

Having a Disagreement: Expression, Persuasion and Demand

abstract

In the current literature, it is common to distinguish between disagreement in the state sense (*being in disagreement*) and disagreement in the activity sense (*having a disagreement*). On the one hand, ‘disagreement’ can refer to a relation between mental states that requires no interaction between the persons who hold them. On the other hand, it can refer to an active interaction between speakers.

Most philosophers have focused on the issue of what disagreement in the state sense is. But what are the “attitudes and actions” that constitute the activity of having a disagreement? How should the activity be defined? Despite the distinction between state and activity being commonly drawn, this question has been rarely addressed. In this paper, I argue that the two main ideas present in the current literature are mistaken and propose a different view.

First, I present and reject the thesis according to which having a disagreement is simply a matter of expressing conflicting attitudes. This view is simple and appealing. However, I argue, it fails to provide a sufficient condition. Two people can express conflicting attitudes without having a disagreement.

Second, I present and reject the thesis according to which having a disagreement is not only the expression of conflicting attitudes, but it also involves the persuasive attempt to get the other round one’s view. This second view improves on the first one. However, I argue, it fails to provide a necessary condition. Two people can have a disagreement without trying to change each other’s minds.

Finally, I put forward an alternative account that goes beyond the mere expression of conflicting attitudes, but that does not go as far as to posit the attempt to change someone’s mind. Having a disagreement, I submit, is a matter of expressing conflicting attitudes and demanding agreement, that is, advancing the normative claim that the other should share one’s attitude.