Disagreement
Conceptual and Semantic Foundations
Bonn 28-29 October 2016

TITLES & ABSTRACTS

Alexander Dinges (University of Hamburg)

*Relativism, Disagreement and Testimony*—This talk brings together two sets of data that are rarely discussed in concert; namely, disagreement and testimony data. I will argue that relativism yields a much more elegant account of these data than its major rival, contextualism. The basic idea will be that contextualists can account for disagreement data only by adopting principles that preclude a simple account of testimony data. I will conclude that, other things being equal, we should prefer relativism to contextualism. In making this comparative point, I will also defend a self-standing relativist account of disagreement and testimony data. My focus will be on relativism in the domain of predicates of personal taste. Most of what I say, though, should carry over straightforwardly to relativism in aesthetics, more generally construed, and ethics.

Filippo Ferrari (University of Bonn) & Giulia Pravato (University of Bologna)

*Conceptual Foundations of Disagreement*—In this paper we provide a characterization of the phenomenon of disagreement that aims at addressing two distinct problems that plague the classical view (the so-called “Simple View”) which defines disagreement in terms of incompatibility of semantic contents. The first problem concerns how to account for the fact that two thinkers endorsing apparently conflicting temporally and/or locationally neutral propositions but answering to different times and places do not seem to disagree, contrary to what the simple view predicts. The second problem concerns how to account for the fact, if it is a fact, that both the atheist and the believer are in disagreement with the agnostic if, as it seems, such disagreement does not amount to a case in which two thinkers endorse contradictory contents. We solve the first problem by providing a refinement of the notion of incompatibility, and the second by explaining disagreement in terms of the normative structure that underlies the practice of enquiry—i.e. in terms of the set of cognitive commitments that one undertakes qua enquirer.

Brendan Balcerak Jackson (University of Miami)

*Essentially Practical Questions*—Researchers who study discourse phenomena have long recognized that questions play a crucial role in helping to structure discourse. In previous work I have argued that paying attention to questions also helps us to better understand disagreements, both of the genuine and the merely verbal sort. Much less widely recognized is the fact that some of the questions that structure discourse are what I call essentially practical questions, questions about what we will do, what we want to do, and even what we ought to do – have been settled. Essentially practical questions help
structure discourse no less than ordinary questions, and making room for this fact requires us to revise the classic Stalnaker conception of common ground as a body of shared beliefs. Moreover, some genuine (non-verbal) disagreements are best understood as involving disagreement over one or more essentially practical questions. Recognizing this gives us new resources for making sense of cases of so-called “faultless disagreement” involving taste and aesthetic predicates and the like without having to depart from standard (non-relativist) semantics.

Teresa Marques (Pompeu Fabra University)

**Hybrid Dispositionalism and Disagreement**—Most of the disagreements that are worth having: over matters of taste, over the value and normative import of aesthetic, moral, political, or legal claims, occupy a large and central share of human activity that don’t fit a simple model of disagreement. It’s questionable whether in those domains there’s one single correct answer to each possible question (what's the case and what isn't, or what can, can't, or should be done), and it’s doubtful that one either gets things right, or one doesn’t.

These doubts intersect various kinds of questions: the metaphysical question of what, if anything, distinguishes matters of fact from matters of value, and of matters of personal taste; the epistemic question of whether two people who disagree can’t be both right about the topic of the disagreement; the semantic question of what the content of mental states and speech acts must be for people to disagree.

I favour contextualism about evaluative and normative discourse. But it faces the objection that it can’t account for disagreement in normative and evaluative domains. Rather than looking for alternative semantic theories, I want to explore possible replies to the objection. I will point to some dead ends, before I propose an alternative. The view I'll propose combines:

- Semantic contextualism about the literal content -- where the content of a value predicate is dispositional property.
- Pressuppositions/conversational implicatures that serve “a connection building role”;
- An expressive presupposition/conversational implicature that conveys speaker's conative attitude.

Sebastiano Moruzzi (University of Bologna)

**Pluralism and Disagreement: How to be a Pluralist about Disagreement**—What is disagreement? The recent philosophical literature on faultless disagreement has shown that the question is less tractable than it could appear at first sight. I contend that the impasse is partly due to a monistic assumption underlying the debate: that there is only one way in which disagreement can arise. As in the debate on the nature of truth, a pluralistic framework can provide the resources for treating the diversity that we witness with respect to the many ways in which disagreement occurs. The aim of this talk is to explore an extension of the alethic pluralist model to disagreement - diaphonic pluralism. A pluralist approach to disagreement can be seen as a natural extension of alethic pluralism by means of bridge principles connecting truth and disagreement, and it can also be useful to tackle puzzles such as the so-called phenomenon of faultless disagreement. After laying down the tenets of diaphonic pluralism, I will argue for two theses: first, that the concept of disagreement depends on the concept of truth since the diaphonic core principles depend on the alethic core principles; second, that realisation of the disagreement relation is grounded on the realisation of the truth property. As a consequence, I
hold a thesis of double dependence between disagreement and truth: disagreement is both conceptually and metaphysically dependent on truth.

Mark Richard (Harvard University)

Frameworks, Domains, Disagreement—Carnap famously held that what logic one uses and what ontology one adopts is in some sense beyond substantive criticism. One might raise procedural or pragmatic objections to a particular framework, of course. But the question of whether the objects of a framework are ‘really out there’ is a pseudo question; choices of one logic over another do not reflect opinions on the nature of the world.

There is much not to like about Carnap’s way of developing these ideas; in particular, Carnap’s development requires on a notion of analyticity that many of us reject. But an idea one takes away from Carnap—that a well-functioning discourse is alright as it stands, and is in some sense immune to criticism—has a certain attractiveness.

Of late, various neo-Carnapians have tried to develop views like that in ‘Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology’ but which are committed neither to analyticity nor to the idea that, for example, the domain of science can never raise substantive criticisms of other domains. In this talk I discuss such views, focusing on what they imply about ontological disputes and the degree to which they can be substantive.

Carol Rovane (Columbia University)

A Normative Approach to Disagreement and What it Shows about Relativism—Disagreements arise when communicators make contradictory claims. These claims are open to more than one interpretation, and the question arises, when and why should we interpret them to be contradictory? The normative point of such an interpretation is to register that the claims cannot be equally true, or in other words, that at least one of them is mistaken. This is not so in situations where disagreements are supposed to be relativism-inducing, for they are supposed to be so-called “faultless” disagreements in which neither party is mistaken. Thus the normative point of positing a disagreement is entirely missing in the sort of situation that intuitively gives rise to relativism. Yet these are not situations of agreement either. What the relativist should seek is an account of how and why a situation can be one of neither disagreement nor agreement. Such an account should reveal a distinctive normative significance in the relativist’s stance, which is profoundly different from the normative significance of disagreement.

Erik Stei (University of Bonn)

Opposition and Disagreement among Logics—Logical pluralism is often characterized by the claim that there are at least two opposing but equally correct logics. In my talk I focus on the aspect of opposition. The guiding questions are: What does opposition, or rivalry, among different logics amount to? How can disagreement about "the correct logic" be captured from a methodological point of view? And can rivalry be exhaustively described in terms of disagreement? I first give a brief typology of positions regarding the correctness of logical systems. In a next step I review some standard proposals about how to characterize rivalry among logics as opposed to, say, supplementation or extension. I
argue that none of those proposals is entirely satisfactory, but that it might be helpful to resort to the debate on disagreement in the philosophy of language in order to improve on that situation. I conclude by outlining some consequences for the monism/pluralism debate in the philosophy of logic.

Julia Zakkou (University of Hamburg)

**Defiance and Compliance in Disagreements About Personal Taste**—Both in philosophy of language and linguistics, many people agree that sentences containing predicates of personal taste allow for faultless disagreements. Often, they assume that the main challenge for subject sensitive semantics stems from the fact that not only we as onlookers can characterize the speakers involved as having a disagreement, but that the speakers themselves can express their disagreement by giving defiant responses like 'I disagree.' The prevalent opinion in the debate has been that this challenge can only be met if we relativize proposition truth to something like standards of taste. If we do not relativize, the thought goes, we can account for the faultlessness feature only at the expense of not accounting for the felicity of the defiant responses. But there is another, so far underappreciated difficulty for subject sensitive semantics. It stems from the fact that not only we as onlookers can characterize the speakers as being faultless, but the speakers themselves can grant each other's faultlessness by giving compliant responses like 'You are not at fault.' The contention here has been that this difficulty can only be met if we pluralize the truth norm. If we relativize and do not pluralize, the thought goes, we cannot account for the felicity of the compliant responses. In this paper, I shall argue that indexical contextualism, an orthodox subject sensitive semantic theory, can account for both features. More precisely, I shall argue that pragmatically extended versions thereof that meet the first challenge are well equipped to also meet the second. I shall thus show that to account for the felicity of both defiant and compliant responses in faultless disagreements, we neither have to relativize proposition truth to something like standard of taste, nor do we have to pluralize the truth norm.

Dan Zeman (University of the Basque Country)

**Disagreement, Misunderstanding, and the Semantics of Taste**—In this talk I scrutinize the main contenders to providing the best semantics for predicates of taste (expressions like "tasty", "fun" etc.) - namely, contextualism, relativism and expressivism - vis-a-vis two desiderata: that of employing a notion of minimal disagreement and that of being able to distinguish between disagreement and (a certain type of) misunderstanding. The first desideratum stems from the need to assure that, in the face of various phenomena that could be called "disagreement", the competing views don't talk past each other. (In the paper I propose such a notion as a working hypothesis.) The second desideratum pertains to a combination between the notion of minimal disagreement adopted and the semantic commitments of the views themselves, and I take its desirability to be obvious. I show that none of the views investigated meets these two desiderata, or that if they do, they incur additional theoretical costs. I then ponder about the significance of this result for the appeal to disagreement in semantic deliberations about taste.