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Epistemology of Disagreement

Disagreement is an indispensable part of human communication. It arises among politicians, scientists and philosophers and wives husbands, parents and children but also – perhaps, between different rules or principles. We might have clashing opinions on some topic but we might also desire different things. Disagreement is philosophically important for many reasons. It has, for instance, been considered to be a hard nut to crack for contextualism. When I say: “These grapes are delicious” and when you say: “These grapes are awful”, the contextualist might be committed to say that what we have said is not in disagreement at all – we simply talk past each other – I say: “I believe grapes are good” and you say: “I believe grapes are bad”.

My aim here is to try to determine what is ‘happening in the heads’ of the disagreeing people. I believe there is more than one way in which people might be disagreeing. After John MacFarlane, I claim that disagreement can take place when one understands a proposition as the one that cannot be included in the set of propositions being contents of beliefs without compromising the coherence of this set. In other cases, it might be that such a “new” belief precludes accuracy of a different belief. Many further distinctions can be made and I believe that certain disputes in the philosophy of language might depend on what we take disagreement to be. Perhaps there is a kind which has the potential of bringing the lost disagreement to contextualism. In my presentation I propose different varieties of disagreement and I supplement them with examples. Furthermore, I try to show which of its kinds can function in the frameworks of certain semantic theories and point to the consequences of this potential.