**Challenging the Verbal/Non-Verbal Distinction**

No understanding of disagreement is complete before an adequate uncovering and characterization of the verbal/non-verbal distinction. Verbal disputes are often invoked to explain defects and obstacles in communication and argumentation. Various accounts of the phenomenon, including methods of detection and diagnosis, general strategies for their dissolution, and potential deflationistic consequences have been proposed and debated in the literature, with particular intensity over the last 15 years (Abreu Zavaleta 2020; Balcerak Jackson 2013, 2014; Belleri 2017, 2018, 2020; Cappelen 2018; Chalmers 2011; Cohnitz 2020; Hirsch 2005, 2009; Jenkins 2014; Knoll forthcoming, Krabbe & Van Laar 2019; Ludlow 2014; Rott 2015; Sidelle 2007; Vermeulen 2018).

The basic, intuitive distinction is the one between substantive disputes, involving genuine disagreements, and irregular verbal disputes, based not on effectively conflicting views of the world but simply on some divergent uses of words. Whether denounced as ‘defective’ and ‘pointless’ (Chalmers 2011, Hirch 2005, 2009, Sidelle 2007), or rehabilitated as ‘consequential’ and ‘worth having’ (Ludlow 2014; Plunkett 2015; Plunkett & Sundell 2013), the received view is that, in any case, verbal disputes constitute a special class of their own, separate from that of substantive disputes, issuing from different underlying conditions, and admitting, or even demanding, different responses and resolutions.

In this talk, we question the tenability of a robust verbal/non-verbal distinction that (still) includes *philosophically interesting cases* — i.e. cases of some minimal persistence and theoretical density, beyond the obvious equivocation or malapropism — on the *verbal* side of the divide.

Close inspection of a paradigmatic example of a seemingly verbal dispute, the ‘lie’ case in Chalmers (2011), allows us to test and find faults with the three most important (types of) criteria of *verbalness* available in the literature: a dispute counts as verbal iff

1. it counterfactually correlates with a disagreement over some meaning (Chalmers 2011);
2. each party in the dispute ought to "agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language” (Hirsch 2009, 2005);
3. it involves some divergence over meanings but no relevant genuine object-level disagreement. (Belleri 2018, Chalmers 2011, Jenkins 2014, Vermeulen 2018);

Against the unanimous verdict of all three criteria — *verbal dispute* —, we offer a plausible development of our initial example that reveals it as effectively harbouring the presence of a substantive divergence and genuine disagreement. By abstracting and generalizing the decisive features of the example, we argue that the criteria are equally inadequately porous when dealing with numerous philosophically interesting cases, unduly counting such discussions as verbal disputes without a proper justification. Furthermore, we consider the prospects of refinement, revision or strengthening of the criteria and expose our reasons for believing that no suitably improved substitute is forthcoming.

We conclude by proposing that the conception of the verbal/non-verbal distinction as a robust, principled and objective separation of cases be abandoned. A pragmatic distinction — one that is context sensitive, interest driven, and partially arbitrary — is what we need and actually employ in our ordinary judgments of verbalness.

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