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The Quasi-Persuasive Nature of Disagreement

Giulio Pietroiusti

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The Quasi-Persuasive Nature of Disagreement

Giulio Pietroiusti

Thesis submitted for the degree of
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Supervisors:

Dan López de Sa

Teresa Marques

Tutor:

Dan López de Sa

Ph.D. Program in Cognitive Science and Language

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To my mother and my father

Abstract

This thesis is made up of two papers. Both of them are concerned with the “motive for altering or calling into question the attitude of the other” that Stevenson included in his characterization of disagreement. The first paper argues that Eriksson’s considerations are insufficient for drawing the conclusion that moral and taste judgments are different with respect to the presence of such a motive. The second paper offers an account of what it is to have disagreement in terms of “demanding” agreement, by developing the Stevensonian “calling into question” element.

Esta tesis está compuesta por dos artículos. Ambos se relacionan con el “motivo para alterar o poner en cuestión la actitud del otro” que Stevenson incluyó en su caracterización del desacuerdo. El primer artículo argumenta que las consideraciones de Eriksson son insuficientes para sacar la conclusión de que los juicios morales y los juicios de gusto son diferentes con respecto a la presencia de tal motivo. El segundo artículo ofrece una definición de la actividad del desacuerdo, desarrollando el elemento stevensoniano de “poner en cuestión.”

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Contents

Introduction	7
1 Disagreement and Conflict: How Moral and Taste Judgements Do <i>Not</i> Differ	15
1	15
2	17
3	18
4	24
2 Having a Disagreement: Expression, Persuasion and Demand	25
1 Introduction	25
2 Expression	27
3 Persuasion	29
4 Demand	30
5 Conclusion	35
Conclusions	37

Introduction. Persuasion and Challenge in the Noncognitive Theory of Value

Science and Ethics

My interest in the topics discussed in this collection of papers is to be inscribed in a broader philosophical reflection about the nature of value. Both papers here collected deal, in different ways, with a fascinating element in the history of metaethics: the persuasive and challenging aspect of Stevenson’s notion of disagreement. In this introduction, I endeavor to illuminate its significance within the so-called “noncognitive theory of value” (cf. Stevenson 1963, Ch. V).

One of the central questions addressed by Stevenson was whether “normative ethics” essentially differs from “science” (cf. Stevenson 1963, p. ix). Stevenson held that ethics and science are different. He made this point in at least two ways: in terms of *meaning* and in terms of *disagreement*. Both ways of drawing the distinction rely on the most fundamental assumption of Stevenson’s philosophy, the psychological distinction between *belief* and *attitude*, between *cognition* and *interest*. Stevenson follows, in that respect, a tradition that goes back at least to Brentano.¹ This is not the place to conceptualize in exact terms such a distinction. We can say, roughly, that pure cognition lacks the polarity “for” and “against”, or “favor” and “disfavor”, that sets interest apart.²

¹ According to Satris (1987, p. 12), it was Brentano that, through Perry, “gave to Stevenson the concept of interest (*Interesse*) or emotion (*Gemütsbewegung*), with the polarity of ‘for’ or ‘against’ (*Lieben/Hassen*)”. See Perry (1926, p. 115) for Perry’s definition of ‘interest’.

² In this introduction I use ‘attitude’ to mean noncognitive attitudes.

Meaning

One way in which Stevenson discerned science and ethics was in terms of their “meanings”. Stevenson uses the word ‘meaning’ to refer to the disposition of a linguistic sign, developed through the history of its usage, to “express” and “evoke” a certain mental state (see Stevenson 1944, Ch. III). On the one hand, descriptive sentences are said to have (only) “descriptive meaning”; that is, a disposition to “express” and “evoke” beliefs. On the other hand, evaluative sentences are said to have (also) “emotive meaning”; that is, a disposition, or tendency, to “express” and “evoke” attitudes.

Stevenson is making two different claims (see Satris 1987, pp. 81–83). The first claim is about the *acceptance conditions* of statements. He holds that the acceptance of a descriptive statement entails the presence of (only) cognition, “beliefs”, whereas the acceptance of an evaluative statement entails the presence of (also) interest, “attitudes”. I converge with Satris (1987) in taking Stevenson’s notion of “meaning” to be exactly this: the mental states which belong to the acceptance conditions of a statement. The mental states that a statement “tends to express” and “tends to evoke” are those mental states that belong to the statement’s acceptance conditions (cf. also Schroeder 2008, p. 704; Van Roojen 2015, p. 143).

‘Jones insulted Smith’, for example, tends to express the belief that Jones insulted Smith, but it is not *about* that belief.³ ‘I believe that John insulted Smith’, instead, does not tend to express the belief that Jones insulted Smith, but it is about that belief; it tends to express the belief that the speaker believes that Jones insulted Smith. ‘What Jones did was wrong’, to give an evaluative example, tends to express an attitude — a negative attitude towards Jones’ action —, but it is not about that attitude (cf. Stevenson 1963, pp. 204 ff.).

Stevenson, notice, is primarily dealing with the use of declarative sentences. This has an important consequence. The acceptance of a sentence in the declarative mood is ordinarily called ‘belief’ or ‘opinion’. When I say that what Jones did was wrong, I can be said to *believe* that what Jones did was wrong, or to be of that opinion. This is not at odds with Stevenson’s contention that ‘what Jones did was wrong’ tends to express an attitude, rather than a belief. His notion of belief is a technical one, not an ordinary one (see Stevenson 1944, p. 2; Satris 1987, p. 35). ‘Belief’, in Stevenson’s theory, refers to the cognitive side of the fundamental psychological dualism the noncognitive theory of value relies on. And some beliefs in the *ordinary*

³ Stevenson speaks of *sentences* tending to express and evoke, rather than statements or utterances.

sense do not qualify as beliefs in the *technical* sense.⁴

The first claim that Stevenson makes concerning “meaning”, I have said, is a claim about the acceptance conditions of statements. The second claim that Stevenson makes is that sentences, in general, are typically used when one has — “express” — the mental states that belongs to the acceptance conditions of their utterance, and when one wants others to acquire those mental states — “evoke”. It follows that, according to Stevenson, evaluative sentences are typically used when we have (also) attitudes and when we want others to share those attitudes; and that, by contrast, descriptive sentences are typically used when we have (only) beliefs and when we want others to share those beliefs.

Stevenson, though, recognizes that, when we accept a certain statement, when we believe — believe in the ordinary sense — something, we don’t always want others to “do so as well”. He is also aware that when we make a statement, be it evaluative or descriptive, we don’t always want others to accept it. But, even if we don’t want our audience to agree, we are usually exerting a certain kind of pressure. Our statements have a “quasi-imperative” force (cf. Stevenson 1963, Ch. II). They “invite-so-to-speak” (Stevenson 1963, p. 209) to their acceptance. Given so, usually, when we say that something is the case, we are, in a sense, challenging, or calling into question, those views according to which that something is not the case. Trying to alter and calling into question — persuasion and challenge — appear, crucially, in Stevenson’s characterization of disagreement. To that we now turn our attention.

Disagreement

The distinction between science and ethics was drawn by Stevenson not only in terms of “meaning”, but also in terms of “disagreement”.⁵ One the one hand, scientific disagreement is (only) *disagreement in belief*:

In such cases one man believes that p is the answer, and another that not-p, or some proposition incompatible with p, is the answer; and in the course of discussion each tries to give some manner of proof for his view, or revise, in the light of further information. Let us call this “disagreement in belief.” (Stevenson 1944, p. 2)

⁴ I believe, accordingly, that Huvenes (2017) commits a mistake in taking Stevenson’s notion of belief as including evaluative beliefs.

⁵ Stevenson’s notion of disagreement is an ordinary, intuitive, one. See Stevenson (1944, pp. 2–3; 1963, pp. 26, 129).

On the other hand, ethical disagreement is (also) *disagreement in attitude*:

Two men will be said to disagree in attitude when they have opposed attitudes to the same objects — one approving of it, for instances, and the other disapproving of it — and when at least one of them has a motive for altering or calling into question the attitude of the other. (Stevenson 1944, p. 3)

Stevenson characterizes disagreement, both in belief and in attitude, as involving dispositions or efforts to defend one’s own view and to try to alter or to call into question that of the other (see Stevenson 1944, pp. 22, 111–112, 138, 288; 1963, pp. 1, 26, 129–130). How to explain the presence of such an element?

The topic of disagreement makes its first appearance in “The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms” (Stevenson 1937), Stevenson’s first article.⁶ Stevenson introduces this topic in connection with G. E. Moore’s criticism of certain types of “naturalist” views. Such views — “traditional interest theories” (Stevenson 1937), or “relativist” theories (cf. Stevenson 1963, p. 71) —, very much like contemporary “contextualist” theories, had it that the utterance of an evaluative sentence like ‘x is good’ *describes* the attitude of someone. A popular version of those views, “subjectivism”, had it that such a sentence describes the attitude of the speaker towards x. That is, according to subjectivism, when Bill says that x is good, Bill is reporting his attitude towards x, he is saying that he, Bill himself, has a certain (positive) attitude towards x.

Subjectivism and similar views were accused by Moore (Moore 1912, Ch. 3; 1922, pp. 332–334) of being at odds with common sense.^{7, 8} Stevenson describes the problem as a failure to fulfill a requirement that the typical sense of ‘good’ should fulfill: “we must be able sensibly to *disagree* about whether something is “good”” (Stevenson 1963, p. 13).⁹ Stevenson agreed with subjectivism that ethics and evaluation are (at least partly) a matter of attitudes and gave a reply to Moore’s concern. His reply famously involves

⁶ Republished, with some small changes, in Stevenson (1963, Ch. II).

⁷ Interestingly, Moore’s original point was in terms of a “difference of opinion”.

⁸ Contemporary contextualist (“indexical relativist”) theories are today criticized in analogous ways; see, for example, Kölbel (2004), Lasersohn (2005), Stephenson (2007), Egan (2010), and MacFarlane (2014). Many contextualists have offered answers to those kinds of concerns. For example, Glanzberg (2007), López de Sa (2008), Huvenes (2012), Plunkett and Sundell (2013), Marques and García-Carpintero (2014), López de Sa (2015), and Marques (2015).

⁹ Stevenson thought that “relativist” theories were problematic in other respects as well. See Stevenson (1963, Ch. II, V, XI). From now on, I will focus on subjectivism, but the considerations that follow apply *mutatis mutandis* to the other theories of the same family.

the notion of *disagreement in attitude* and it was a rejection of nonnaturalism as much as it was of traditional interest theories.¹⁰

But what is exactly the problem for subjectivism and traditional interest theories as Stevenson understands it? Let me say, first, what it is *not*. I will briefly present one way of understanding the problem that Stevenson was dealing with and the way he solved it. I will, secondly, present an alternative understanding that, I believe, is to be preferred. Consider the following dialogue:

- (1)
 - A: x is good
 - B: x is not good

According to subjectivism, A is saying that A himself has a positive attitude — we could call it ‘approval’ — towards x, and B is saying that B herself has a negative attitude — we could call it ‘disapproval’ — towards x. One could then think that subjectivism is at odds with common sense, given that (1) is a dialogue that evinces mental states which would be commonly described as a “disagreement”; but, when the dialogue is understood as subjectivism understands it, it does not seem to evince mental states that would ordinarily be considered a “disagreement”. First, certainly, the belief — directly expressed by A, according to subjectivism — that A has a positive attitude towards x does not “disagree” with the belief — directly expressed by B, according to subjectivism — that B has a negative attitude towards x. Second, neither the positive attitude towards x — indirectly expressed by A, according to subjectivism — “disagrees” with the negative attitude towards x — indirectly expressed by B, according to subjectivism. The pair of approval and disapproval, one could argue, is just a difference. It’s not a disagreement.

One might think that Stevenson was dealing with this (alleged) issue and that he tried to solve it, by arguing that it is false that a positive attitude towards x and a negative attitude towards x are not a “disagreement”. Those attitudes, Stevenson would be arguing, *are* a disagreement. They constitute a “disagreement in attitude.” So, subjectivism and traditional interest theories, it would follow, have no disagreement problem: A and B disagree in virtue of holding, respectively, a positive and a negative attitude towards the same thing.

I think, however, that this story is not right. Stevenson was well aware that subjectivism and traditional interest theories entail, in (1), the presence

¹⁰ For an exceptionally clear discussion of Stevenson’s reply to Moore and a defense of classic subjectivism, see Schnall (2004).

of a positive and a negative attitude towards x — assuming the sincerity of the speakers (see, for example, Stevenson 1963, p. 80). Nonetheless, he still thought that subjectivist theories have a problem with the disagreement requirement (see Stevenson 1944, p. 22; 1963, Ch. II, VII). Even if the presence of a positive attitude towards x and a negative attitude towards x is preserved, when dialogue (1) is read through the lenses of subjectivism, A and B, Stevenson says, seem to only have a “pseudo-issue”. A and B can perfectly accept each others’ statements and agree that A has a positive attitude towards x and B has a negative one. If subjectivism were true, then A and B would not be trying to change each others’ minds, neither would they be calling each others’ attitudes into question. They would be merely “comparing introspective notes” (Stevenson 1944, p. 15; 1963, pp. 130–131).¹¹ There would be no “issue”.¹² But, in (1), A and B *are* trying to change each others’ minds or, at least, they are calling each others’ attitudes into question.¹³ So, *there is* an issue. The “altering or calling into question” element is lost, under a subjectivist interpretation. That is the problem that subjectivism faces and noncognitivism does not face.¹⁴

The noncognitive theory of value, unlike subjectivism, has it that A and B, in (1), are not *describing* their attitudes. According to it, A’s and B’s statements “*recommend* an interest in an object, rather than state that the interest already exists” (Stevenson 1963, p. 16, his emphasis). They (tend to) express attitudes. They do *not* (tend to) express, as subjectivism has it, *beliefs about attitudes*. Accordingly, A, who has a positive attitude towards x , cannot accept what B is saying without changing his mind, because accepting what B says would require holding a negative attitude towards x . And B, who has a negative attitude towards x , cannot accept what A is saying without changing her mind, because accepting what A is saying would require holding

¹¹ Stevenson refers to Ramsey (1931, p. 289), who used almost the same expression.

¹² This is not to say that there is *no* possible context in which reporting one’s attitude constitutes attempting to alter the attitude of the other or calling it into question.

¹³ Cf. Stevenson (1963, p. 26): “It is disagreement in interest which takes place in ethics. When C says “this is good,” and D says “no, it’s bad,” we have a case of suggestion and counter-suggestion. Each man is trying to redirect the other’s interest. There obviously need be no domineering, since each may be willing to give ear to the other’s influence; but each is trying to move the other none the less. It is in this sense that they disagree.”

¹⁴ I here neither deny nor affirm that Stevenson considered a simple pair of a positive and a negative attitude — approval and disapproval, liking and disliking, etc. — to constitute “disagreement” in an ordinary sense. Cf. Satris (1987), Schnall (2004), Ridge (2013), Boisvert (2016), Boisvert and Toppinen (2021), Sinclair (2021), and López de Sa (forthcoming). I am arguing that that was not his point — or at least his main point — and that his notion of disagreement, used in addressing Moore’s concern, involved something more than a simple pair of a positive and a negative attitude.

a positive attitude towards x . In uttering what they utter, A and B are trying to alter each other's attitudes or, at least, they are calling them into question.¹⁵ As Satris states,

The presence of conative-affective attitudes (or interests) *in question* preserves the reality of there being an *issue*. (Satris 1987, p. 125, his emphasis.)

That is why, according to Stevenson, the noncognitive theory of value, unlike subjectivism, fulfills the disagreement requirement.

In Pietroiusti (2021), Chapter 1 of this thesis, I deal with Eriksson's (2016) attempt to provide an explanation for the (alleged) fact that those moral judgments we disagree with are intuitively considered mistaken, while those judgments of taste we disagree with, typically, are not. According to Eriksson, this (alleged) intuitive difference is explained by (i) the fact that moral judgments and judgments of taste differ with respect to the presence of a Stevensonian "motive for altering or calling into question the attitude of the other" — necessary in the moral case, but only contingent in the taste case —, and (ii) that such a motive is precisely what the intuition of a mistake consists in.

My focus is solely on (i). And my aim is to show that Eriksson's support for (i) fails. In the first place, I discuss the considerations that Eriksson offers for thinking that a taste judgment is only contingently linked with a Stevensonian motive. In the second place, I deal with his arguments to the effect that a moral judgment is necessarily linked with a Stevensonian motive. I argue, in both cases, that Eriksson's considerations seem to apply to one domain just as well as they apply to the other. I conclude, then, that Eriksson does not succeed in bringing to light any essential difference between morality and taste with the respect to the presence of "a motive for altering or calling into question the attitude of the other".

Pietroiusti (2022), Chapter 2 of this thesis, aims to characterize what it is to have a disagreement (disagreement in the activity sense). In the first part of the paper, I argue that the two main ideas present in the current literature are mistaken. According to EXPRESSION, an idea expressed by Plunkett and

¹⁵ This is not to say that there is *no* possible context in which uttering sentences with incompatible acceptance conditions does not entail trying to change the mind of the other or calling their judgment into question.

Sundell (2021) and Zeman (2020), disagreement in the activity sense consists in expressing a pair of attitudes that stand in a certain relation of conflict. I argue that this is not sufficient for having a disagreement: two people can express “conflicting” attitudes without having a disagreement.

The second view that I take into consideration comes from Sinclair (2021), who, in formulating it, was inspired by Stevenson’s characterization of disagreement and, in particular, by the “motive for altering or calling into question”. According to Sinclair’s view, PERSUASION, having a disagreement consists not only in expressing a pair of judgments that stand in a certain relation, but also in persuasively attempting to bring the other around to one’s view. I argue that this is not necessary for having a disagreement: two people can have a disagreement without trying to change each other’s minds.

Finally, I devote the rest of the paper to present and defend an alternative view about what it is to have a disagreement. My view is inspired by Stevenson too. But, unlike Sinclair’s, the source of inspiration is the “calling into question” element, rather than the “altering” one. I have, in effect, provided an elaboration of the “calling into question” element in terms of demanding agreement, thereby placing a Kantian protagonist on a stage set by Stevenson. My account, DEMAND, goes beyond the mere expression of conflicting states, but it does not go as far as to posit the attempt to change someone’s mind. According to it, having a disagreement is expressing a pair of conflicting mental states and demanding agreement, that is, advancing the normative claim that the other should share one’s attitude.¹⁶

To conclude, both papers have at their center the “motive for altering or calling into question”, which, as I have argued in this introduction, has a special place in Stevenson’s philosophy and metaethics more generally. From this point of view, the papers can be thought of as my small contribution to a general (noncognitive) theory of value.

¹⁶ I think that Stevenson can be read in a way which is compatible with my proposal. With ‘a motive for altering’, he can be taken as providing a *usual* element of disagreement, and with ‘calling into question’ an *essential* one — to be understood in the way I suggest with DEMAND.

Chapter 1

Disagreement and Conflict: How Moral and Taste Judgements Do *Not* Differ

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1

According to Eriksson (2016), moral judgements that conflict with our own are intuitively mistaken, whereas taste judgements we disagree with are not.¹ Many have voiced this idea or very similar ones. Timmons (1998, p. 142), for example, claims that a moral judgement, unlike a taste judgement, is “categorical” and therefore “we categorically deny conflicting moral views rather than regard them as true or correct for those individuals who sincerely hold them”. According to Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009, p. 114), “the phenomenology of ‘no-fault disagreement’ is not even *prima facie* present in the moral cases”.²

For Eriksson, if you think that stealing is wrong, then you will intuitively take to be at fault anyone who thinks that stealing is not wrong. More generally, according to him, moral disagreements are intuitively not faultless. By contrast, if you think that bacon is tasty, you will not usually think that

¹ In this article, I use ‘judgements’ to refer to mental states.

² For considerations along these lines see also Carritt (1938, p. 147), Blackburn (1998, pp. 8–14), Loeb (2003, p. 31), Burgess (2007, pp. 429, 432), Rosenkranz (2008, pp. 233–234), Harold (2008, p. 296), Strandberg (2010), and Stojanovic (2019, p. 30).

someone who thinks that bacon is not tasty is at fault. More generally, taste disagreements are intuitively faultless.

Eriksson attempts to account for this intuitive difference between the two domains. His explanation is grounded in two claims. The first of these claims is that moral and taste judgements differ with regard to their “attitudinal complexity”:

A taste judgment consists in a simple attitude. To think that chocolate is delicious is, roughly, to be disposed to have certain pleasurable sensations upon tasting chocolate. A moral judgment, by contrast, consists of a more complex attitude. For example, to think that stealing is wrong is to be disposed to disapprove of stealing, but also to be disposed to call conflicting judgments into question. (Eriksson 2016, p. 785)

Within the non-cognitivist tradition, Stevenson and Gibbard have already claimed that moral utterances express something akin to a desire that the hearers agree with what the speaker says (Stevenson 1944; 1963; Gibbard 1990; see Ridge 2003 for a discussion). Eriksson, however, argues that a similar element is present not only at the level of moral *language*, but also at the level of moral *thought*, and that such an element is absent from the domain of taste. This claim echoes Blackburn’s (1998, pp. 8–14) idea according to which we usually tolerate differences in simple preferences, whereas moral dissent is considered “beyond the pale”. Timmons (1998, p. 142) similarly claims that a moral stance, unlike a taste, involves a “sort of commitment that typically manifests itself in being disposed, for example, to assert and uphold one’s stance over and against the conflicting stances of others”.

The thesis that a moral judgement is in part a disposition to challenge conflicting judgements, whereas a taste judgement is not, is combined by Eriksson with the following further claim:

To be disposed to call into question the attitude of the other is what the intuition that the other party is mistaken consists in ... Lacking such a disposition is what the intuition that neither party is mistaken consists in. (Eriksson 2016, p. 786)

It is perhaps worth remarking here that Eriksson does not argue for this latter claim. He does not say why an intuition that a conflicting judgement is mistaken consists in one’s disposition to call it into question. We only know that “consists in” should be understood in the sense that “the disposition to challenge conflicting judgments is projected as a mistake inherent in those very judgments” (Eriksson 2016, p. 791).

According to Eriksson, since moral judgements and taste judgements differ precisely in whether or not they are partly a disposition to call into question conflicting judgements, and this disposition is what the intuition of a mistake consists in, we intuitively take conflicting judgements to be mistaken in the moral domain, but not in the taste domain. More generally, he argues, moral disagreement is intuitively not faultless and taste disagreement is intuitively faultless, because the two different attitudes involved give rise to two different senses of disagreement:

Disagreement in attitude 1: Two parties disagree if they have opposed attitudes (although neither has a disposition for altering or calling into question the attitude of the other).

Disagreement in attitude 2: Two parties disagree if they have opposed attitudes and at least one of them has a disposition for altering or calling into question the attitude of the other. (Eriksson 2016, p. 786)

One can therefore account for both moral and taste disagreement in terms of Stevenson's "disagreement in attitude", even if one is intuitively faultless, whereas the other is not (cf. Stevenson 1944; 1963).

For the sake of the argument, I am currently assuming, with Eriksson, that our intuitions tell us that, on the one hand, conflicting moral judgements are mistaken and moral disagreements are not faultless and, on the other hand, conflicting taste judgements are not mistaken and taste disagreements are faultless. I shall be concerned with the truth of this assumption later on. For now, I focus instead on the extent to which Eriksson's arguments, which are intended to explain the alleged intuitive difference between the two domains, succeed in tracking a substantial difference between taste judgements and moral judgements with regard to the presence of a disposition to alter or call into question conflicting judgements. I shall argue that none of his arguments succeeds in revealing such a difference.

2

Some concerns about Eriksson's account immediately arise.

On the one hand, it may seem that not all moral disagreements involve either party calling the conflicting judgment into question. For example, although you disagree with someone who thinks that telling white lies is forbidden, you may not challenge his or

her judgment. On the other hand, it may seem that some taste disagreements involve either party calling the other party's judgment into question. For example, if you were to encounter someone who claims that putrid meat is tasty, you may be inclined to challenge the claim. (Eriksson 2016, p. 787)

Eriksson's examples here seem to suggest that taste judgements and moral judgements do not differ with respect to involving a disposition to challenge conflicting judgements. So a worry arises: how can one reconcile these examples with Eriksson's general claim that there is a difference between the moral and the taste domains?

Eriksson notes that the challenging of conflicting judgements is *less common* in the taste domain. However, this is not sufficient for answering the worry, since even if conflicting judgements are challenged more frequently in the case of morality, this may be due to reasons that have nothing to do with the attitudinal complexity of the judgements.

In fact, Eriksson does not give much weight to this consideration and immediately proceeds to provide a further argument which, as he himself subsequently acknowledges, is not sufficient either. He argues that, in the taste domain, we seem to challenge a judgement because we suspect that the person who expresses it does not really endorse it, whereas, in morality, we seem to challenge a judgement simply because it conflicts with our own. If you claim, say, that putrid meat is tasty, then I might challenge your judgement, because I suspect that you do not really have the relevant attitude (i.e., being disposed to get a pleasant feeling from eating putrid meat).

However, Eriksson ends up recognizing that there are cases where we challenge taste judgements for other reasons than the one just suggested. He argues that taste and moral judgements, even in these latter situations, still differ, and they do so with regard to the presence of a disposition to alter or call into question conflicting judgements.

3

3.1

One reason why we may challenge taste judgements is that they give rise, as do moral judgements, to practical problems. Eriksson invites us to consider a case where A and B are trying to decide what to have for dinner. A claims that putrid meat is delicious and B disagrees. In a case of this type it seems plausible that B would challenge A's judgement, even without suspecting that A does not really have the relevant attitude (cf. Eriksson 2016, p. 789).

However, Eriksson still maintains that this case is different from a moral one, in that the pressure to challenge is *external*, or contingent. That is, B is not inclined to challenge A’s judgement *just because* it conflicts with hers, but rather for another, external reason, that is, because she wants to have something other than putrid meat for dinner. That the disposition is external, he claims, is suggested by the fact that, if dinner plans are called off, then B would seem no longer to have any reason to challenge A’s judgement. This is supposed to contrast with moral cases, where “it is much more plausible to hold that, if your judgment conflicts with mine, then I am *necessarily* disposed to challenge it, and that this disposition is *part of the judgment itself*” (Eriksson 2016, p. 789; emphasis added).

However, it is not clear that, if dinner plans are called off, then B would no longer have any reason to challenge A’s judgement. There are, in fact, cases where we naturally challenge conflicting taste judgements without trying to solve any practical problem. Suppose A and B are at a restaurant. A orders a horse steak.

A: I love the horse steak. It’s delicious.

B: I tried it last time I came here. It’s disgusting!

B challenges A’s judgement in a perfectly natural way. And B is not trying to solve any practical problem.

Nonetheless, Eriksson might be taken to suggest that, even if B’s challenge is not aimed at solving a practical problem, it is still due to an external pressure, that is, a pressure that is not part of the judgement that horse meat is disgusting: “there may be tons of other reasons for me to want to challenge your judgment. It is not cool to like [horse] meat and I really want you to be cool. Hence, I want you to agree with me that [horse] meat is not tasty. However, this is not part of the taste judgment, but contingent” (Eriksson 2016, p. 789). Eriksson can then be taken to claim implicitly that, if any external pressure — be it a practical problem or not — is removed, then we would no longer be disposed to challenge a taste judgement.

What reasons do we have to think that this is true — and that things are different in the moral case? As I said, Eriksson does not address the issue in these terms explicitly. It is plausible that when we challenge taste judgements external pressures are present. But this cannot ground an asymmetry with the moral case, because it seems even more plausible to think that such pressures are present when a moral judgement is challenged. Suppose that C and D are at a restaurant. C orders a horse steak and claims that there is nothing wrong with eating horse meat. D disagrees and challenges C’s judgement. It seems very plausible to think that several external pressures

— pressures that are not part of the judgement that eating horse meat is wrong — are present: she does not want certain food industries to get support, she does not want horses to be killed, she thinks that eating meat is unhealthy and wants her friend to be healthy, etc. It seems that, usually, we have more reasons to challenge conflicting moral judgements than conflicting taste judgements. (In fact, this difference may explain, although perhaps only in part, why some people have the intuition that morality is necessarily linked with a disposition to challenge conflicting judgements, whereas taste is not.) However, this is not a substantial asymmetry. Such external reasons to challenge conflicting judgements are present in both domains, even if, plausibly, in different measures.

How can one then argue that, if any possible external pressure was removed, then we would no longer be disposed to challenge a conflicting taste judgement? I think it is far from clear — both in taste and in morality — how to assess which dispositions to challenge conflicting judgements one would have in such an artificial scenario — in which no external pressure whatsoever is present. In the reasons Eriksson mentions for challenging contrasting judgements in the case of taste, then, I do not find enough support for vindicating an asymmetry with the case of morality. And my criticism is independent from whether, at the end of the day, Eriksson’s claim that a disposition to challenge is external to a taste judgement turns out to be true or false. In the next section, I focus on how Eriksson offers positive support for his claim that a disposition to challenge is internal to a moral thought and, in section 3.3, on how he defends this claim from a family of reasonable objections.

3.2

Eriksson offers two positive reasons for thinking that a disposition to challenge conflicting thoughts is internal to a moral judgement. The first of these appeals to cooperation:

Moral thought and talk evolved in order to help us reap the benefits of cooperation. This requires that we coordinate our attitudes. However, coordination doesn’t happen by itself. We therefore need some mechanism by which it is achieved. Simply having conflicting attitudes is consistent with indifference to other parties’ attitudes (as often is the case in matters of taste). Having a disposition to challenge conflicting judgments seems to be a way around this problem. Of course, challenging a conflicting moral judgment doesn’t by itself bring about agreement, but

it is what triggers normative discussion. Nevertheless, by building this disposition into moral judgments evolution found a way for us to move towards consensus and thereby helped us disentangle practical problems, i.e., questions concerning how to live. Hence, to endorse a moral judgment is, in part, to be disposed to challenge conflicting judgments. This is why we cannot really turn the coordinating function off. (Eriksson 2016, p. 789)

However, both taste and moral judgements — indeed, any type of judgement — may give rise to coordination problems. In some cases, problems arise from conflicting moral judgements, as in a case where two people need to decide whether a certain action should be carried out or not, and one of those people morally disapproves of the action’s predicted consequences, while the other morally approves of them. In other cases, problems are posed by conflicting taste judgements, as in a case where two people need to decide what to eat, and one of those people thinks that meat is delicious, while the other thinks that meat is disgusting.³ In other cases, problems arise from conflicting descriptive beliefs, as in a case where two people have the same end, but disagree about the best means to achieve it. It is plausible to think that *if*, via evolution, we have developed a mechanism that prompts us to solve problems of coordination, as depicted by Eriksson, *then* this mechanism would aim to solve problems not only in those cases where coordination is hindered by conflicting moral judgements, but also in those cases where coordination is hindered by other types of judgements as well. Again, Eriksson’s argument does not seem to isolate any distinctive feature of moral judgements, with respect to the presence of a disposition to challenge, that taste judgements plausibly lack. And again, my criticism here is independent from whether, at the end of the day, Eriksson’s claim that a disposition to challenge is internal to a moral judgement turns out to be true or false.

I now turn my attention to the second positive reason that Eriksson (2016, p. 789) offers to support internality in the moral domain: “thinking that, e.g., stealing is wrong, seems sufficient for thinking that conflicting judgments are mistaken”. As far as I can see, this consideration can support the claim that a moral judgement is partly a disposition to challenge a conflicting judgement only insofar as we accept the thesis that any intuition that a judgement is mistaken “consists in” one’s disposition to challenge it. Yet the latter thesis, as I said earlier, has not been argued for in any way. Besides, the claim

³ Cf. Marques (2015, pp. 15–18), who claims that our preference for certain converging taste dispositions and our aversion for certain diverging taste dispositions is to be explained in terms of evolutionary processes that have equipped us for the solution of coordination problems.

that we intuitively take conflicting moral judgements to be mistaken is highly controversial in the light of evidence provided by some recent studies in social psychology and experimental philosophy. I will mention just a couple of them. Sarkissian et al. (2011) report six experiments that support the thesis that the more different the culture and way of life under consideration, the more relativist people's intuitions are. Fisher et al. (2017) provide evidence to the effect that when people assume a cooperative mindset, they are less inclined towards objectivism than when they are in a competitive mindset. In short, this family of studies have increasingly undermined the idea, often taken for granted by analytic philosophers in recent decades, that people ordinarily take moral issues to have objective answers.⁴

Eriksson is well aware of such findings — he refers explicitly to Sarkissian et al. (2011) — and he tries, at the end of his paper, to square them with his account:

Part of the function of moral thought and talk is to achieve co-ordination. Such a function, it seems, is essential for us to move towards consensus via discussion. However, the need for, and indeed conceivability of, coordination depends on the context. The closer someone is to me, the more urgent coordination is likely to be. The more urgent coordination is, the more likely it is that my disposition to challenge conflicting judgments will become occurrent. When this disposition becomes occurrent, I am more likely to think that the other party is mistaken. By contrast, unless coordination is in the offing, it seems less likely that the disposition to challenge the judgment will become occurrent. If it doesn't become occurrent, then I am more likely to think that the other party is not mistaken. Applied to taste, one explanation of why some people have more objectivist intuitions is because of features external to the taste judgment itself. A food critic, for example, may want everyone to share his or her attitude, which disposes him or her to challenge conflicting judgments. This, in turn, explains why he or she will think that conflicting judgments are mistaken. According to the suggestion outlined here, however, features external to the taste judgment explain this. The critic, doesn't think that the other party is mistaken because other judgments are in conflict with his or hers. The disagreement, in itself, is therefore still faultless. (Eriksson 2016, p. 792)

Remember that I was assessing Eriksson's second reason to think that a

⁴ Such studies are not free of concerns. See, for example, Pölzler (2018).

moral judgement is in part a disposition to challenge judgements that conflict with it. That reason was that making a moral judgement seems sufficient for thinking that judgements that conflict with it are mistaken. However, as the quotation above shows, Eriksson, in the attempt to reconcile certain experimental findings with his account, seems to defeat this line of argument, for he ends up recognizing that, in certain contexts, we do not think that conflicting moral judgements are mistaken. Furthermore, Eriksson admits that even conflicting judgements of taste may sometimes be taken as mistaken. According to this picture, both in the moral and in the taste domain, we would project a mistake when a disposition to challenge conflicting judgements is made occurrent by the contextual circumstances. Why then thinking that the disposition is internal in the moral case but external in the case of taste?

3.3

I now turn to consider Eriksson's answer to a family of objections that cast doubt on the claim that a moral thought is partly constituted by a disposition to challenge conflicting judgements.

There are situations, as we have already mentioned, where it may seem that someone is not disposed to challenge conflicting moral judgements. Take, for example, someone who takes herself to have insufficient authority to make a certain moral judgement, or as having insufficient justification for it. According to Ridge (2003, p. 570), this makes it "implausible to suppose that thinking something is morally good (or morally bad) must be partially constituted by a desire that others approve of it". Or, alternatively, take someone who is "content to survey life with passive detachment" or "too timid, too aloof, or too economical of their time to make an issue of the matter" (Stevenson 1944, p. 111). Again, one may claim that, in this case, the person in question is not disposed to make other people converge with her moral judgements.

Eriksson (2016, pp. 790–791) argues that these examples fail to falsify the claim that the disposition to challenge is part of a moral judgement. It is true that the depicted circumstances — say, lacking justification or being timid — may interfere with the disposition manifesting itself, namely, producing its response (challenging the conflicting judgement). But this does not entail that the disposition "is not there". In other words, these examples only show that, in the cases considered, there is no *sufficient* disposition for altering or calling into question conflicting judgements, rather than showing that there is *no* disposition.

Regardless of whether Eriksson's argument succeeds in disarming such objections, it should be recognized that arguments of the same type can be

given for analogous situations in the taste domain. If, with regard to cases where a conflicting moral judgement is not challenged, it can be said that the disposition “is there” but does not manifest itself, then the same can be said about cases where a conflicting taste judgement is not challenged. So, as before, this type of argument does not disclose any difference between the domains of morality and taste with respect to a disposition to alter or call into question conflicting judgements.

4

This article has focused on Eriksson’s attempt to argue that moral judgements and judgements of taste differ in their attitudinal complexity, the former necessarily involving a disposition to challenge conflicting judgements that the latter do not necessarily involve. The project of positively stating what, if anything, makes moral judgements and judgements of taste substantially different, as fascinating as it may be, goes beyond the scope of this article. For now, I content myself with a modest conclusion, but one that I think is worth making. If it is to be shown that moral judgements and taste judgements differ with regard to the presence of a disposition to challenge conflicting judgements, then arguments other than Eriksson’s are needed.

Chapter 2

Having a Disagreement: Expression, Persuasion and Demand

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1 Introduction

In the current literature it is common to distinguish two ordinary senses of ‘disagreement’. Disagreement can be a kind of *state* people are in or a type of linguistic *activity* people engage in.¹

MacFarlane (2014) is one of those who draw the distinction:

When we characterize two people as disagreeing, we sometimes mean that they are *having a disagreement* — engaging in a kind of activity — and sometimes just that they *are in disagreement*, which is a kind of state. (119)

On the one hand,

People can be *in disagreement* even if they do not know of each other. The ancient Greeks were in disagreement with the ancient

¹ Cf. Endicott (2000), Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009, pp. 60–61), Buekens (2011, p. 638), Belleri and Palmira (2013, p. 145), Egan (2013), Baker (2014, p. 171), MacFarlane (2014, pp. 119–120), Marques (2014), Marques and García-Carpintero (2014), Ridge (2014, p. 171), Khoo and Knobe (2016, p. 3), Beddor (2018), Stroud (2019), Worsnip (2019, p. 252), Zeman (2020), Sinclair (2021), and Beebe (forthcoming).

Indians about whether the bodies of the dead should be burned or buried even before Herodotus and other travelers made this disagreement known to them. Whether two people are in disagreement is a function of their first-order attitudes, not of their attitudes towards each other. (119)

On the other hand,

Whether they are *having a disagreement* [...] depends only on their attitudes and actions towards each other. Two people who agree about all the issues at stake can nonetheless be having a disagreement if, through some misunderstanding, they take their views to differ, or if one is playing devil's advocate. The question "Why are you disagreeing with me, if we agree about what is at issue?" is perfectly intelligible. (119)

Most philosophers, like MacFarlane, 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. In Sect. 2, I present and reject *EXPRESSION*, the thesis according to which having a disagreement is a matter of expressing conflicting attitudes. I argue that this is not sufficient for having a disagreement. In Sect. 3, I present and reject *PERSUASION*, the thesis according to which having a disagreement is not only the expression of conflicting attitudes, but it also involves the persuasive attempt to bring the other around to one's view. I argue that this is not necessary for having a disagreement. In Sect. 4, I put forward and defend *DEMAND*. According to *DEMAND*, having a disagreement is a matter of expressing conflicting attitudes and demanding the agreement of the other, that is, advancing the normative claim that the other should share one's attitude.²

Following standard philosophical practice, I will provide the reader with examples and appeal to their intuitions as to whether the situations described qualify as having a disagreement or not. I recognize, though, that intuitions might differ. The extent to which the intuitions I rely on are shared is an issue which is ultimately to be solved through empirical investigation. Studies of that kind, however, are still missing.

² More precisely, I aim to provide the truth conditions of 'A and B are having a disagreement'. In what follows I will allow myself to be presentationally more flexible, but that is the way I should be understood. Moreover, with 'disagreement', from now on, I mean the activity, unless otherwise specified.

2 Expression

In this section, first, I present **EXPRESSION**, a characterization of the activity in terms of the expression of conflicting attitudes. Second, I provide a counterexample to it. Not every expression of conflicting attitudes qualifies as having a disagreement.

How to define the activity of having a disagreement? Some authors seem to have assumed a simple and natural characterization. Plunkett and Sundell, for example, define ‘disputes’ in terms of the expression of a conflict in mental states:

Disagreement, as we use the term, indicates a kind of rational conflict in mental states. [...] Disputes, on the other hand, are linguistic exchanges. In particular, disputes are linguistic exchanges that appear to evince or express a disagreement. (Plunkett and Sundell 2021, p. 4)

Zeman (2020), similarly, proposes an activity sense of disagreement according to which two people disagree iff they have conflicting attitudes at some “level of discourse” (Zeman 2020, p. 1656).

I dub this understanding of the activity **EXPRESSION**:

- **EXPRESSION**: A and B are having a disagreement iff they are expressing conflicting attitudes.

Some clarifications before moving on. First, there is an ambiguity with the term ‘express’ that should be cleared away. Suppose I assert something I do not believe. In a perfectly natural sense, I’m expressing a belief that I do not actually hold. However, in an equally natural sense, which has been called “occasional” (Satris 1987, p. 81), we could also say that my utterance does not actually express the mental state it seems to express. In this latter sense, a speaker expresses a certain mental state only in those occasions in which she actually holds it. The notion of expression I use throughout the paper is non-occasional: one can express attitudes that one does not actually have.³

Second, it is not important, for the purposes of the present paper, to provide an account of what it is for two attitudes to “conflict”. I’m presently content to leave the issue open to debate. The claims I shall put forward are independent from whether a “conflict” between attitudes always entails the presence of incompatible contents or not, or from whether it sometimes

³ Plunkett and Sundell (2021) should be taken to employ an occasional notion so ‘appear to express’ in their usage is equivalent to ‘express’ in my usage.

includes affective-conative attitudes or not. It will be sufficient to have at our disposal relatively uncontroversial cases of “conflicting attitudes”. Any pair of attitudes that are capable of being the two positions at stake in a disagreement will count as conflicting.

Third, I will remain neutral with respect to the issue of the relation between the activity of having a disagreement and the state of being in disagreement. It is reasonable to think that “conflicting attitudes” will correspond to disagreement in the state sense. If this were true, then the three competing theses about the activity considered in this paper would all have it that if two speakers are having a disagreement, then they also are in the state of being in disagreement (assuming they are sincere). However, this matter might be more controversial than it *prima facie* seems. Some, for example MacFarlane (2014), think that the state notion is more fundamental. Others, like Khoo and Knobe (2016), suggest the opposite and seem to have advanced the hypothesis that even beliefs with incompatible contents might sometimes fail to qualify as a disagreement in the state sense. The following arguments will not require me to take a stance on this issue either.

EXPRESSION, as it stands, would plausibly need some finessing.⁴ I shall neglect such issues about details. My objection aims at the core of the idea. Expression is a natural thought. Take the following dialogue:

A: 6029 is a prime number.

B: No, 6029 is not a prime number.

A and B are having a disagreement, it seems, because they are expressing thoughts that stand in a certain relation.

However, here is a counterexample to EXPRESSION:

- EVERYONE-HAS-THEIR-OWN-TASTE:

A: This cake is not tasty.

B: Really? I think it’s delicious. But, it’s okay if you don’t like it, everyone has their own taste.

A: Right! *De gustibus*.

A and B have different opinions about the cake. However, neither is calling the opinion of the other into question. Each considers it as legitimate

⁴ For example, the following dialogue evinces conflicting attitudes, but the speakers are not having a disagreement: A: “Hey B, you know we disagree about x, right?” B: “Yes I know. We definitively disagree about x, because you think that p and I think that not-p.”

as their own. A and B are expressing conflicting attitudes, but they are not having a disagreement. Expression fails to provide sufficient conditions.⁵

What is missing from EXPRESSION? PERSUASION offers an answer.

3 Persuasion

In this section, first, I present PERSUASION, the thesis according to which two speakers expressing conflicting attitudes qualify as having a disagreement only if there is an attempt to persuade the interlocutor to change her mind. Second, I provide a counterexample to it. Two persons can have a disagreement without attempting to change each other’s mind.

Charles Stevenson famously included in his definition of disagreement “a motive for altering or calling into question the attitude of the other” (Stevenson 1944, p. 2). Sinclair (2021) proposes a characterization of the activity inspired by Stevenson’s insight.⁶ Abstracting from some complexities that need not interest us here, Sinclair suggests the following view:

- PERSUASION : A and B are having a disagreement iff they are expressing conflicting attitudes and at least one of them is attempting to change the attitude of the other.⁷

PERSUASION would need some finessing as well. In particular, not *any* attempt to change the attitude of the other will do. I might try to change your mind, say, by employing very subtle techniques, like exposing you to certain smells. Or I might put a psychoactive substance in your drink. These will not count as cases of having a disagreement. A way to exclude these sorts of cases is taking the relevant actions to be attempts to *persuade*, by linguistic means, the other to change her mind. In fact, I take this to be the spirit of Sinclair’s proposal (cf. Sinclair 2021, pp. 83–84). However, once again, the objection I am about to put forward goes through regardless of these matters of finessing.

I think there is a lot to say in favor of PERSUASION. In particular, it solves EXPRESSION’s problem. In EVERYONE-HAS-THEIR-OWN-TASTE

⁵ The claim that that A and B are not having a disagreement is compatible with the claim that B disagreed when she uttered ‘I think it’s delicious’. Moreover, the claim that they are not having a disagreement is compatible with the claim that the conflicting attitudes they are expressing constitute a disagreement in the state sense.

⁶ Sinclair, though, ends up neglecting the “calling into question” element and proposes a view only in terms of a “motive to change”. However, at least *prima facie*, trying to alter (or change) is not the same thing as calling into question.

⁷ For Sinclair’s original statement see Sinclair (2021, p. 91). The differences in that, more complex, formulation do not make it immune to the objection I will put forward.

there is no “persuasive attempt”, so PERSUASION correctly predicts that A and B are not having a disagreement.

Here is, though, a counterexample to PERSUASION:

- I-AM-NOT-TRYING-TO-CHANGE-YOUR-MIND:

A: P.

B: Look, I’m not trying to change your mind. But I think you should. Your position is untenable, for the following reasons: . . .

A: I don’t want to change your mind either. But you are misinterpreting the evidence. Everything you said shows that we should believe that P.

B: I beg to differ. . .

Neither A nor B is attempting to change the mind of the other.⁸ Nevertheless, both call into question the attitude of the other by explicitly stating that they consider it wrong to hold. Furthermore, each justifies her own position and defends it from the reasons advanced by the other. That is, each is *arguing* in favor of her own position.⁹ A and B are having a disagreement. PERSUASION fails to provide necessary conditions.

We have seen that having a disagreement is not just a matter of expressing conflicting attitudes. PERSUASION fixes the old problem, but creates a new one. What is it, then, that people do when they have a disagreement?

4 Demand

In rejecting PERSUASION, we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. In this section, I propose a view that agrees with PERSUASION in two important respects. First, something is missing from EXPRESSION. Second, the missing element “seeks” to establish agreement. However, unlike PERSUASION, the characterization I put forward does not posit an attempt to change the interlocutor’s mind as an essential aspect of having a disagreement.

⁸ Notice that the fact that A and B are not *attempting* to persuade the other (given the lack of intention to do so), is compatible with one of them ending up *persuading* the other (i.e. changing her mind without trying to do so).

⁹ See Blair (2004) and Micheli (2012) for the idea that *arguing* does not necessarily entail the attempt to persuade one’s interlocutor. Arguing can sometimes consist in justifying one’s position and situating one’s discourse with respect to the discourse of the other, without the presence of persuasive attempts. Among other things, we often argue when the possibilities of reaching agreement are deemed to be zero.

In Sect. 4.1, I present DEMAND and show how it differs from EXPRESSION and PERSUASION. In Sect. 4.2, I argue that DEMAND is extensionally adequate. In Sect. 4.3, I answer two possible objections.

4.1 Demand

- DEMAND: A and B are having a disagreement iff they are expressing conflicting attitudes and at least one of them is *demanding* that her attitude be shared by the other.

In my usage, demanding consists in advancing the *normative* claim that the other *should*, or is *required*, to agree (i.e. to share the attitude expressed).¹⁰

DEMAND goes beyond EXPRESSION, but it does not go as far as PERSUASION goes. On the one hand, one can express one's view without demanding that the other share it. A speaker can express the belief that p, and at the same time express the belief that the interlocutor is not required to share her attitude. Ridge (2003) has already made this point:

I might judge that abortion is morally bad but not think others should share that judgment and therefore keep my mouth shut about it. Or if I say anything, I might say, 'Abortion is wicked, but don't believe it because it's even worse to be the sort of person who has views on such matters.' (571)

On the other hand, one can demand the interlocutor's agreement and, at the same time, manifest no desire to change their mind. Thinking and saying that the interlocutor should share one's attitude entails in no way an actual attempt to make her share it.

A demand, moreover, is typically attended by reasons. A speaker often *argues* in support of their thesis. She can and often does explain *why* one is required to hold the attitude she is expressing.

¹⁰The sense of 'demand' I employ here might depart from the common sense of the word, which is often stronger. However, 'demand' has already a history of use in highly theoretical, related, contexts. In particular, see Kant (2000), who has inspired the main thesis defended in Sect. 4. (My greatest philosophical debt, however, is undoubtedly to the work of Charles Stevenson.)

4.2 Extensional Adequacy

4.2.1 Everyone Has Their Own Taste

In EVERYONE-HAS-THEIR-OWN-TASTE, A and B are expressing conflicting attitudes, but neither is demanding that their attitude be shared by the other. DEMAND, unlike EXPRESSION, correctly predicts that A and B are not having a disagreement.

4.2.2 I Am Not Trying to Change Your Mind

In I-AM-NOT-TRYING-TO-CHANGE-YOUR-MIND, A and B, besides expressing conflicting attitudes, are both demanding the agreement of the other, even if neither is actually attempting to bring about the agreement. DEMAND, unlike PERSUASION, correctly predicts that A and B are having a disagreement.

4.2.3 Simple denials

- SIMPLE-DENIAL

A: P.

B: No, not-P.

Simple cases like this one are intuitively cases where A and B are having a disagreement. Can DEMAND account for this?

It seems plausible to hold that when someone asserts something, one is, in most contexts, implicitly demanding the agreement of the audience. Gibbard and Ridge seem to have made this point.

Gibbard (1990) says that

Conversation is full of implicit demands and pressures. Suppose I confidently expound astrology, and you give no credence. The result will be discomfort: in effect I demand that what I say be accepted, and you will not accede. The discussion is no longer cooperative; it is strained; it threatens to become a quarrel. (172)

Ridge (2003) agrees:

Allan Gibbard claims that in making a moral utterance part of what a speaker is doing is, ‘demanding that the audience accept what he says, that it share the state of mind he expresses’ (172). Once we distinguish this from Gibbard’s more controversial claim that in making assertions we are claiming to be an authority of

some kind, this idea is plausible, both with respect to the expression of ordinary descriptive beliefs and the expression of moral judgments. [...] The reason I only ‘in effect’ make an ‘implicit’ demand that what I say be accepted is that this is merely a pragmatic element of what I say. (570-1)¹¹

Both Gibbard and Ridge recognize that the “implicit demand” can be cancelled or “revoked”. This is, indeed, what happens in EVERYONE-HAS-THEIR-OWN-TASTE.

If it’s plausible that one implicitly demands agreement simply by asserting something, then it’s plausible to think that in cases like SIMPLE-DENIAL the speakers are implicitly demanding that their attitude be shared. DEMAND correctly predicts that A and B are having a disagreement.¹²

4.2.4 Let’s Go to a Cinema Tonight

A theory of the activity must account for the sorts of cases described by Stevenson:

A. “Let’s go to a cinema tonight.” B. “I don’t want to do that. Let’s go to the symphony.” A continues to insist on the cinema, B on the symphony. This is disagreement in a perfectly conventional sense. (Stevenson 1963, p. 26)

It seems quite clear, in this case, that A and B are both demanding the agreement of the other. If this is correct, then DEMAND correctly predicts that they are having a disagreement.

¹¹ See also Ridge (2013): “I can advise you to believe in God simply by asserting that God exists. For to assert that p is not only to express the belief that p; it is also to exert a kind of conversational pressure on one’s interlocutor to adopt the belief that p. [...] The pressure can be cancelled, as one can say that p, but then go on to say things like, “but you needn’t believe it on my say so; I am not a very good judge of these things,” and “though I am not terribly sure about that.” All the same, if one asserts that p with none of these caveats, then one has exerted a kind of uncanceled conversational pressure in favor of the belief that p.” (19) Stevenson (1963) makes similar remarks: “Just as a factual sentence typically invites-so-to-speak the hearer to share the speaker’s expressed belief, so an evaluative sentence (though it may in part do the same thing) typically invites-so-to-speak the hearer to share the speaker’s expressed attitude”. (209)

¹² As noted by MacFarlane, one of the speakers could be playing devil’s advocate and they would be still having a disagreement. DEMAND is not at odds with this consideration, given that the speaker playing devil’s advocate would still be demanding, although insincerely, the agreement of the other.

4.3 Possible Objections

4.3.1 Agree to Disagree

- AGREE-TO-DISAGREE

A: P.

B: No.

A: Let's agree to disagree?

B: Okay.

One might object to DEMAND that, in AGREE-TO-DISAGREE, it is not the case that A and B are having a disagreement, even if they are expressing conflicting attitudes and (implicitly) demanding the agreement of the other.

My reply is that A and B are having a disagreement but immediately stop it. In fact, the expressions *agree to disagree* and *agree to differ*, are typically used to describe situations in which two speakers stop a disagreement in progress rather than avoiding having one.¹³

4.3.2 You Should Not Change Your Mind

Here is another possible counterexample to DEMAND:

- YOU-SHOULD-NOT-CHANGE-YOUR-MIND

A: P.

B: Look, you shouldn't change your mind. But let me tell you why I think you are totally wrong: ...

A: I don't think you should change your mind either. But *you* are wrong. Here is why: ...

A and B, one might object, are having a disagreement, but neither is claiming that the other should share their attitude.

My answer is that, as long as a speaker is conveying that her own position is better than the position of the other, she is — besides expressing a conflicting attitude — demanding the agreement of the other. Consider what it is to cancel a demand. In EVERYONE-HAS-THEIR-OWN-TASTE, for example, the demands put forward by the speakers are successfully revoked.

¹³ For example, according to the Oxford English Dictionary to “agree to differ” is to “[c]ease to argue about something because neither party will compromise or be persuaded”. For the Merriam-Webster Dictionary “agree to disagree” is “to agree not to argue anymore about a difference of opinion”.

They are successfully revoked, because the speakers are conveying that the view expressed by the other is as legitimate as their own. The two attitudes expressed, although conflicting, are considered equally good by both speakers.

Now, in YOU-SHOULD-NOT-CHANGE-YOUR-MIND, the speakers are explicitly saying that the other should not change her mind. If, in saying so, they meant that the other's position is as good as their own, then, I think, the dialogue would be puzzling. What would 'your position is as good as mine, but you are wrong' mean? I grant, though, that there are felicitous ways to understand that exchange. The speakers might mean, for example, that the other has practical reasons not to abandon her (wrong) view.¹⁴

However, if so, DEMAND would still predict that A and B are having a disagreement. A and B, in saying that the other is wrong, are each conveying that their own attitude — respectively the belief that P and the belief that not-P — is better than the attitude expressed by the other. This latter demand is *not* revoked by their assertion that the other should not, from a practical point of view, change her mind.¹⁵ The speakers in YOU-SHOULD-NOT-CHANGE-YOUR-MIND, unlike those in EVERYONE-HAS-THEIR-OWN-TASTE, are expressing conflicting attitudes and demanding agreement, in the sense that they are claiming that the position of the other is not as good as their own. Therefore, the objection fails: according to DEMAND, A and B are having a disagreement.

5 Conclusion

The phenomenon and the concept of disagreement have been and continue to be philosophically relevant in a variety of ways. Despite the widespread distinction between a stative sense and an active sense of disagreement, little work has been done on how the activity should be defined. This issue should

¹⁴ For example, one might think that the other should not change her mind, because changing her mind would have some negative consequences. Alternative explanations that do not appeal to practical reasons are, of course, possible. The consideration that follows, though, would remain, *mutatis mutandis*, the same.

¹⁵ In so asserting, one is not conveying that the two attitudes expressed are equally good; one, instead, is expressing the belief that the other should not, from a practical point of view, change her mind and demanding that the other agree. And no conflicting attitudes have been expressed in YOU-SHOULD-NOT-CHANGE-YOUR-MIND about that. A and B are having a disagreement about whether P. They are *not* having a disagreement about whether they are practically required to believe that P or not. They would be having a disagreement of this kind if, for example, A asserted (and demanded) that B is practically required to hold the belief that P *and* B denied it.

also concern those who are interested only in defining the state notion of disagreement, given that, as I have already mentioned, the relation between the two senses is still a controversial matter. For all we know, the activity sense might be explanatorily prior.

In this paper, I have argued that the extant views on the activity of having a disagreement are mistaken and offered a definition in terms of demanding agreement. In a certain sense, I have put forward only a *minimal* definition of the activity (cf. Zeman 2020). I have not said what it is for two attitudes to “conflict” and I have by no means offered a full account of what a demand consists in. For the moment, I content myself with the claim that having a disagreement requires *more* than expression and *less* than persuasion. The right account lies in the normative notion of demanding agreement. How to spell this out fully I leave for future research.

Conclusions

Eriksson (2016) claims that moral judgments and judgments of taste are different with respect to their “attitudinal complexity”. The former, he says, necessarily involve a disposition to “challenge” conflicting judgments, whereas the latter do not necessarily involve such a disposition.¹⁶ In Pietroiusti (2021), I’ve argued that Eriksson’s arguments do not justify drawing that conclusion. The question of whether moral and taste judgments are different with respect to the necessary presence of a disposition to challenge conflicting judgments remains, as far as my paper is concerned, open. I’m inclined to believe that Eriksson’s thesis is false, but defending this stronger claim would require further arguments.

I am also skeptic, as you might have already gathered, about the alleged intuitive difference that Eriksson assumes and tries to account for. He thinks that having a moral thought is sufficient for thinking that those judgments that conflict with it are mistaken, but that having a taste thought is not sufficient for thinking that those judgments that conflict with it are mistaken. I do find plausible that a taste judgment is not necessarily attended by the thought that those who disagree with it are mistaken (cf. Pietroiusti 2022, Sec. 2). But I’m not convinced by the idea a moral judgment is different in that respect. Pietroiusti (2021) points at some possibly relevant empirical evidence, but Pietroiusti (2022) provides some pertinent considerations too.

If Eriksson is right about a moral judgment entailing the thought that those who disagree with it are mistaken, then expressing a moral judgment would entail the issuing of what I have called a “demand”. However, as I have tried to show, a demand is only a pragmatic aspect of assertion (see Pietroiusti 2022, Sec. 4.2.3). As such, its presence is contingent, not necessary. An interesting question is whether a demand is contingent, too, when “factual” assertions are made — assertions about issues that clearly have an objective answer. I’m inclined to answer affirmatively, but arguments to that

¹⁶ Eriksson never clarifies what challenging precisely consists in. My discussion of Eriksson’s proposal does not attempt to do so either. I think that none of my arguments is contingent on how exactly ‘challenging’ should be understood.

effect shall wait for future occasions.

My proposal in Pietroiusti (2022) raises other several questions that remain unanswered (see Pietroiusti 2022, Sec. 5). In particular, I haven't said anything about disagreement in the state sense and its relation with the activity I have defined. The project of characterizing disagreement in the state sense has received much attention in the philosophical literature (see Huvenes 2017). A prominent controversy, in that context, is about whether there is such a thing as a non-doxastic disagreement, i.e., disagreement without the presence of conflicting beliefs. The literature is divided between those who think that the notion of disagreement also applies to non-doxastic attitudes alone and those who think that it does not. Parfit is probably the clearest voice among the latter: “[f]or people to disagree, they must have conflicting beliefs” (Parfit 2011, p. 385). Against such a view, many have endorsed, in different ways, the idea certain non-doxastic attitudes are, by themselves, sufficient for disagreement.¹⁷

I have tried to make progress on whether there is such a thing as a non-doxastic disagreement both on a purely theoretical ground and from an empirical point of view. On the theoretical level, I have put forward a hypothesis which, I think, is worth exploring. Human psychology can be divided into “cognitive” and “noncognitive” mental states. Roughly, the former aims at representing the world, while the latter are favorable or unfavorable dispositions towards it. An idea that has been voiced within the noncognitivist tradition in metaethics is that evaluative *ordinary* beliefs are (at least in part) noncognitive mental states. With ‘ordinary beliefs’ I mean those mental states that are expressed by utterances of declarative sentences and that are ascribed by sentences like ‘A believes that p’. Once we grant this, we are in the position to make the following working hypothesis:

- A and B are in disagreement only if they have conflicting *ordinary* beliefs.

Such a view could be used to retain the intuitive idea that disagreement is a matter of conflicting beliefs — colloquially, “a difference of opinion” — and hold, at the same time, that some disagreements are purely noncognitive.¹⁸ The full defense of such a view will require putting forward an explanation of what ‘conflicting’ means, an account of the distinction between cognitive and noncognitive mental states, and arguments in support of the idea that

¹⁷ See, for example, Dreier (2009), Sundell (2011), Egan (2013), Huvenes (2013), MacFarlane (2014), López de Sa (2015), and Shemmer and Bex-Priestley (2021).

¹⁸ If I have understood him correctly, Beddor (2018; [Unpublished manuscript](#)) is going in this direction as well.

ordinary beliefs can be noncognitive mental states. This is left for future work.

In order to make progress, from an empirical point of view, on whether there is such a thing as a non-doxastic disagreement, I have conducted an experimental study about whether people are inclined to ascribe disagreement in cases of conflicting beliefs (e.g., A believes that the cake is tasty and B doesn't) to a greater extent than they are in cases of analogous conflicting non-doxastic mental states (e.g., A likes the cake and B doesn't).¹⁹ About four hundred people were recruited and randomly assigned either to a doxastic condition, in which they were given a vignette describing two persons holding a pair of conflicting doxastic states, or to a non-doxastic condition, in which they were given a vignette describing two persons holding a pair of conflicting non-doxastic states. In both conditions they were asked to rate their agreement, on a scale from 1 to 7, with the statement that the two persons described in the vignette disagree, given the mental states ascribed to them.

There was a significant effect such that participants agreed more with the statement in the doxastic conditions than in the non-doxastic conditions. In the doxastic conditions, participants tended to agree with the statement that the two persons disagree. By contrast, in the non-doxastic conditions, the overall average was approximately at mid-point; not because of a convergence on mid-point, but because participants displayed completely different intuitions from each other, with their responses being fairly equally distributed over the scale. Both the averages and the distribution of answers call for an explanation. This, too, is left for future work.

¹⁹ I thank my supervisors, as well as Josh Knobe, Julia Zakkou, Alexander Dinges and Nat Hansen for their help in designing and conducting the study.

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