their voter-base.

Aikin (2019) also applies the concept to political polarisation between exponents of ‘left’ and ‘right’ leaning views within the United States before introducing the notion of varying depth of disagreement. From this concept of varying levels of disagreement, Philips (2021, p.113) infers a strategy to dealing with deep disagreements. Namely, that once an impasse on an issue has been found, one ought to move to exploring ‘what is grounding the values or other framework propositions that are making rational engagement more difficult’. This seemingly validates the longer research aims articulated in this essay.

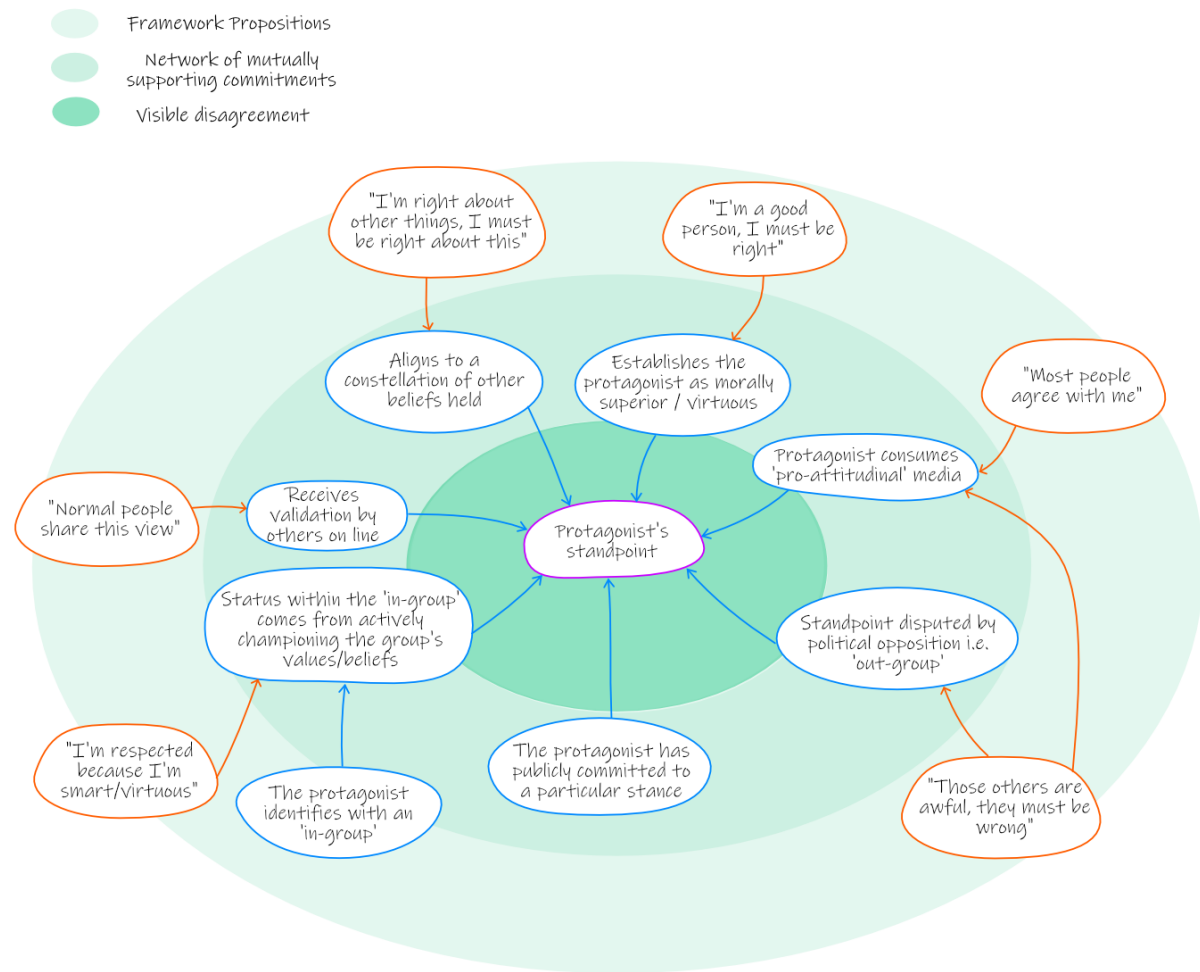


Figure 1 - Interpretation of Fogelin's (1985) framework propositions and system of commitment represented as an influence diagram

### 2.3 Summary Conclusion

Both concepts of research paradigms and deep disagreements provide a theoretical framework to understand the social phenomena which prompted this research. The four research paradigms cited give a consistent structure that is intended to enable the classification of an individual's philosophical perspective or worldview.

Deep disagreements offer an explanation of how polarisation around a disagreement likely occurs, i.e. through a conflict between, or, lack of shared values, beliefs and assumptions that are not easily rationalised, but nonetheless influence human activity. Deep disagreement literature also validates the longer research arc proposed of moving the focal point of the argument away from the surface issue to these framework propositions of mutual supporting system of commitments.

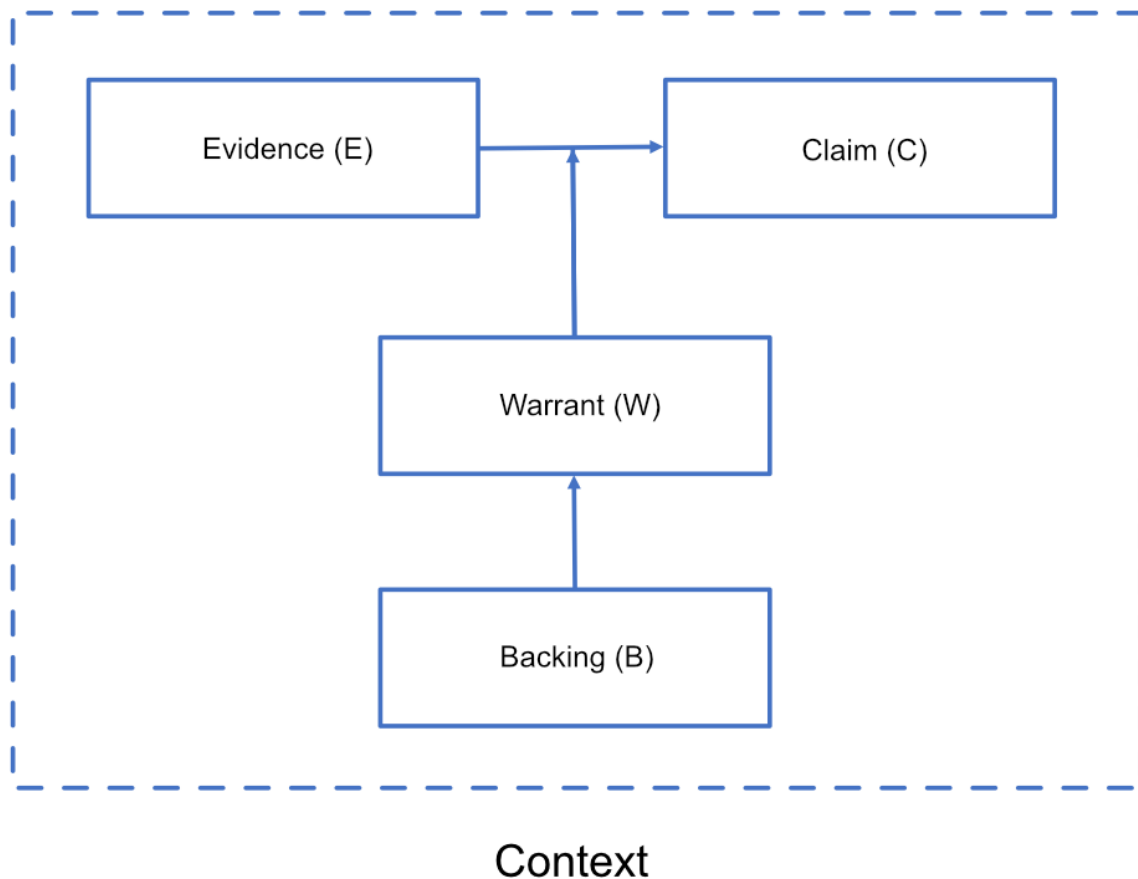
## 3 Tools from argumentation

This section introduces two tools from the field of argumentation that are to be used to map the components of a claimant's paradigm.

### 3.1 Toulmin model

Figure x introduces an adapted form of the Toulmin model of an argument (Toulmin, 1958). The purpose of argument diagramming is to focus on the essential structure of a claim and thus enable

an analysis and evaluation. The Toulmin model supports the structure of a simple argument, the most basic example would contain a claim (C) and some statement of evidence (E). The warrant (W) is the rationale for how the evidence supports the claim. The backing (B) is the logic that justifies the warrant. Another contrasting way to conceptualise the anatomy of an argument is to think of a series of premises with one of them being the final claim (Eemeren et al, 1987). Toulmin introduced a structure and classification of the major and minor premises.



*Figure 2 An adapted Toulmin Model diagram (Toulmin, 1958, p.97) with 'context' component added*

By representing the premises of the argument in the way, the analyst can identify opportunities to test the claim or other components. Simosi (2003) and Voss (2005) empirically found the Toulmin model to support problem structuring and conflict resolution, which can be components of deep disagreements. However, these studies found difficulty in identifying and differentiating all components of the model from everyday speech. Nonetheless, both studies reference the need to identify unexpressed premises.

### 3.2 Unexpressed premises

Within everyday communication it is common for premises or standpoints to be unexpressed (Eemeren et al, 2002).

In this example, the claim that 'Claus likes to yodel' is supported by the evidence that he comes from Tyrol. The speaker assumes the listener knows that 'most Tyrolers likes to yodel' and omits this from the spoken discourse as this seems redundant information. However, to those unfamiliar with the generalisation about Tyrol's citizens, on hearing the claim and evidence, may indicate in some way that they do not understand the connection. One can imagine the speaker then having to explain

the warrant by making it explicit. The implicit backing in this case is that what is generally true of a community of people is likely to be true of the individuals making in up.

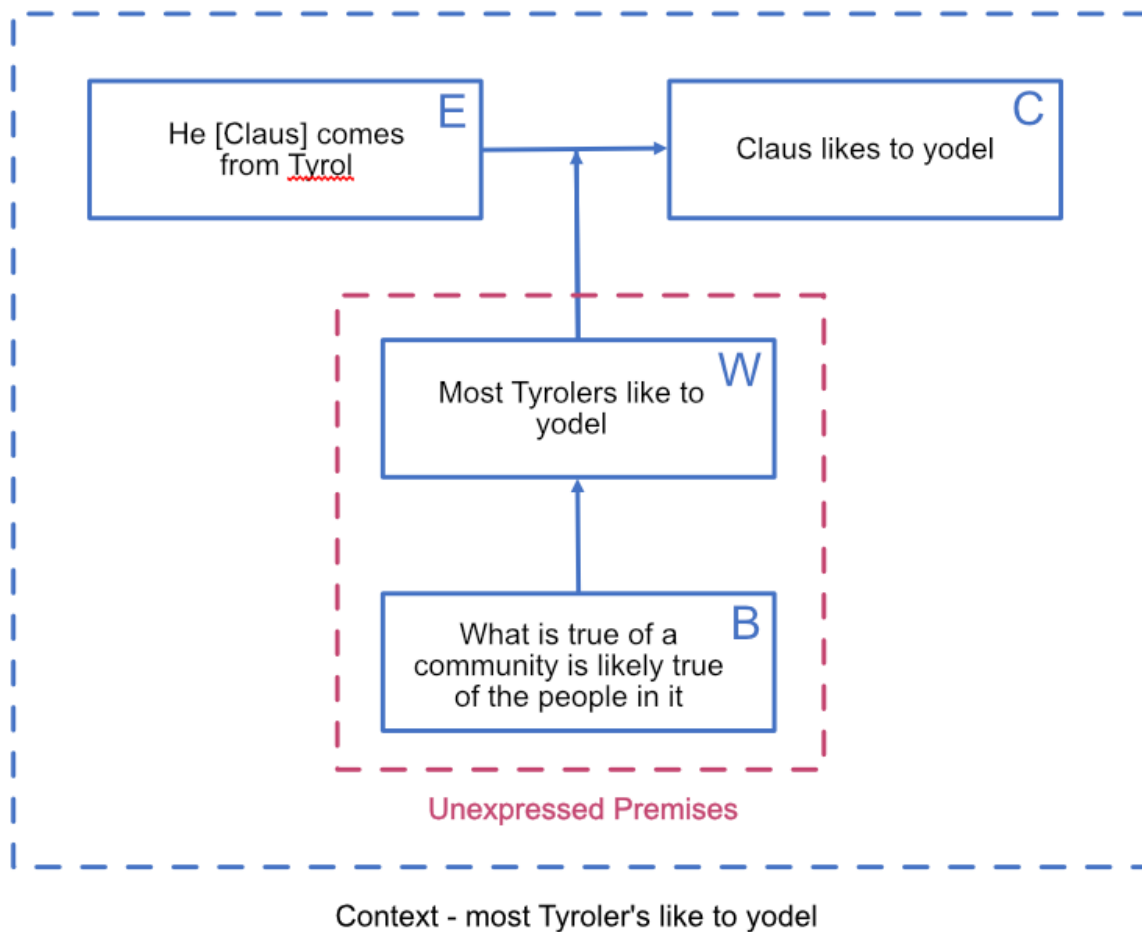


Figure 3 An adapted Toulmin diagram with an example from Eemeren (2002, p.57)

Interestingly, the backing statement could be argued to be fallacious, the fallacy of division (Walton, 1995). However, without surfacing this underpinning assumption it goes by without scrutiny, highlighting the need to uncover unexpressed premises to evaluate an argument.

One technique to uncover unexpressed premises is to look for additional premises that would link the stated premises to the conclusion, explicitly, and adopt those the one that is most sympathetic to the original argument (Eemeren, 2002; Groarke, 1999; Gough and Tindale, 1985). This essentially takes an inductive argument and attempts to make it deductive.

Eemeren (2002) adds that unexpressed premises are more reliably identified when the context is well defined, illustrating this with the following example.

Suppose that Sally responds to an invitation from her friend Elaine to go with her to a party with the following argument:

I don't thin you should ask me to go with you to that party. Ronald and Marlene are in Portugal!

Without further information about the context, there is no apparent connection between the argument...and the standpoint...If more is known about the context, then a more meaningful statement can be formulated...For instance, if Sally is known to be very sad

because her boyfriend Ronald has gone on holiday with her friend Marlene, then the following formulation is possible:

Someone who is disappointed in love can't be expected to want to go to a party.  
(Eemeren et al, 2002, p.59)

A limitation of the Toulmin model is that it does not represent the context of the argumentation. Therefore, as advocated by Zarefsky (2005) Toulmin's model has been adapted to include an outer box to represent context.

### 3.3 Summary conclusion

The Toulmin model for diagramming arguments provides an empirically tested method for simplifying arguments which prompts the analyst to identify commonly unexpressed premises. Unexpressed premises are likely to indicate the beliefs and values or framework propositions, which may be mapped to common research paradigms. Unexpressed premises can be uncovered deductively although a well-defined context supports the analyst reliably do this. This addition of 'context' to the diagram could also be used to indicate the 'network of commitments' to opponents within a deep disagreement.

## 4 Synthesis of tools and concepts

Figure 4 contains two modified Toulmin diagrams to illustrate where components of an argument and context may be used to infer the research paradigm (ontology, epistemology, methodology) of an individual putting forth the argument. The illustration uses two opposing views on socio-economic causes of disparity between racial groups. These standpoints are a broad characterisation of those found online, in this instance, adapted from Thomas Sowell Videos (2020).

This author makes no evaluation as to the strength of either standpoint, or the accuracy of their representation free from bias. The intent is to explore whether the epistemologies can be reasonably identified from opposing perspectives in a 'deep disagreement'.

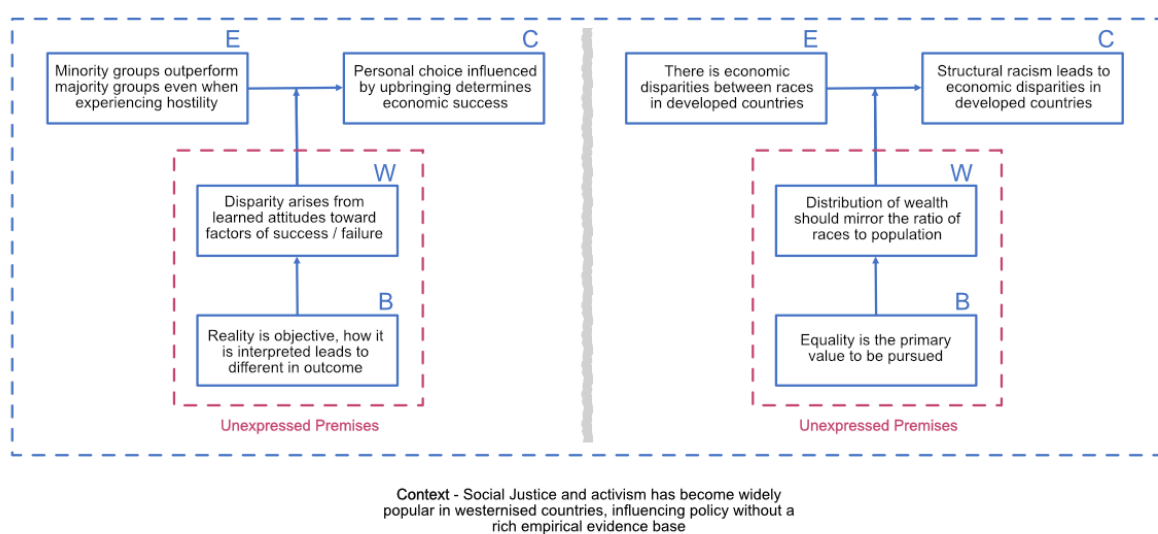


Figure 4 Modified Toulmin diagrams illustrating applicability of mapping unexpressed premises to paradigm

### Argument A

Here the standpoint is somewhere likely between constructivist and positivist. The Constructionist worldview acknowledges that the historical and cultural view held by an individual or group will lead



them to making different interpretations of the same external phenomena (Crotty, 1998). In this argument the differences between groups and cultures are acknowledged. However, the evidence appealed to implies quantitative measurement, such as the size of groups and a measure of 'performance'. In identifying the epistemology in this seeming contradiction, Crotty (1998, p.41) offers the following advice:

"When investigators talk...of exploring meanings by way of qualitative methods and then 'confirming' or 'validating' their findings by a quantitative study, they are privileging the latter in a...positivist manner"

Using the three questions outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1994) the speaker's view of reality is that there is a knowable physical reality that can be interpreted differently based upon historical and cultural experiences. However, it appears they conceive that different groups live in the same measurable, physical reality where statistical proof is of the highest standing. The epistemological standpoint does not appear to seek objectivity offers examples of other groups to emphasise differences in communities. The methodological question reveals qualitative and quantitative methods, the mention of hostility experienced by groups. Each answer closely corresponds to the examples given in Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.109)

### **Argument B**

The argument in B may be indicative of a critical theory paradigm. Crotty (1998, p.158) notes, among other assumptions, that this philosophical position holds that "certain groups in any society are privileged over others, constituting an oppression that is most forceful when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary or inevitable". As such, those from a critical inquiry perspective advocate social activism to challenge conventional social structures. In B, we see a standpoint critical of economic and social institutions that are believed to create disparity along racial lines. The proponent of such a standpoint is likely to hold 'framework propositions' that are committed to viewing disparity as primarily arising from power relationships between the oppressor and oppressed. To answer the epistemological question, intention and moral value is used as a measure for knowledge to be of value. The methodological question is answered by considering how 'oppression' is experienced, perhaps through recounted, lived, experience. Each answer corresponding to a form of Critical Theory (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Observing this debate unfold, it is likely that both parties would be unmoved by the case put forward by the other. Both use different values and criteria for establishing knowledge or 'truth'. The proponent of A may consider B's argument to be biased by the views held of viewing economic differences through the lens of power and oppression rather than using objective measurements to rule out possible false positives, whereas, B is likely to view A's argument to be a product of institutionalised bias as they fail to acknowledge differences through a critical inquiry perspective which serves to reinforce systems of oppression of groups based upon gender, race and class. This scenario would approximate a deep disagreement, noting that one of the two 'real world' examples used by Fogelin (1985) included disagreement on affirmative action.

## **5 Discussion**

Returning to the research question, 'to what extent can qualitative argumentation analysis be used to identify philosophical frameworks underpinning opposing arguments?', the above illustration suggests that they can, indeed, play a role in identifying the beliefs and values of an argument and using reference material describing the major paradigms support mapping these theoretical perspectives identified in social research. This section considers the strength and weakness of study, implications for the intended audience and future opportunities for subsequent research.

## 5.1 Strengths

- The research follows a logical progression drawing on published books and peer reviewed material to take forward understanding of how well argumentation tools can be adapted to analyse the paradigm of an argument.
- This research is intended to support a longer-term project to determine whether moving the foci of an argument to epistemological exploration would help resolve deep disagreements which is analogous to polarised political disagreements.
- The topic is relevant to current social contexts dealing with widening divides between advocates of left and right political ideologies.
- Synthesis of ideas, concepts and tools was achieved towards the goal of building on existing knowledge to formulate a new understanding.

## 5.2 Weaknesses

- A single example is offered to suggest a generalisable finding.
- Arguably, a similar classification of research paradigms could be achieved without using argumentation tools, such as annotating transcripts from a matrix of paradigm characteristics.
- There is likely to be limited interest in this research. Greater consideration could be given to the relevance it has to everyday scenarios.

## 5.3 Implications

Implications for the intended audience of other YXM830 students and other masters level students embarking on research:

Consider the ‘framework propositions’ of both parties in a seemingly polarised disagreement as well as the network of commitments which may conflict a consensus. Specifically, whether either party rely on a fallacious beliefs backing up their standpoint or stand to lose more than just the argument.

Argumentation alone is unlikely to resolve a deep disagreement. An approach that respects rather than condemns the opponents’ beliefs and values is likely to lead to greater accommodation between parties. Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) is such an approach (Checkland and Holwell, 1998).

Consider how your own research may exacerbate or ameliorate an associated deep disagreement. Interest in research may be increased by choosing something controversial, however, consider the legacy for your work and ethics. Does it stoke or quell the metaphorical fire; does it widen or narrow the existing divide?

## 5.4 Opportunities for further research

There are a number of further research ideas that have arisen through this initial project. The most interesting would explore a wider range of research paradigms through the lens of argument schemes and fallacies (Walton, 1995). An argument scheme is a warrant (and backing) that is commonly used, for example ‘argument from testimony’ (Zarefsky, 2019). This would consist of a claim that is supported by evidence of some authority asserting the claim. The benefit of identifying the argument scheme is in the existing standard tests or ‘critical questions’ that can be employed to determine if the argument scheme has been employed correctly. In the case of argument from testimony, ‘is the person giving testimony an authority on the topic?’ would be one such test.

Argument schemes and Fallacies can be considered to intersect. In the situation where an argument scheme is not used appropriately, this would constitute a fallacy and a challenge issued that may undermine the argument. The benefit of this research would be to establish a reference of critical questions for each research paradigm. This would build on the research described in this essay.

## **6 Conclusion**

This paper explored whether argumentation tools can be used to identify common research paradigms as part of lengthier research question into directing the focus of intractable, polarised disputes towards epistemic beliefs as an avenue for resolution.

Deep disagreements, a concept from argumentation, was appropriately used to frame these types of disputes, this gave some insight into the factors that bring them about. This also validated the intended strategy of this author, that of moving the discussion toward the framework propositions underpinning the two opposing standpoints.

These framework propositions were found to align with the worldview or beliefs and assumptions that, over time, crystallised to establish research paradigms. The Toulmin model of argumentation along with the process of surfacing unexpressed premises were deemed plausible tools for identifying and diagramming these often-tacit premises. This is done to fully understand the argument and open up choices about critically testing or questioning ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives giving rise to an argument.

The strengths and weaknesses of the approach were considered before discussing the implications for the intended audience, masters level students considering research. Finally, a future prospect for research was outlined, building on these findings, that would lead to a body of knowledge to support the testing of research paradigms underpinning claims, particularly those, around which, have formed a deep disagreement.

## 7 References

- Checkland, P. and Holwell, S. (1998) *Information, Systems and Information Systems*, Chichester, Wiley (this edition 2005)
- Crotty, M. (1998) *The Foundations of Social Research*, London, Sage Publications (this edition 2015)
- Eemeren, F.H.V., Grootendorst, R., Krugier, T. (1987) *Handbook of Argumentation Theory*, Holland, Foris Publications
- Eemeren, F.H.V., Grootendorst, R., Henkemans, F.S. (2002) *Argumentation: Analysis, Evaluation, Presentation*, New Jersey, Erlbaum
- Fogelin, F.J. (1985) 'The Logic of Deep Disagreements', *Informal Logic*, Vol 7, No. 1 [Online] Available at [https://informallogic.ca/index.php/informal\\_logic/issue/view/320](https://informallogic.ca/index.php/informal_logic/issue/view/320) (Accessed 15 January 2022)
- Gough, J. and Tindale, C. (1985) 'Hidden or Missing Premises', *Informal Logic*, 7(2), pp. 99-106 [Online] Available at: [https://informallogic.ca/index.php/informal\\_logic/article/view/2708](https://informallogic.ca/index.php/informal_logic/article/view/2708) (Accessed 17 May 2022)
- Groarke, L. (1999) 'Deductivism Within Pragma-Dialectics', *Argumentation*, 13(1), pp. 1-16 [Online] Available at: [https://idp-springer-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/authorize?response\\_type=cookie&client\\_id=springerlink&redirect\\_uri=https%3A%2F%2Flink.springer.com%2Fcontent%2Fpdf%2F10.1023%2FA%253A1007771101651.pdf](https://idp-springer-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/authorize?response_type=cookie&client_id=springerlink&redirect_uri=https%3A%2F%2Flink.springer.com%2Fcontent%2Fpdf%2F10.1023%2FA%253A1007771101651.pdf) (Accessed 15 January 2022)
- Guba, E. and Lincoln, Y. (1994) 'Competing paradigms in qualitative research', in N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of qualitative research 2 edn*, Sage, pp.105-117
- Kubin, E. & von Sikorski, C. (2021) 'The role of (social) media in political polarization: a systematic review', *Annals of the International Communication Association*, vol.45 no.3, pp.188-206 [Online] Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/23808985.2021.1976070?needAccess=true> (Accessed 14 April 2022)
- L'Huillier, B.M., 2008. The Hitchhikers Guide to Paradigms: Tripping on Methodology. In *12th th Annual Student Research Conference*. [Online] Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Barbara-Lhuillier-2/publication/261725460\\_The\\_Hitchhikers\\_Guide\\_to\\_Paradigms\\_tripping\\_on\\_Methodology/links/53f453e40cf256ab87b7ae5d/The-Hitchhikers-Guide-to-Paradigms-tripping-on-Methodology.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Barbara-Lhuillier-2/publication/261725460_The_Hitchhikers_Guide_to_Paradigms_tripping_on_Methodology/links/53f453e40cf256ab87b7ae5d/The-Hitchhikers-Guide-to-Paradigms-tripping-on-Methodology.pdf) (Accessed 15 May 2022)
- Miller, J., Birmingham, R. (2021) 'Political polarisation and participation;', *UK Parliament*, 29 April [Online]. Available at <https://post.parliament.uk/political-polarisation-and-participation/> (Accessed 15 January 2022)
- Phillips, K. (2021) 'Deep Disagreement and Patience as an Argumentative Virtue', *Informal Logic*, 41(1), pp. 107-130 [Online] Available at: [https://informallogic.ca/index.php/informal\\_logic/article/view/6689](https://informallogic.ca/index.php/informal_logic/article/view/6689) (Accessed 17 May 2022)
- Simosi, M. (2003) 'Using Toulmin's Framework for the Analysis of Everyday Argumentation: Some Methodological Considerations', *Argumentation*, Vol.17, No.2, pp.185-202 [Online] Available at <https://link-springer-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/article/10.1023/A%3A1024059024337> (Accessed 15 January 2022)

Thomas Sowell Videos (2020) *Thomas Sowell vs Trevor Noah on Slavery and Reparations*, 16 October 2020 [Online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBbmpcJpyos> (Accessed 15 May 2022)

Toulmin, S. (1958) *The Uses of Argument*, Cambridge University Press (this edition 2008)

Voss, J. (2005) 'Toulmin's Model and the Solving of Ill-Structured Problems', *Argumentation*, Vol.19, No.3, pp.321-329 [Online] Available at <https://link.springer-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/article/10.1007/s10503-005-4419-6> (Accessed 15 January 2022)

Walton, D. (1995) *A Pragmatic Theory of Fallacy*, The University of Alabama Press

Zarefsky, D. (2005) 'Argumentation: The Study of Effective Reasoning, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition', *The Great Courses* [Online] Available at <https://www.thegreatcourses.com/player/Video/4294?autoplay=false> (Accessed 15 January 2022)

Zarefsky, D. (2010) 'The Appeal For Transcendence: A Possible Response to Cases Of Deep Disagreement', *ISSA Proceedings 2020* [Online] Available at <https://rozenbergquarterly.com/issa-proceedings-2010-the-appeal-for-transcendence-a-possible-response-to-cases-of-deep-disagreement/?print=print> (Accessed 15 January 2022)

Zarefsky, D. (2019) *The Practice of Argumentation: Effective Reasoning in Communication*, Cambridge University Press