

# *Non-epistemic Disagreements and the Underspecificity of Thought*

Some recent work on philosophical methodology has been preoccupied with what I call here *non-epistemic disagreements*, or NEDs. Intuitively, a NED is a dispute that superficially appears to be “factual” but is really grounded in some kind of practical issue. Consider the question of whether Secretariat the champion horse is an athlete:<sup>1</sup> the question does not feature any apparent normative content, but there is a familiar kind of debate in which the interlocutors could apparently know everything relevant to answering the question and yet continue to disagree in a substantive sense. Some theorists have discussed the prospect that NEDs are ubiquitous in philosophy, and, in particular, that debates orbiting conceptual analysis, real definition, and related projects are in actuality NEDs.<sup>2</sup>

My project here is to model NEDs with a generalized version of the expressivist semantics developed in MacFarlane (2020) for vague adjectives. While MacFarlane applies the Gibbardian apparatus only to dimensions that can be used to generate a sorites series (height in the case of tallness) and focuses on linguistic phenomena like communication and the common ground, I focus primarily on beliefs and treat these attitudes as underspecific along a plentitudinous range of dimensions. On this semantics, beliefs are associated with sets of world-plan pairs, the first parameter of which is an element of the set of (centered) possible worlds  $W$ , the second of which is what Gibbard (2003) calls a hyperplan. A hyperplan  $h$  is a function from centered worlds to option sets, and fixes verdicts about what is permissible and impermissible for any centered world. The semantic content of a belief like SECRETARIAT IS AN ATHLETE is a kind of conditional commitment: it says to eliminate from the total doxastic state any world-plan pair  $\langle w, h \rangle$  such that the value  $h$  returns when fed  $w$  makes it permissible to treat Secretariat as a non-athlete.

The basic insight is that, on this semantics, a NED is a situation in which interlocutors share the same set of centered worlds in their overall doxastic state, but vary on which plans to adopt. I show how this approach allows us to assign thoughts the very same semantic values in the context of a NED as they receive in prosaic contexts, allowing for conceptual continuity interpersonally and intrapersonally. I also apply the semantics to *agreement*, showing why it makes sense to say that you and I agree that Michael Jordan is an athlete even though we have planned-based disagreement about Secretariat’s athletehood. In the denouement, I offer some general remarks about how to understand the relationship between planning, thought, and disagreement, and try to assuage the feeling that NEDs really do involve an epistemic component.

<sup>1</sup> As discussed in Ludlow (2014), Plunkett and Sundell (2013), and Cappelen (2018).

<sup>2</sup> Chalmers (2011), Plunkett and Sundell (2013), Thomasson (2020).