



From Dyadic Conflict to Trilateral Gravity: A Framework for Epistemic Repair in Deep Disagreement

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ABSTRACT

Deep disagreement and epistemic injustice can reinforce one another. Deep disagreement concerns conflict over fundamental beliefs, values, or standards of reasoning; epistemic injustice concerns wrongs inflicted on people in their capacity as knowers. When credibility is unequally distributed, disagreement becomes harder to deliberate, while incompatible epistemic frameworks can intensify the dismissal of testimony and the exclusion of interpretive resources. This paper develops the Great Attractor framework as a conceptual model of structural epistemic repair. The model proposes that, where disputants cannot establish a shared justificatory framework, cooperation may be organized around a third reference point: a shared material necessity, institutional commitment, or public value. The proposed mechanism is not adjudication. It is a change in the structure of interaction that can make reciprocal dependence, shared measurement, and new interpretive resources possible without requiring prior agreement on disputed foundations. A structured theoretical synthesis connects research on deep disagreement, epistemic injustice, deliberative design, and dynamical accounts of intractable conflict. Its central claim is modest: external coordination points may support epistemic repair, but they cannot substitute for justice, recognition, or institutional transformation.

Keywords: deep disagreement; epistemic injustice; epistemic repair; conflict transformation; attractor dynamics; water governance

INTRODUCTION

Recent scholarly work has increasingly highlighted that deep disagreements and epistemic injustices are not separate phenomena but rather interconnected dynamics that fuel the ongoing cycles of conflict. Fogelin (1985) initially characterized deep disagreement as a profound clash between worldviews in which participants lack common epistemic principles or reasoning standards. However, this structural view is incomplete without Miranda Fricker's (2007) pivotal insight that such disagreements are often sustained by epistemic injustices - harms inflicted on individuals in their capacity as knowers. The relationship between these phenomena suggests that the apparent irrationality of deep disagreements often obscures an underlying epistemic problem: the systematic exclusion of certain voices from contributing to the shared foundation necessary for rational discourse. When Party A dismisses Party B's testimony not based on evidence but due to prejudiced assumptions about their group identity, the opportunity for mutual understanding collapses before any substantial discussion can occur. The connection between these phenomena reveals that the apparent irrationality of deep disagreements often masks an underlying epistemic pathology: the systematic disqualification of certain voices from contributing to the shared background necessary for rational dialogue (Williams & Jobe, 2024).

Deep disagreement is not simply disagreement supported by incomplete information. It concerns conflicts over fundamental beliefs, principles, values, or worldviews, including the standards by which reasons count as reasons. Fogelin's original account treats some disagreements as resistant to rational resolution because the participants do not share the background commitments required for argument (Fogelin, 1985). Ranalli and Lagewaard's review distinguishes Wittgensteinian, Fundamental Epistemic Principle, and hybrid accounts of such disagreement, showing why additional evidence alone may not settle a dispute when the parties disagree about the standards governing evidence itself (Ranalli & Lagewaard, 2022).



Epistemic injustice adds a normative and social dimension to this problem. Fricker defines epistemic injustice as a wrong done to someone in their capacity as a knower, including testimonial injustice, in which prejudice produces an unwarranted credibility deficit, and hermeneutical injustice, in which gaps or distortions in shared interpretive resources impede intelligibility (Fricker, 2007). The connection with deep disagreement should not be treated as a universal causal law. It is better understood as a recurrent feedback process: incompatible frameworks can encourage credibility deficits, and credibility deficits can prevent the testimony and concepts needed to revise those frameworks. Research on citizen-expert disagreement, for example, describes how conflicts over epistemic understanding, credibility, and motives can generate deficit attributions that make more modest and inclusive conversation difficult (Fuentes et al., 2021).

This paper argues that epistemic repair in deep disagreement cannot rely exclusively on individual virtues or on negotiation procedures that presuppose a sufficiently shared rational framework. Epistemic humility and testimonial sensitivity remain important, but they operate within institutions that distribute speaking opportunities, credibility, interpretive authority, and material resources. Recent work on expressive epistemic injustice makes this structural point directly: even when testimonial and hermeneutical injustices are reduced, social forces can still prevent a group's values and beliefs from being reflected in what it expresses as its wants or in collective decisions (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2024). The central problem is therefore not only how disputants should reason, but also how the environment of reasoning should be redesigned.

The paper develops the Great Attractor as a conceptual answer to that problem. An attractor is not a moral authority that decides which party is correct. It is a reference point that reorganizes interaction around a task or value that neither party can address alone. The proposal draws on dynamical conflict theory, where destructive conflict is modeled as a strong attractor produced by mutually reinforcing psychological, social, and community-level elements (Coleman et al., 2007). It also draws on work suggesting that conflict transformation requires changing the set of sustainable states available to the system, rather than merely attempting to move parties temporarily toward a ceasefire.

The Israeli-Palestinian water context is used as an illustrative case because it combines contested histories, unequal political power, shared ecological systems, and documented attempts at technical cooperation. The case does not establish that the Great Attractor works, and the paper does not claim that water cooperation resolves the conflict. Studies of water governance instead identify serious constraints, including mistrust, political tension, unequal perceptions of the shared resource, limited enforcement, and domestic political pressures (Dai, 2021). The case therefore functions as a stress test for the framework: it clarifies both the possibilities of task-oriented cooperation and the danger that an apparently shared necessity can reproduce the very epistemic and political inequalities that the model is intended to address.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptual framework for understanding deep disagreement has undergone a significant transformation. Theories of deep disagreement differ over whether foundational commitments are best understood as hinges, fundamental epistemic principles, or components of a hybrid structure. Ranalli and Lagewaard (2022) point out two main theories addressing deep disagreement: the Wittgensteinian account and the Fundamental Epistemic Principle account, in addition to a hybrid account that aims to integrate insights from both. The Wittgensteinian approach, rooted in Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy (1969), argues that certain foundational beliefs, termed "hinges," are beyond rational scrutiny and do not disrupt the practices that facilitate rational inquiry. This viewpoint helps explain why some disagreements persist: individuals may be anchored in fundamentally divergent worldviews or epistemic foundations that cannot be reconciled through logical discourse. The Fundamental Epistemic Principle account, by contrast, suggests that deep disagreements arise when parties operate according to incompatible principles for evaluating evidence and reasoning. Both approaches highlight the structural nature of deep disagreement - it is not a matter of insufficient information or poor argumentation but rather a fundamental incompatibility in the frameworks through which parties interpret reality.

Miranda Fricker's (2007) influential study on epistemic injustice provides an essential framework for under-



anding the unfair allocation of knowledge and credibility in society. Fricker describes epistemic injustice as a specific harm inflicted on individuals in their capacity as knowers, when they are unjustly treated in their role as sources of knowledge. This framework identifies two principal forms of injustice: testimonial and hermeneutical. Testimonial injustice arises when a listener assigns diminished credibility to a speaker because of identity-based biases. When credibility is unjustly withheld from a speaker based on prejudice rather than evidence, the epistemic standing of that individual is compromised. McGlynn (2023) illustrates that debates on core issues like oppression become more entrenched when those most capable of providing pertinent testimony are themselves subjected to testimonial injustice. This leads to a self-perpetuating cycle: as disagreements intensify, individuals are more prone to disregard the testimony of those they oppose, particularly if they are part of groups already experiencing credibility deficits.

Deep disagreement and epistemic dependence

Theories of deep disagreement differ over whether foundational commitments are best understood as hinges, fundamental epistemic principles, or components of a hybrid structure. Ranalli and Lagewaard show that the debate concerns both the conditions that make disagreement deep and the question of whether deep disagreement can be rationally resolved (Ranalli & Lagewaard, 2022). The practical implication is that a strategy based only on exchanging reasons may fail when the parties do not recognize the same sources of authority, standards of evidence, or background assumptions.

This does not imply that deep disagreement is beyond every form of learning. It implies that learning may occur through practices other than direct convergence on foundational propositions. Citizen-expert dialogue is a useful example. Fuentes, Goñi, and Miranda argue that parties with different epistemic worldviews may attribute deficits in understanding, credibility, or motives to one another; they propose analytical categories for studying these interactions and for pursuing more modest and inclusive forms of conversation (Fuentes et al., 2021). Their analysis supports a distinction between propositional agreement and coordinated inquiry. Parties may cooperate in producing measurements, maintaining infrastructure, or testing interventions before they agree on the broader political or moral interpretation of the issue.

Dynamical systems theory provides a compatible systems-level account. Coleman and colleagues conceptualize intractable conflict as a strong attractor: multiple elements of a conflict system become self-organized into a durable pattern that resists contradictory information and external pressure (Coleman et al., 2007). Related work argues that intervention must attend to the conflict landscape - the set of sustainable positive, neutral, and negative states - because a temporary reduction in conflict will not produce durable coexistence if the system contains no sustainable positive state (Coleman et al., 2007). The Great Attractor adopts this systems insight while changing its normative emphasis: the relevant intervention is not merely a reduction in escalation, but the construction of a cooperative state in which the parties become mutually dependent on fair epistemic and institutional practices.

Epistemic injustice as a structural process

Epistemic injustice is not reducible to individual rudeness or error. Testimonial injustice concerns the distribution of credibility, while hermeneutical injustice concerns the availability and authority of interpretive resources. The two can interact. A speaker whose testimony is discounted may also be excluded from the collective production of concepts, and a community lacking authoritative concepts may find its testimony difficult to recognize within dominant categories (Fricker, 2007).

The literature also warns against treating hermeneutical injustice as only an absence of concepts. Dular argues that hermeneutical excess can occur when additional concepts are introduced into collective resources in ways that obscure marginalized experiences. On this account, domination can operate through the inappropriate inclusion of concepts as well as through exclusion from concept formation (Dular, 2023). Pohlhaus similarly describes willful hermeneutical ignorance as a refusal by dominantly situated knowers to acknowledge epistemic tools developed from marginalized experience (Pohlhaus, 2012). These arguments matter for the Great Attractor framework because a new shared vocabulary is not automatically emancipatory. A vocabulary



produced by the stronger party can create the appearance of common understanding while preserving asymmetrical authority.

The structural problem extends to public expression and collective choice. Dryzek and Niemeyer's account of expressive epistemic injustice holds that powerful social forces can prevent individuals or groups from expressing their values as wants, even when testimonial and hermeneutical injustice have ostensibly been addressed. Their analysis proposes citizen deliberation as a possible corrective because deliberation can improve the likelihood that collective decisions respond to the values and beliefs relevant to those decisions (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2024). This supports a stronger design requirement for an attractor-centered intervention: the external reference point must be governed through procedures that allow affected parties to shape the agenda, evidence base, and interpretation of outcomes.

Research on deliberative mini-publics makes the risk of internal exclusion more concrete. Schmidt distinguishes symbolic internal exclusion from epistemic internal exclusion, the latter occurring when some participants are heard and believed less despite being physically present. She identifies group composition and facilitation, agenda setting, expert selection, and the relationship between rhetoric and persuasion as sites where exclusion can occur (Schmidt, 2024). Proposed remedies include active facilitation, broader agenda formation, and the inclusion of concepts and expertise that marginalized participants have developed (Schmidt, 2024). These are not peripheral additions to the Great Attractor model. They are conditions for preventing a third reference point from becoming a new centralized authority.

From individual virtue to institutional repair

Individual epistemic virtues remain relevant because cooperation requires participants to listen, revise, and acknowledge uncertainty. They are not sufficient, however, when institutional arrangements systematically amplify some speakers and discount others. The literature on expressive injustice shows why a formally open forum can still generate distorted outcomes (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2024). The literature on willful hermeneutical ignorance shows why the presence of concepts in public discourse does not guarantee that dominant groups will use them to understand marginalized experience (Pohlhaus, 2012). Structural repair therefore requires more than inviting parties to speak. It requires changing who sets the agenda, whose evidence is treated as authoritative, how disagreement is recorded, and what consequences follow from ignoring relevant testimony.

In this paper, epistemic repair means a change in the conditions under which affected people can contribute knowledge, receive appropriate credibility, participate in the formation of shared interpretive resources, contest imposed categories, and secure institutional responses to epistemic wrongs. This definition has procedural and substantive dimensions. It concerns who can participate and be heard, but also whether their contributions can affect collective interpretation and decision-making and whether institutions can correct epistemic harms. Cooperation, conflict reduction, recognition, reconciliation, and institutional reform may support epistemic repair, but none is equivalent to it. Cooperation can be strategic while leaving credibility hierarchies unchanged. Conflict reduction can coexist with silencing. Recognition may acknowledge a group without changing its epistemic authority. Institutional reform may alter formal rules without changing effective participation. Reconciliation may require acknowledgment and renewed association, whereas epistemic repair can occur without agreement or forgiveness.

The Great Attractor is intended as one component of that institutional repair. It focuses on a practical problem: how can parties coordinate when they cannot first agree on the history, identity, or ultimate values that organize their conflict? The proposed answer is to create a shared task with three properties. First, it must be materially consequential for all parties. Second, it must require reciprocal contribution rather than unilateral compliance. Third, it must be governed by institutions capable of detecting and correcting unequal participation. A shared task without the third condition may intensify dependency without producing justice.



MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper employs a theoretical framework synthesis approach, drawing from social epistemology, conflict resolution theory, and dynamical systems analysis. Rather than conducting an empirical study with human subjects, we develop a conceptual model - the “Great Attractor” framework - through careful analysis of existing scholarship and application to a historically significant case. The literature was organized around four bodies of work: theories of deep disagreement; philosophical accounts of epistemic injustice; deliberative and institutional mechanisms of epistemic repair; and dynamical approaches to intractable conflict. The conceptual model was then applied to published analyses of Israeli-Palestinian water and wastewater cooperation.

The synthesis proceeded in three stages. First, the paper identified the mechanisms most relevant to the research problem: foundational incompatibility, credibility deficits, hermeneutical exclusion or distortion, feedback loops that stabilize conflict, and institutional designs that can alter participation. Second, these mechanisms were assembled into the Great Attractor model. The model distinguishes the dyadic conflict system, consisting of the parties and their mutually reinforcing narratives and practices, from a trilateral coordination structure, consisting of the parties plus an external task, value, or institution. Third, the model was examined against the Israeli-Palestinian water context. The case was selected for theoretical relevance, not representativeness or causal identification.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, serves as our primary case study due to its exemplification of persistent deep disagreement rooted in epistemic injustice. Over the past 70 years, political negotiations focused on territorial disputes, security assurances, and historical justice have not been successful. The conflict involves incommensurable historical narratives, competing justice claims, and systematic credibility deficits between parties. In this regard, our analysis examines how traditional diplomatic approaches - which assume shared rationality and common ground - have repeatedly failed. We then apply the Great Attractor framework to illustrate how external forces (water scarcity, shared religious commitments, and survival imperatives) might redirect both parties toward collaborative action despite their deep disagreements. The case is not treated as a simple disagreement between two epistemic parties. The water context involves state agencies, local authorities, communities, farmers, civil-society organizations, technical experts, and external institutions. Infrastructure, permits, data, security arrangements, and international funding shape the distribution of voice and dependence. The case analysis therefore asks whether the proposed mechanism can remain normatively defensible in a setting where power is unequal and the coordinating task may itself be governed asymmetrically.

In fact, the case analysis treated water and wastewater initiatives as possible coordination sites rather than as evidence of successful conflict resolution. A 2019 collaborative desalination project involving students and researchers from Israel, Palestine, and the United Kingdom developed prototypes for Palestinian farmers using batch reverse osmosis; the project reported 70–76% recovery and specific energy consumption below 1.3 kWh/m³ (Ali et al., 2019). This example is relevant because it links a material problem to cross-border technical learning. It does not demonstrate that cooperation generalizes to political reconciliation.

The case analysis also retained evidence of failure and asymmetry. A study of Israel-Palestine water cooperation identifies political tension, mistrust, divergent perceptions of water value, technological constraints, weak external enforcement, and domestic political pressures as constraints on consensual cooperation (Dai, 2021). Research on wastewater governance documents trade-offs involving cost, equity, and environmental exposure when security concerns shape infrastructure decisions (Dai, 2021). These findings were used to test the model’s boundary conditions rather than to confirm its effectiveness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Great Attractor model

A Great Attractor is a bounded external reference point that changes the recurring incentives, practices, and interpretive conditions of a conflict system. It may be a material necessity, such as water security; a public



value, such as protection from environmental harm; or an institution with authority to coordinate measurement, resource allocation, and accountability. “External” means external to the parties’ inherited narratives and immediate justificatory frameworks, not necessarily external to society or politics. The term does not imply that the reference point is naturally neutral, universally accepted, or coercively binding.

Within this framework, a candidate Great Attractor must satisfy six necessary conditions. First, it must be consequential for all materially affected parties. Second, no party should be able to secure the relevant benefit alone without materially altering the task. Third, it must organize repeated interaction rather than express a one-time preference or symbolic commitment. Fourth, the task must require contributions from differently situated forms of knowledge. Fifth, measurement, accountability, and contestation must be institutionalized rather than left to goodwill. Sixth, the arrangement must preserve routes for historical claims, dissent, recognition, and remedy. These conditions are jointly necessary within the model; none by itself is sufficient. A shared interest becomes a Great Attractor only when it changes the recurrent structure of interaction and is governed so that reciprocal dependence does not become unilateral control.

The Great Attractor is therefore distinct from adjacent concepts. A superordinate goal identifies an objective that can unite groups, but does not necessarily require joint production, shared measurement, or epistemic safeguards. Common-interest framing changes how parties describe an issue, whereas the Great Attractor refers to a materially consequential coordination structure. A boundary object supports coordination across communities while remaining interpretable in different ways; the Great Attractor may employ boundary objects but additionally requires reciprocal dependence and institutional accountability. Shared-resource governance concerns the management of a resource, while the Great Attractor is a broader model of how a shared task may alter interaction and epistemic conditions. Deliberative design specifies procedures for inclusive reasoning; it supplies safeguards within the model but is not identical to the coordinating reference point. Conflict transformation concerns changes in relationships, structures, and conflict systems; the Great Attractor is a proposed mechanism that may contribute to such transformation but cannot replace it. Contact-based approaches may create opportunities for interaction, but contact alone does not establish reciprocal authority, shared measurement, or remedy.

The originality claim is consequently limited. The paper does not claim to invent shared goals, boundary objects, deliberative spaces, or conflict transformation. It proposes a mechanism-level synthesis that connects an external coordination point to reciprocal epistemic dependence and makes epistemic safeguards constitutive rather than optional. Its distinctive question is how parties may begin coordinated inquiry when they do not share a justificatory framework while avoiding the assumption that coordination itself repairs injustice.

In this regard, in addressing deep disagreement and epistemic injustice, we propose the introduction of a “third party” conceptualized as a “Great Attractor.” This entity is not intended to serve as a neutral arbiter to resolve disagreements through judgment. Instead, it functions as a “gravitational” center that reorients both disputants toward an external point of reference. Through this approach, we present a novel structural intervention for deep disagreement and epistemic injustice. The Great Attractor model adeptly addresses three significant deficiencies in conventional epistemic-repair methodologies. First, it resolves the incommensurability dilemma: when parties lack a common metric for evaluating arguments, the introduction of an external gravitational point establishes a novel reference frame that is detached from the entrenched foundational beliefs of either side. Second, it mitigates testimonial injustice by appointing a third party as the central epistemic authority to which both disputants must defer, thereby fostering what we describe as a “compelled epistemic partnership” - a situation where mutual reliance is essential as both parties are aligned toward a unified external aim. Third, it creates innovative hermeneutical resources: as both parties endeavor toward the shared objective defined by the Attractor, they are required to develop a common vocabulary that surpasses the exclusionary language that previously obstructed dialogue.

The influence of the Great Attractor is contingent on its ability to garner commitment that transcends political will or individual virtue. “Internal Attractors,” which are based on shared values or political agreements, are insufficient in contexts characterized by deep polarization, where historical trauma and conflicting justice claims hinder mutual recognition. These internal mechanisms fail because they require agreement on the very



things that are disputed. Conversely, we propose the implementation of “External Attractors,” which are rooted in survival imperatives or transcendent values, as they exert a gravitational influence that rational self-interest alone cannot resist. Environmental disasters, water scarcity, and shared religious convictions, among others, emerge as “Essential Forces” potent enough to render historical grievances secondary in the orchestration of collective action. These are not chosen solutions but imposed realities that demand cooperation or risk devastation.

In this sense then, the term “attractor” is used here as a conceptual systems term, not as a claim that the case has been mathematically modeled or that a formal dynamical parameter has been estimated. The system comprises affected parties, institutions, material conditions, credibility practices, interpretive resources, and feedback loops. The principal interaction variables are: (1) credibility allocation; (2) agenda control; (3) symmetry of dependence; (4) information exchange; (5) recognition of relevant testimony; (6) reliability and ownership of joint measurement; (7) access to institutional remedy; and (8) distribution of benefits and burdens.

The model contains four linked components: A “dyadic conflict attractor” - repeated interactions stabilize a pattern in which each party’s threat perception, credibility judgments, and political incentives reinforce the others. Dynamical conflict research describes such patterns as strong attractors that resist contradictory information and positive external pressure (Coleman et al., 2007). Secondly, the model contains a “third reference point,” in which the parties are organized around a shared task or value that neither can secure alone. The reference point changes the object of coordination without requiring agreement on every foundational belief. Thirdly, the model contains an “institutionalized reciprocal dependence.” The task is divided so that each party’s knowledge and contribution are necessary, while procedures prevent dependence from becoming domination. Joint measurement, transparent data, independent review, and appeal mechanisms are therefore part of the model rather than optional additions. Finally, the model incorporates an “epistemic and memorial safeguards.” Cooperation must preserve the ability to contest the framing of the task, record harms, recognize unequal burdens, and maintain historical memory. Otherwise the attractor may stabilize cooperation by suppressing the knowledge of the weaker party.

The transition from one state to another is mediated by repeated joint tasks, jointly governed measurement, redistribution of agenda and interpretive authority, and enforceable correction when participation or benefits become asymmetric. A dyadic conflict pattern functions as an attractor when negative expectations, credibility deficits, exclusionary interpretation, and political incentives reproduce one another across interactions, making the pattern stable against isolated contrary evidence. A candidate Great Attractor exists when the shared reference point produces repeated, mutually necessary interactions and when the institutional rules make inclusive participation and contestation part of the stable pattern.

Movement toward epistemic repair is therefore not inferred from a single cooperative event, a reduction in hostile rhetoric, or a technical output. Provisional indicators include durable changes in who is heard, whose concepts shape the agenda, how evidence is produced and interpreted, whether benefits and burdens are monitored, whether affected parties can challenge the framing of the task, and whether epistemic harms trigger correction. These indicators are hypotheses for future empirical research, not measurements established by the present conceptual paper.

Why an external reference point may help – and why it may not

The model addresses a limitation of direct argument. If the parties reject one another’s standards of evidence, attempts to settle the dispute through a single shared metric may reproduce the original asymmetry. A bounded external task can instead establish a provisional metric for a limited purpose: for example, the reliability of a jointly monitored water-quality measure or the performance of a treatment technology. This metric is not a universal epistemic authority. It is a negotiated instrument whose production and interpretation remain contestable.

Practical interdependence is expected to alter epistemic relations only under specific conditions. Repeated joint work can create situations in which each party’s situated knowledge is necessary for the task. If measurement



procedures are jointly governed, this can make credibility judgments answerable to performance, expose the limits of unilateral expertise, and create opportunities for concepts developed by affected groups to enter the shared interpretive repertoire. Joint measurement can also make disagreement more specific and contestable by separating disputes about data production, interpretation, distribution, and political meaning. But, of course, the effect is not automatic. Interdependence may produce strategic cooperation while leaving testimonial and hermeneutical injustice intact. It may even deepen dependence when one party controls the infrastructure, defines the indicators, owns the data, or imposes the distribution of benefits. The mechanism therefore requires co-governance, independent technical review, representation of affected communities, transparent evidence practices, and enforceable correction. The paper predicts epistemic change only when those safeguards make authority and interpretation genuinely contestable.

The model also addresses the limitation of purely interpersonal repair. Testimonial injustice cannot be eliminated by asking marginalized speakers to communicate more effectively when institutions continue to distribute credibility unequally. Deliberative research identifies facilitation, agenda setting, expert selection, and group composition as mechanisms that can produce internal exclusion (Schmidt, 2024). An attractor-centered institution must therefore specify who can participate, who can veto decisions, how technical evidence is produced, how claims of harm are investigated, and what consequences follow from ignoring relevant testimony.

In short, the model's third contribution is to reframe "third-party" involvement. A third party is often imagined as a neutral mediator who assesses the claims of two disputants. The Great Attractor instead refers to a third reference point. It might be administered by a mediator, but it need not decide which narrative is true. Its function is to make a pattern of reciprocal action possible. This distinction avoids assigning epistemic authority to a single external actor, although it does not eliminate the risk that the institution will acquire such authority in practice.

Testimonial and hermeneutical dimensions of repair

The model separates testimonial and hermeneutical repair. Testimonial repair concerns credibility allocation: whether speakers are heard and assessed without identity-based credibility deficits, and whether their testimony can affect decisions. Hermeneutical repair concerns participation in the production, authority, and application of interpretive resources. A joint technical project may improve testimonial conditions by creating repeated opportunities to hear situated expertise, but it does not by itself repair hermeneutical injustice.

Hermeneutical repair requires affected groups to participate in framing the problem, naming relevant harms, defining indicators, interpreting results, and determining what counts as an adequate response. The risks of hermeneutical excess and willful refusal remain. Additional concepts can obscure experience, and dominant actors can refuse to use interpretive tools developed from marginalized experience (Dular, 2023; Pohlhaus, 2012). Expanded interpretive resources are therefore an intermediate possibility, not proof of repair. The relevant question is not simply whether a new vocabulary exists, but who produced it, whose experiences it makes intelligible, whether competing interpretations remain possible, and whether institutions act on what becomes intelligible.

Power asymmetry and institutional safeguards

A shared reference point does not guarantee equal participation. The revised framework identifies control over resources, infrastructure, permits, data, technical expertise, agenda setting, and enforcement as possible sources of domination. Safeguards are required at each point in the pathway: representation that accounts for unequal effects rather than relying on formal parity alone; independent technical review; publicly auditable data; multilingual and accessible evidence; recognition of community-generated knowledge; agenda-setting rights for affected groups; conflict-of-interest rules; appeal and complaint procedures; benefit-sharing and burden-monitoring; and periodic review of whether the coordination structure is reproducing unequal dependence.



A Great Attractor can fail when the shared task is controlled by one party, participation is symbolic, the reference point suppresses historical claims, benefits and burdens are distributed unequally, or no institution can correct epistemic and material harms. The framework therefore does not treat shared necessity as self-legitimizing. Memory and contestation are not obstacles that must be removed to achieve cooperation. They are safeguards against a form of cooperation that stabilizes unequal authority.

The Israeli-Palestinian water context as an illustrative case

To illustrate the application of this model, we examine the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a case study demonstrating the efficacy of this framework. Over the past 70 years, political negotiations focused on territorial disputes, security assurances, and historical justice have not been successful. However, an approach rooted in mutual reliance on limited resources or overarching commitments may be a feasible alternative. For instance, a collaborative “desalination project” aimed at addressing the region’s water scarcity would necessitate that Israeli and Palestinian engineers acknowledge each other’s technical expertise, thereby establishing micro-bridges to extend credibility in other domains. This practical cooperation, rooted in an External Attractor (water security), creates conditions for epistemic partnership without requiring resolution of underlying historical disputes.

Of course, the Israeli–Palestinian case is not represented as a bilateral disagreement that can be reduced to a technical problem. It is a politically asymmetric, multi-actor governance setting involving state agencies, local authorities, communities, farmers, civil-society organizations, technical experts, and external institutions. Water infrastructure, permits, data, security arrangements, and international funding shape the distribution of voice and dependence. The case is used as an illustrative stress test for the framework’s conditions and failure modes, not as a representative test or causal demonstration.

The water context, for example, might show why a shared necessity can support cooperation without dissolving conflict. The Jordan Valley contains transboundary groundwater resources shared by Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian residents. The collaborative desalination project described by Abu Ali and colleagues linked technical development, cross-border training, and a practical aim for Palestinian agriculture (Ali et al., 2019). In Great Attractor terms, the project created a limited arena in which participants could exchange expertise and produce a shared technical object. Moreover, the same context shows why the attractor must not be romanticized. Dai’s analysis of the shared Mountain Aquifer identifies mistrust, political tensions, divergent perceptions of the resource, domestic political pressures, technological limits, and the lack of external enforcement as constraints on cooperation (Dai, 2021). A material necessity does not automatically produce equal bargaining power. Indeed, it can intensify dependence if one party controls infrastructure, permits, data, or the distribution of benefits.

Of course, desalination illustrates this ambivalence. A comparative study of desalination and transboundary water conflict reports increased cooperation and reduced conflict in some cases, including Israel-Jordan, while describing Israel-Palestine as a case in which desalination enabled greater unilateral action and did not remove disputes over rights and allocation (Walschot & Katz, 2022). The implication for the model is precise: technological substitution can reduce a shared scarcity without resolving the political relationship through which water rights are contested. Desalination may widen the menu of options, but it cannot by itself establish epistemic justice. In this sense, we admit here that the Great Attractor framework attains a practical resolution through a notable mechanism: it renders the past irrelevant rather than resolving it. This approach raises a significant ethical concern that neither the proponents nor the detractors of the framework can overlook. If Palestinians and Israelis cease to prioritize the 1948 narrative and the ensuing decades of displacement, occupation, and loss - not because they have reached a mutual understanding, but because both communities are oriented toward shared survival - have they achieved justice, or merely engaged in a form of deliberate forgetting?

The framework acknowledges this tension. We assert that the Attractor does not rectify injustice entirely but rather renders it irrelevant for the sake of survival. This is neither reconciliation nor reckoning; instead, it constitutes what we might term “epistemic postponement.” Scholarship on epistemic injustice has highlighted



concerns that theories based on justice-oriented epistemology may struggle to accommodate structures necessitating the suspension of justice claims. However, the response to this issue identifies a preceding problem: when parties are entrenched in intractable disagreements stemming from unequal epistemic standing, the quest for perfect epistemic justice may perpetuate an indefinite postponement of practical peace. The framework posits that in situations where truth and justice become mutually destructive - where fully acknowledging one party's historical narrative inherently negates the other's - an external force that renders both narratives secondary may be epistemically preferable to an endless impasse. Nevertheless, this remains a tragic rather than an ideal solution, and its legitimacy hinges on the simultaneous development of mechanisms that preserve memory and prevent the erasure of truth, even as daily practices are reoriented towards future cooperation.

Within this framework, we propose the notion of “agential shift” to partially address the existing tension. This concept allows disputants to sustain their internal narratives - their conviction in the authenticity of their historical accounts - while simultaneously engaging on an alternative level, orchestrated by the external Attractor. For example, a Palestinian activist can uphold the truth of displacement while participating in cooperative water management efforts, and an Israeli can prioritize security concerns while engaging in joint environmental restoration initiatives. This form of “narrative coexistence” is distinct from reaching a consensus on historical accuracy. Nonetheless, it hinges on a fragile balance: the internal narrative must retain its emotional and spiritual significance while assuming a politically subordinate position. This dynamic requires what can be described as a “double consciousness” - the capacity to embrace dual truths, perceiving oneself through one's own lens and through the lens of others who challenge one's narrative.

CONCLUSION

This paper has developed the Great Attractor as a conceptual framework for epistemic repair under conditions of deep disagreement. Its point of departure is that foundational disagreement, credibility deficits, hermeneutical exclusion, and conflict dynamics can reinforce one another. Deep disagreement is not simply a shortage of information, and epistemic injustice is not simply a failure of individual politeness. Both are shaped by the institutions through which people speak, listen, measure, decide, and distribute resources (Fricker, 2007; Ranalli & Lagewaard, 2022).

The framework defines a Great Attractor as a bounded external reference point that organizes repeated, materially consequential interaction; requires reciprocal contributions; uses shared measurement and accountability; and preserves representation, contestation, historical memory, and remedy. This distinguishes it from a generic shared interest, superordinate goal, boundary object, deliberative space, or conflict-reduction measure. The framework's originality claim is therefore a conditional mechanism-level synthesis rather than a claim that its component practices are unprecedented.

The Israeli-Palestinian water context demonstrates both sides of the argument. Cross-border desalination, wastewater, and environmental initiatives can create practical contact and task-specific forms of epistemic dependence (Ali et al., 2019). Yet documented constraints - including mistrust, political tension, unequal capacity, weak enforcement, and asymmetrical governance - show that shared resources do not automatically produce shared authority or justice (Dai, 2021). The case therefore supports a conditional, not triumphalist, conclusion.

The Great Attractor should not be understood as a device for making injustice disappear, postponing accountability without limit, or replacing political judgment with technical necessity. Its defensible role is narrower: to help construct institutions in which parties can cooperate on urgent tasks while preserving historical memory, contestability, representation, and routes to remedy. Under those conditions, trilateral gravity may move a conflict system toward cooperation. Without them, it may simply stabilize a new form of unequal dependence. The framework should therefore be tested through comparative empirical research that measures changes in credibility practices, agenda control, interpretive authority, distributional outcomes, and remedy over time.



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