

# DISAGREEMENTS IN PHILOSOPHY

SUBSTANTIVE DISAGREEMENTS

VS.

VERBAL DISPUTES

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## Introduction

Disagreements are ubiquitous. There are divergent views about almost every topic: there are disagreements about whether it is morally right to eat animals, whether there is climate change, how the ancient Greeks were dressed, whether the particle neutrino exists, whether a certain wine is delicious, ...

Thereby, some disagreements are considered to be substantive while others are judged to be verbal disputes. The dialogue of me arguing with an ignoramus seems to be a clear case of a substantive disagreement:

Anna: "Bern is the capital of Switzerland." (S)

Ignoramus: "No, Bern is not the capital of Switzerland." ( $\neg$ S)

Naturally, it is assumed that the opponents express and believe contradictory contents  $p$  and  $\neg p$ , that they describe the state of our world at the time of their disagreement and that only one of them, namely me, is right, since Bern is indeed the capital of Switzerland (in our world at the time of the disagreement).

In contrast, the following conversation between an Englishman and an American seems to be a clear case of a verbal dispute:

Englishman: "Mostly, burgers are served with chips." (S)

American: "No, mostly, burgers aren't served with chips." ( $\neg$ S)

Even though the opponents use a sentence S and its negation  $\neg$ S in their conversation, they do not express and believe contradictory contents. Rather, they both believe and agree that *mostly, burgers are served with deep-fried long chunks of potato*. In addition, if it is assumed that they describe our world at the time of their utterance, their belief is true, since mostly burgers are served with deep-fried long chunks of potato. However, they assume that "chips" expresses a different content (*deep-fried long chunks of potato vs. deep-fried thin slices of potato*). Accordingly, the American takes the Englishman to wrongly believe that *mostly, burgers are served with deep-fried thin slices of potato*. Similarly, the Englishman assumes that the American wrongly denies that *mostly, burgers are served with deep-fried long*

*chunks of potato*. That is the reason why they engage in an argument. However, as their conversation is based on a misunderstanding, it does not seem to be a substantive disagreement.

Not every dialogue that appears to be a disagreement can clearly be judged to be a substantive disagreement or a verbal dispute. Further, the question can be posed as to whether these two characterisations of disagreement are opposed or whether there are verbal disputes that may be substantive. In two debates in philosophy there is much discussion about whether a certain disagreement is considered to be a substantive disagreement or a verbal dispute. The first debate centres on disagreements involving predicates of personal taste such as "is delicious". Consider the following disagreement about taste between Marta and Kurt:

Marta: "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious." (S)

Kurt: "No, Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious." (¬S)

According to semanticists called contextualists the apparent opponents express and believe compatible contents about their own taste such as *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Marta* and *Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious for Kurt*. In addition, if it is assumed that they describe our world at the time of their utterance, both expressed contents are true, as Marta adores and Kurt hates the wine in question. Relativists are not happy with such a description of the disagreement, since the apparent opponents do not disagree: they do not express contradictory contents but rather seem to talk past one another, as they agree with the content expressed by the other party. In order to explain the dialectic of disagreements about taste appropriately, relativists are ready to depart from traditional semantics: in their view, the disputed sentences express the simple contents that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious* and *Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious*. Accordingly, Marta and Kurt express contradictory contents and they disagree substantively. However, relativists assume that the contradictory contents can both be true, since they may be evaluated with respect to different standards of taste: evaluated with respect to Marta's standard of taste, it is true that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious* while the negation thereof is true when evaluated with respect to Kurt's standard of taste. The view that content is true with respect to a standard of taste breaks with traditional semantics.

The first part of this thesis will focus on the views of John MacFarlane, one of the most prominent proponents of relativism. After presenting his motivation for relativism and discussing a possible rejoinder, his characterisations of disagreement will be illustrated. He disentangles different kinds and subkinds of substantive disagreement. Further, he tries to clarify which of those are most reasonably considered to be present in disagreements about taste and can be accounted for by different semantic positions. In his view, relativists succeed in elucidating disagreements about taste in the most promising way.

The second debate concerns ontological disagreements such as about which sets of bits of matter constitute a physical object. Perdurantists like Pedro believe that temporal parts of ordinary physical objects like sticks are themselves physical objects while endurantists like Edna deny the existence of temporal parts and they may engage in the following disagreement:

- Pedro: "In front of us there is a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence." (S)
- Edna: "No, in front of us there is no succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence." (¬S)

Some authors consider the disagreement between Edna and Pedro to be a verbal dispute while others argue that the disagreement is substantive. In the second part of this thesis Eli Hirsch's characterisation of verbal disputes will be presented: roughly, he considers a disagreement to be a verbal dispute if the opponents agree that the other party speaks the truth in his or her own language. This characterisation applies to the disagreement between the American and the Englishman: the American may interpret the Englishman to talk about deep-fried long chunks of potato, and she agrees that mostly, burgers are served with deep-fried long chunks of potato. Similarly, the Englishman agrees that mostly, burgers are not served with deep-fried thin slices of potato. (Hirsch has a strict conception of a language, he considers opponents to speak a different language if they use an expression such as "chips" with a different meaning.) Further, it will be illustrated why Hirsch considers Edna and Pedro to engage in a verbal dispute.

The discussion will then turn to David Chalmers who is also willing to identify verbal disputes in philosophy. He offers his own characterisation of verbal disputes

and he presents a method to identify and resolve them. Roughly, he considers a disagreement about some sentence *S* to be a verbal dispute when it arises wholly because of the opponents having different beliefs about the meaning of some term *T* in *S*. The disagreement between the American and the Englishman about "Mostly, burgers are served with chips" (*S*) is a verbal dispute in Chalmers' sense, as it arises wholly because the opponents have different beliefs about the meaning of the term "chips" (*T*). In Chalmers' view, a verbal dispute can be identified if the opponents bar the expression *T* from their vocabulary and do not find a disputed sentence *S'* (in the restricted vocabulary) that underlies the original disagreement. However, in his view, the disagreement between Edna and Pedro is substantive, even though they do not find a disputed and underlying *S'*. Their disagreement involves the bedrock concept of the existential quantifier expressed by the expression "there is" or "there exists". This concept is so basic that it cannot be stated in more basic terms and that opponents use it with the same meaning. In Chalmers' view, disagreements with bedrock expressions are not verbal disputes but substantive disagreements called bedrock disputes.

The main goal of this thesis is to investigate what a substantive disagreement and a verbal dispute amounts to. In the first two parts of this thesis it will be examined whether the various authors offer convincing characterisations of substantive disagreement or verbal dispute and whether they analyse disagreements about taste or ontological disagreement in a compelling way.

In the third part of this thesis, the previously introduced characterisations of substantive disagreement and verbal dispute will be compared and assessed. The aim is to carve out differences and similarities as well as to isolate widely accepted necessary or sufficient conditions for substantive disagreement and verbal dispute. It will not be decided whether disagreements about taste and ontological disagreements are substantive disagreements or verbal disputes. However, an explanation for why the respective disagreements are assessed so differently by the various authors will be given.

Part I

Disagreements about Taste

## Chapter I

### Disagreement and Relativism

Disagreement about taste lies at the centre of a debate about a new form of relativism. Mostly, relativism is taken to be the view that some values (truth, reasonableness, goodness, beauty, etc.) depend upon some framework of assessment (cultures, conceptual schemes, languages, etc.) (see e.g. Baghramian & Carter [2015], Krausz [2010a], O'Grady [2002]). As suggested by the specifications in the brackets, "relativism" is used for many different positions and ideas: different relativistic positions exist regarding very different values, e.g. relativism about truth or about goodness. Further, there are even different relativistic positions regarding the same value, as some like truth, for instance, may be relativised with respect to different frameworks of assessment, e.g. with respect to cultures or languages. Relativistic thoughts date back to at least Protagoras of Abdera (c. 490 – c. 420 BC). In *Theatetus*, Plato describes Protagoras as claiming that "man is the measure of all things" and Socrates restates this claim in saying that "individual things are for me such as they appear to me, and for you in turn such as they appear to you – you and I being "man"" (*Theatetus* 152a).

In the following, I am concerned with a specific form of relativism about truth that emerged out of the work of philosophers and linguists at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This new form of relativism concerns different domains of discourse – aesthetic, epistemic and moral among others – and different types of expressions: predicates of personal taste, knowledge attributions, epistemic modals, deontic modals, future contingents, indicative conditionals, etc. This thesis will focus on the relativist position regarding sentences containing predicates of personal taste like "is delicious" and on the main motivation for their position. In the following, I will use the terms "relativists" and "relativism" for relativism and relativists about predicates of personal taste. According to relativists, disagreements involving predicates of personal taste speak in favour of relativism. Consider the following disagreement between Marta and Kurt:

Marta: "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious."

Kurt: "No, Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious."

According to most relativists, disagreement about taste is a paradigmatic case of a so-called *faultless disagreement*. Max Koelbel offers one of the most prominent characterisations of faultless disagreement (Koelbel [2004a] p. 55f.):

*Faultless Disagreement*

A faultless disagreement is a situation where there is a thinker *A*, a thinker *B*, and a proposition (content of judgment) *p* such that:

- (a) *A* believes (judges) that *p* and *B* believes (judges) that not-*p*
- (b) Neither *A* nor *B* has made a mistake (is at fault)

Condition (a) amounts to a characterisation of disagreement. In Koelbel's view, there is a disagreement when opponents believe contradictory propositions (see also Koelbel [2004a] p. 53, 72). Condition (b) specifies faultlessness. In Koelbel's opinion a belief is faultless when the thinker does not make a mistake in holding it. One makes a mistake if one believes a proposition that is not true in one's perspective (Koelbel [2004a] p. 70).<sup>1</sup> Relativists like Koelbel, Lasersohn, and MacFarlane are ready to depart from traditional semantics in order to explain the phenomenon of faultless disagreement (Koelbel [2004a], Lasersohn [2005], MacFarlane [2014]). Taking up the ideas presented by both Kaplan and Lewis (Kaplan [1989], Lewis [1980]) who propose a radical semantics for predicates of personal taste: A sentence such as "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious" expresses the simple proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious* (and the negation of the sentence expresses the negated proposition). Accordingly, the wine tasters in the example above disagree, since they believe contradictory propositions *p* and *non-p*. However, the propositions can be evaluated with respect to different standards of taste. The proposition, *p*, is true when evaluated with respect to Marta's standard of taste, while *non-p* is true when evaluated with respect to that of Kurt. Thus, depending on the standard of evaluation a proposition and

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<sup>1</sup> Koelbel points out that some authors have a different notion of faultlessness in mind, namely *cognitive faultlessness*: One might be cognitively faultless in holding some belief. That is the case if one is justified in holding a certain belief, for instance if one processes a sufficient proportion of the relevant evidence without making a mistake (Koelbel [2004a] p. 59). According to some authors, it might be possible to be justified in holding some belief that is nevertheless false (see e.g. Wright [1992]).

its negation can both be true. Thereby, the opponents disagree faultlessly, as they both believe a proposition that is true with respect to their own perspective.

Contextualists about taste (see e.g. Glanzberg [2007] and Cappelen & Hawthorne [2009]) offer a more traditional account of the semantics personal taste predicates. However, they are unable to explain the phenomenon of faultless disagreement: in their view,, Marta and Kurt talk about their own taste. When Marta utters the sentence “Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious” she asserts the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Marta*. Along these lines, Kurt's negation of the sentence expresses the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious for Kurt*. Due to contextualists, Marta and Kurt express two different and compatible propositions, both of which are true: Marta's asserted proposition is true as Marta likes Château La Lagune 2014, and Kurt's proposition is true as he does not like the wine in question. However, relativists object that contextualists fail to explain the disagreement between the two wine drinkers: if Marta and Kurt talk about their own taste, they don't disagree. At least, they don't believe contradictory propositions but rather seem to talk past one another as they further believe the proposition expressed by the other party: Marta is happy to believe that *Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious for Kurt* while Kurt acknowledges that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Marta*. This lack of disagreement is the main objection of relativists against the contextualists' position.

Contextualists and relativists about taste are compared for how well they explain disagreement about taste. However, in the debate between these two positions, little is said about what disagreement about taste and disagreement in general amounts to. MacFarlane, one of the main proponents of relativism, presents the most detailed discussion of disagreement about taste and he characterises and disentangles different kinds and subkinds of substantive disagreement. The goal of this part of the thesis is to investigate whether MacFarlane's different accounts of substantive disagreements and his explanation of disagreements about taste are convincing. Prior to discussing his characterisations of disagreement, a sketch of the main semantic theories dealing with predicates of personal taste, MacFarlane's motivation for relativism, and a contextualist reply to relativism will be presented.

## 1. The Semantics of Taste

### 1.1 Background and Kaplan

Since the beginning of analytic philosophy around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is a well-established idea in semantics that propositions are the objects of belief and assertion. Thereby, speakers are taken to express propositions with their sentences and are usually taken to believe the propositions they express (unless they seek to mislead some one, for instance). Further, propositions were viewed as truth-bearers. Thereby, it was often assumed that the meaning of a sentence associates the sentence directly with a proposition and that propositions have its truth value absolutely given by the way the world is (see Koelbel [2008a], p. 2). This traditional semantic view is unable to account for apparent cases of faultless disagreement: the sentence "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious" and its negation express contradictory propositions and Marta and Kurt are taken to believe contradictory propositions. As contradictory propositions cannot both be true, one of the wine tasters has made a mistake in believing a false proposition.

Relativists try to maintain truth-conditional semantics while making room for faultless disagreement in adopting a more fine-grained truth-conditional semantics such as the two-dimensional framework of David Kaplan or David Lewis (Kaplan [1989], Lewis [1980]). Below, I will briefly sketch Kaplan's semantic framework, since most relativists rely upon it in presenting their position. Its formal details will not be included, as they are not important for the following considerations regarding disagreement.

Kaplan developed his framework in order to offer a semantic theory for context sensitive expressions like "I", "now" or "here". Sentences containing context sensitive expressions may express different propositions with different truth values depending on the context in which they are used, e.g. on when and by whom they are used. The sentence "I am Marta", for instance, expresses different propositions with different truth values when uttered by different speakers. When uttered by Marta, it seems to express the true proposition that *Marta is Marta* or that *the speaker is Marta* while Kurt's utterance of the sentence seems to express the false proposition that *Kurt is Marta* or that *the speaker is Marta*. If truth conditions are taken to constitute the meaning of a sentence, different occurrences of the same

sentence carry different meanings. It is, however, unsatisfying to claim that the same sentence has different meanings.

Kaplan attempts to solve this problem by arguing that expressions have two kinds of meaning: *character* and *content* (Kaplan [1989] p. 500f). The content of a sentence is the proposition it expresses in a certain context of use (in the following, I will use "content of a sentence" and "proposition" interchangeably). Regarding the content of a sentence, Kaplan holds on to Frege's principle of compositionality and takes the proposition of a sentence expressed in a context of use to be a function of the contents of its parts (Kaplan [1989] p. 507). In Kaplan's view, the content of a name or definite description is the referent in the context of use (contrary to Frege's view which does not take names and definite description to be directly referential). Kaplan does not talk about the content of a predicate, but would probably take it to be the property it expresses. Further, Kaplan specifies the *context of use* as a possible occasion of the use of a sentence (Kaplan [1989] p. 494). The context of use consists of parameters such as an agent, a time, a location, and a possible world. The parameters of a context of use go together; the possible world is the world in which the sentence is uttered, the time is the time of this world at the point of utterance, the agent is the agent of this world (mostly the speaker), and so on. With the parameter information of the context of use at hand, context sensitive expressions have their content assigned. "I", for instance, refers to the speaker of the context of use, "now" refers to the time of the context of use and "here" refers to the location of the context of use.

Besides having a content, expressions have a *character* as a second kind of meaning: according to Kaplan, the character is the rule determining the content of an expression in every context of use (Kaplan [1989] p. 505). The character of "I", for instance, is the rule, that "I" refers to the speaker or writer of the context of use and the character of "here" is the rule, that "here" refers to the location of the context of use. Kaplan does not explicitly talk about the character of names, descriptions and predicates. Yet, it is reasonable to take the character of names or descriptions to be a function that determines its referents in the context of use and to take the character of a predicate to be the function that determines its property in the context of use. Again, Kaplan respects Frege's principle of compositionality and takes the character of a sentence to be a function of the character of its parts (Kaplan [1989] p. 507). Kaplan calls a character *context sensitive*, if its content varies with context of use (Kaplan [1989] p. 506). Some expressions like "All

persons alive in 1977", are not context sensitive, as they express the same content in every context of use. Kaplan calls their character *fixed* (Kaplan [1989] p. 506). I will capture Kaplan's idea in the following general definition of context sensitivity for sentences ("C" stands for "contextualism", as contextualists embrace Kaplan's view on context sensitivity, to be discussed later):

*Context Sensitivity<sub>C</sub> (CS)<sub>C</sub>*

A sentence *s* is context sensitive iff the proposition it expresses due to its character varies with contexts of use (i.e. its character is context sensitive).

As the characterisation of characters and contents already suggests, it is possible that two sentences with the same character express different propositions. The sentence "I drink wine", for instance, is always assigned to the same character, namely to the function that determines the proposition expressed by the sentence in a context of use considering the agent of the context of use and the property of drinking wine. However "I drink wine" uttered by both Marta and by Kurt expresses different propositions, namely that *Marta drinks wine* and that *Kurt drinks wine* respectively. Further, it is possible that two sentences with different characters express the same proposition. Different characters are assigned to the sentences "I drink wine" and "You drink wine". As compared to the character of the first sentence (see above), the character of the second sentence is a function that determines its proposition expressed in a context of use considering the person addressed by the agent of the context of use and the property of drinking wine. Nevertheless, the sentences may express the same proposition – *Marta drinks wine*, for instance, if Marta utters "I drink wine" while Kurt, addressing Marta, asserts "You drink wine". A sentence containing no context sensitive expression expresses the same proposition in every context of use. According to Kaplan, the sentence "All persons alive in 1977 will have died in 2077" expresses the proposition that *all persons alive in 1977 will have died in 2077* in every context of use (Kaplan [1989] p. 506).

Kaplan is not only interested in context sensitivity, but also in modality or truth in other possible worlds. Possible worlds are used to talk about distinct ways reality could have been: Even though Marta actually drinks wine, it is possible that she could have been abstinent from alcohol all her life. For each distinct possible way

reality could have been, there is a distinct possible world.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, there is a possible world in which Marta is abstinent from alcohol. The world in which we live is called the actual world. Regarding possible worlds, truth values as extensions of sentences can be determined according to Kaplan. After the contents (or propositions) of sentences are determined in the context of use with the help of its characters, they are evaluated as true or false with respect to a *circumstance of evaluation* (Kaplan [1989] p. 494). In Kaplan's view, circumstances may include actual as well as counterfactual worlds and include a history of the world, a time, and maybe other features as well (Kaplan [1989] p. 502). Circumstances may include all features of contexts of use, however, these features do not need to go together: The circumstance of evaluation might for instance include a speaker, a time after her birth, and a world she has never lived in. This independence of the features is needed in order to determine whether a sentence would have been true had reality been different. A certain proposition expressed by a sentence determined in a context of use, the content that *Marta drinks wine* expressed by her utterance of the sentence "I drink wine" in the actual world, for instance, can be evaluated with respect to different circumstances (in order to find out whether the expressed proposition is necessarily true or contingently true, i.e. whether the expressed proposition is true in every circumstance of evaluation or whether it might be false evaluated with respect to some circumstance of evaluation). If the actual world is taken to be a feature of the circumstance of evaluation, the proposition is true, as Marta actually drinks wine. If the proposition is evaluated with respect to a possible world as feature of the circumstance of evaluation wherein Marta is abstinent from alcohol, the proposition is false (and the expressed proposition is contingently true). Kaplan's semantic theory is called two-dimensional semantic, as the truth value of a sentence depends on two possible worlds parameters: First, the proposition of a sentence is determined with the help of the context of use. Second, the truth value of the proposition is determined with the help of a circumstance of evaluation. If one wants to determine the truth value of a sentence in the context of use, the context is used twice: first, to determine the proposition expressed by the sentence and second, to determine the truth value of the proposition

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<sup>2</sup> There are different ways to think about the nature of possible worlds. Some, like David Lewis, take them to be physical situations (see e.g. Lewis [1986]). Others take possible worlds to be abstract entities: they might for instance taken them to be states or conditions a concrete world could be in (see e.g. Plantinga [1974], [1976], for an overview of the different positions, see Menzel [2016]).

evaluated with respect to the context of use as circumstance of evaluation – the circumstance of the context, as Kaplan puts it (Kaplan [1989] p. 522).

Kaplan is interested in evaluating the contents of sentences with respect to different possible worlds, as he seeks to clarify the notions of necessary truth and logical truth. In contrast, relativists are mainly interested in the truth of sentences uttered and evaluated with respect to the context of use (and context of assessment, to be discussed later). Kaplan provides the following definition of truth of a sentence, *s*, in context, *c* (Kaplan [1989] p. 522; "proposition" is used in place of "content"):

*Truth in Context<sub>c</sub> (TC)<sub>c</sub>*

If *c* is a context, then an occurrence of *s* in *c* is true iff the proposition expressed by *s* in this context is true when evaluated with respect to the circumstance of the context.

Sometimes, truth in context is called *utterance-truth* or *truth of an uttered proposition*. These expressions will be used interchangeably.

Kaplan's views are widely accepted. Regarding predicates of personal taste, there are different semantic theories that rely upon Kaplan's framework. The following sections present three of these which differ regarding the proposed context sensitivity of sentences containing predicates of personal taste and regarding truth in context: contextualism, nonindexicalism, and relativism.

## 1.2 Contextualism

Contextualists (regarding taste) will be characterised as authors who embrace Kaplan's view on context sensitivity for predicates of personal taste. In their opinion, the character of predicates of personal taste, such as "is delicious" is something like the rule that "is delicious" refers to the property of being delicious with respect to the standard of taste operative in the context of use. As the relevant standard of taste is part of the content expressed by the expression in the context of use, the content of "is delicious" might vary with the context of use. So too does the proposition expressed by a sentence containing a predicate of personal taste. "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious" uttered by Marta, for instance, expresses the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Marta*. The same sentence uttered by Kurt expresses a different proposition, namely that *Châ-*

*teau La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Kurt*. Sometimes, the standard of taste is made explicit, as Marta might for instance utter a relativised taste judgment like "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for me". The following will mostly focus on nonrelativised taste judgments.

Michael Glanzberg, Herman Cappelen and John Hawthorne can be considered to be the main proponents of contextualism regarding predicates of personal taste (Glanzberg [2007], Cappelen & Hawthorne [2009]). However, mostly, contextualists do not develop their semantics explicitly for predicates of personal taste but for other expressions. In motivating their semantic position, relativists adapt the contextualist semantics to predicates of personal taste and they typically conclude that such semantics is unsatisfying for predicates of personal taste. When portraying their semantic opponents, relativists mostly refer to contextualist positions developed regarding other expressions such as "ready" or "tall". Contextualists claim that the content of such expressions can only be determined in the context of use and hold that the content contains information of the context of use. Uttered by the speaker in comparison to the average height of Japanese people, "tall" expresses the content *tall for Japanese people*. If uttered in comparison to basketball players, it expresses the content *tall for basketball players*. There are different contextualist positions on offer: some hold that expressions like "tall" contain a hidden argument place for a comparison class as logical form while its value is given by context (if not made explicit). Others argue that such expressions express a contextually enriched content even though they do not contain any syntactic trigger. (For an overview of the positions, see e.g. Conrad & Loetscher [2015], for a defence of a variety of contextualist positions see e.g. Preyer and Peter [2005] and [2007], for specific contextualist positions see e.g. Glanzberg [2007], Kennedy [2005], [2013] and Sæbø [2009]).

Relativists do not need to care about the exact formulation of contextualism. They deny that predicates of personal taste express a contextually enriched content, and all contextualist positions endorse this view. Relativists accuse contextualists of failing to explain faultless disagreement as, according to contextualists, Marta and Kurt talk about their own preferences when uttering "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious" and its negation: The wine tasters express compatible propositions and there is no disagreement involving contradictory beliefs. At least the apparent opponents do not make a mistake since they do not believe a false proposition.

Before illustrating the semantic views of nonindexicalists and relativists, the similarities between contextualists and Kaplan will be highlighted. Both hold on to the same characterisation of context sensitivity ((CS)<sub>C</sub>): roughly, a sentence is context sensitive if the proposition it expresses varies with the context of use. Further, they both agree on truth in context ((TC)<sub>C</sub>): roughly, a sentence is true in some context of use if the proposition it expresses in that context of use is true when evaluated with respect to the context of use as circumstance of the context.

### 1.3 Nonindexicalism

The term "relativism" is used differently within the debate. Some talk about relativism if besides Kaplan's (CS)<sub>C</sub>, a further kind of context sensitivity is assumed: sentences containing predicates of personal taste do not express different contents in different contexts of use, but are *evaluated* differently with respect to different contexts of use as circumstance of evaluation (see e.g. Cappelen & Hawthorne [2009] and Glanzberg [2007]). This is possible because non-standard parameters such as the standard of taste are added to the context of use as circumstance of evaluation, as will be specified below. Others talk about relativism only if truth in context is considered to be relative to some further *context of assessment* (see MacFarlane [2014], his view will be further discussed in the next section). The latter characterisation, which goes back to MacFarlane, is now better established (see e.g. Brogaard [2009], López de Sa [2011], MacFarlane [2003], [2005c], [2008a], [2009], [2014] and Kindermann [2015]). In the following I will stick to this more common characterisation of relativism and I will call the former view *nonindexical contextualism* or *nonindexicalism* (heretofore "relativism" has been used in conjunction of both views specified). The distinction between the different semantic positions became more fine-grained when the debate was already sparked off. Some authors who take themselves to defend relativism cannot easily be assigned to the nonindexicalist or the relativist camp (MacFarlane ([2014] FN 24, p. 89) talks about Koelbel [2002], [2004a], Richard [2004], Egan [2005] and Egan et al. [2007]). François Recanati develops a framework he calls moderate relativism (Recanati [2007], [2008]). His view is mostly agreed to be nonindexicalist.

Nonindexicalists maintain that some expressions are context sensitive in Kaplan's sense ((CS)<sub>C</sub>). However, they propose a second kind of context sensitivity for sen-

tences with predicates of personal taste that concerns its evaluation with respect to different contexts of use as circumstances of evaluation. The sentence "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious" expresses the same proposition when uttered by Marta or Kurt; namely that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious*. However, the standard of taste operative in the respective contexts of use is relevant to determining the truth value of the proposition. If Marta utters the proposition the standard of taste of her context of use, namely Marta's taste, is relevant to evaluate the proposition for truth in context. As Marta adores Château La Lagune 2014, the uttered proposition is evaluated as true. However, if Kurt uses the sentence to express the same proposition, his standard of taste is the relevant standard operative in the context of use as circumstance and the same proposition is evaluated as false. The nonindexicalist idea of this new form of context sensitivity for predicates of personal taste is captured in the following definition:

*Context Sensitivity<sub>NI</sub> (CS)<sub>NI</sub>*

A sentence *s* is context sensitive, iff (i) due to its character it expresses the same proposition in different contexts of use and (ii) the proposition yields different truth values when evaluated with respect to these different contexts of use as circumstance of evaluation.

In comparison to Kaplan, nonindexicalists not only plead for an additional and different kind of context sensitivity. Further, they add new features – sometimes called non-standard parameters – such as the relevant standard of taste to the context of use as circumstance of evaluation. In Kaplan's view the circumstance of evaluation consists of a possible state or history of the world and a time (Kaplan [1989] p. 502). However, he is open to the possibility of adding further features to the circumstance of evaluation, though. It is the subject of controversy as to which features should be considered part of the circumstance of evaluation. Eternalists, for instance, argue against Kaplan and other so-called temporalists such as Prior (Prior [1967], [1977]) that time is not a feature of the circumstance of evaluation, but part of the expressed proposition (see e.g. Richard [1981]). Nonindexicalists agree with temporalists and take the idea one step further: they argue that besides world and time, an additional parameter for a standard of taste needs to be added to the circumstance of evaluation in order to evaluate sentences containing non-relativised taste judgments.

Although nonindexicalists hold onto an additional and different form of context sensitivity for predicates of personal taste than Kaplan, they agree with his definition of truth in context (TC)<sub>C</sub>: Roughly, a sentence is true in a context of use if the proposition it expresses in the context of use is true when evaluated with respect to the context of use as circumstance of evaluation. Features of the context of use solely determine the truth value of a proposition uttered in a context of use and evaluated with respect to the context of use as circumstance of evaluation. The truth of the proposition expressed by Marta's utterance of the sentence "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious" evaluated with respect to the context of use as circumstance of evaluation is, for instance, determined by features of the context of use, namely Marta's standard of taste. Even Kurt, who strongly dislikes the wine in question, must admit that the proposition Marta expresses with her utterance of the sentence is true, as her standard of taste is relevant in the context of use as circumstance of evaluation.<sup>3</sup>

Nonindexicalists are in the position to explain faultless disagreement. There is disagreement between Marta and Kurt as they believe the contradictory propositions that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious* (p) and that *Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious* ( $\neg$ p). Further, their disagreement is faultless, as they both believe a proposition that is true with respect to their own perspective. The next section will turn to the relativist semantic.

#### 1.4 Relativism

Relativists take the idea of nonindexicalists even one step further. They agree with nonindexicalists that the context of use does not play a crucial role in determining the content of nonrelativised predicates of personal taste. However, in their view, the context of use is just as irrelevant to determine the truth value of sentences containing predicates of personal taste. Rather, the expressed proposition is evaluated with respect to some further contexts called *contexts of assessment*. A context of assessment is like a context of use: it is a possible situation with features (a possible world, an agent, a time and, if needed, other features like a standard of taste) that go together. However, contrary to a context of use, in a context of as-

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<sup>3</sup> Sometimes, contextualists and nonindexicalists are characterised as holding that utterance truth is absolute. As this characterisation is contentious (see e.g. López de Sa [2009]), in this thesis their positions are characterised more cautiously as taking truth in context to be fixed by features of the context of use.

assessment a sentence is not used. Rather, the *use* of a sentence or an *uttered* proposition is *assessed*. Thereby, it might be assessed from indefinitely many contexts of assessment. Further, the context of assessment is not determined by the context of use. Marta's uttered proposition *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious* expressed by her use of the sentence "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious", for instance, could be assessed from different contexts of assessment. If Marta herself is the assessor (this is the case if the context of use additionally serves as context of assessment), her uttered proposition is evaluated with respect to her standard of taste. As she likes the wine in question, the uttered proposition is evaluated as true. However, if Kurt's context serves as context of assessment, Marta's uttered proposition is evaluated as false, as his standard of taste is relevant for the evaluation. Accordingly, an uttered proposition containing a predicate of personal taste might hold different truth values with respect to different contexts of assessment. In comparison to nonindexicalists, relativists not only hold on to a new form of context sensitivity compared to Kaplan's, as they add new features such as the relevant standard of taste to the context of use as circumstance of evaluation. Rather, they add these new features to a new kind of context. In their view, sentences containing predicates of personal taste are context sensitive, as the truth value of the proposition expressed in a context of use varies with the standard of taste in different contexts of assessment as circumstances of evaluation. The relativists' additional form of context sensitivity is caught in the following definition:

*Context Sensitivity<sub>R</sub> (CS)<sub>R</sub>*

A sentence *s* is context sensitive, iff (i) due to its character it expresses the same proposition in different contexts of use (ii) the proposition yields different truth values as evaluated with respect to different contexts of assessment as circumstance of evaluation.

Expressions that meet (CS)<sub>R</sub> will be called *assessment sensitive*.

Compared to nonindexicalists, relativists further depart from Kaplan's definition of truth in context as well. Truth in context is additionally relativised to a context of assessment (see MacFarlane for a similar definition of relativised truth in context (MacFarlane [2014], p. 91)):

*Truth in Context of Use and Context of Assessment<sub>R</sub> (TC)<sub>R</sub>*

If  $c_1$  is a context of use and  $c_2$  is a context of assessment, then an occurrence of  $s$  as used in  $c_1$  and as assessed in  $c_2$  is true iff the proposition expressed by  $s$  as used in  $c_1$  is true as used in  $c_1$  and assessed in  $c_2$ .

This amounts to a radical departure from Kaplan's semantics, since contrary to the positions of contextualists and nonindexicalists, the truth in context of a sentence containing a predicate of personal taste uttered in some context of use is not determined by its context of use. Rather, it is determined with respect to different standards of taste relevant in additional contexts of assessment. As previously mentioned, this study takes this departure from Kaplan's view of truth in context to be the key feature of relativism. Thus relativism is characterised as follows:

*Relativism about Truth*

Relativism about truth is the view that truth in context of some sentence depends on a context of use and a context of assessment in the way specified by (TC)<sub>R</sub>.

MacFarlane is the main proponent of relativism regarding predicates of personal taste. He develops his ideas in several papers and with respect to many domains of discourse (see e.g. MacFarlane [2003], [2005c], [2008a], [2011a], [2011b], [2014]). Other authors do not explicitly talk about contexts of assessment. As was already mentioned, some of them (e.g. Koelbel [2002], [2004a], Richard [2004], Egan [2005] and Egan et al. [2007]) cannot clearly be classified as relativists; others (e.g. Lasersohn [2005]) can be described as relativists in MacFarlane's vein (see MacFarlane [2014], FN 24, p. 89).

Regarding faultless disagreement, relativists tell a similar story as nonindexicalists. Marta and Kurt disagree, as they believe contradictory propositions. However, none of the disputants makes a mistake because the propositions they believe are true assessed from their own contexts of assessment. However, this is not the whole story yet: MacFarlane distinguishes different kinds of disagreements. In his view, relativists can provide the most promising explanation for disagreements about taste.

Summing up, contextualists and nonindexicalists agree on truth in context (TC)<sub>C</sub> but they hold on to different views about the context sensitivity of predicates of personal taste (CS)<sub>C</sub> and (CS)<sub>NI</sub>. Relativists not only assume an additional form of

context sensitivity  $(CS)_R$  (also called assessment sensitivity) but they also argue that truth for sentences with assessment sensitive expressions is further relativised to contexts of assessment  $((TC)_R$ ). The remainder of this chapter will investigate whether considerations of disagreement about taste amount to a successful argument for relativism. As MacFarlane is the relativist who does not only present the most sophisticated views about disagreement but also the most detailed motivation for relativism, I will focus on his views. Before moving to his motivation for relativism, I will briefly say a few words about the ontological assumptions of the different semantic positions discussed so far and I will illustrate some additional views about the semantics of predicates of personal taste.

### 1.5 Semantic and Ontological Assumptions

Different semantic assumptions about context sensitivity and truth in context are not necessarily tied to different ontological assumptions. The ontological assumptions become explicit if the theories of truth the authors believe in are specified. Is a proposition true if it corresponds to reality (correspondence theory of truth), is it true if idealised enquirers would be justified in believing it (epistemic theory of truth) or is it true if it is expedient for a person to think (pragmatic theory of truth)? Most authors do not take a stance on this issue. According to MacFarlane, a correspondence theory of truth is most plausible. But he emphasises that relativists as well as proponents of other semantic theories are asked to offer a detailed account of their theory of truth (MacFarlane [2014], p. 42). It will not be further investigated into the theories of truth the different authors believe in. It will simply be highlighted that probably, relativists make different ontological assumptions than contextualists and nonindexicalists. Let's assume that a correspondence theory of truth about sentences with predicates of personal taste is correct. According to such a view, an asserted taste proposition is true if it corresponds to some fact. Thereby, contextualists, nonindexicalists as well as relativists seem to suppose that there are relativised facts about taste. Their views will be compared regarding Marta's utterance of the sentence "Bordeaux La Lagune 2014 is delicious": According to contextualists the sentence expresses the proposition that *Bordeaux La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Marta* and they most likely consider it to be true if it corresponds to the fact that Marta likes Bordeaux La Lagune 2014 (at time  $t$ ). Nonindexicalists and relativists believe the sentence to express the simple propo-

sition that *Bordeaux La Lagune 2014 is delicious*. Thereby, nonindexicalists seem to agree with contextualists that the fact about Marta's faible of the wine in question renders the expressed proposition true, as the expressed proposition is evaluated with respect to the context of use as circumstance of evaluation. Accordingly, despite making different semantic assumptions about the context sensitivity of predicates of personal taste, contextualists and nonindexicalists seem to make the same ontological assumptions. Relativists, however, would only consider the described fact to be the truth maker if the expressed proposition is not only expressed but also assessed by Marta. In their view, the same expressed proposition can be evaluated with respect to different contexts of assessment as circumstance of evaluation. If Kurt assesses Marta's expressed proposition, there is no fact that renders the proposition true and if Paul is the assessor, the fact that Paul likes Bordeaux La Lagune 2014 (at time *t*) renders the proposition true. In contrast to contextualists and nonindexicalists, relativists thus believe that there are various relativised facts that might render an expressed taste proposition true (or false).

### 1.6 Other Semantic Theories

This section will quickly outline three alternative semantic theories often discussed regarding predicates of personal taste. An explanation will follow to explain why they will not be further pursued in this study (for a detailed discussion of the different views, see MacFarlane [2014] Ch. 1 and Crespo [2015] Ch. 3). First, objectivists claim that predicates of personal taste are not at all context sensitive (see e.g. Smith [2007] and Schafer [2011]). This view sees deliciousness as an objective property of food; either Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious or it is not. Accordingly, the sentence "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious" expresses the same proposition in every context of use and yields the same truth value evaluated with respect to the context of use (and any context of assessment) as circumstance of evaluation. Thus, either Marta or Kurt makes a mistake in calling Château La Lagune 2014 delicious/not delicious. This thesis will hold on to the view of contextualists and relativists and dismiss this option as unsatisfying. As it is a fact that people's preferences vary a lot and they judge very different kinds of food tasty, objectivists would have to explain away many phenomena in relation to taste judgments: why, for instance, do so many people make mistakes in taste judgments? Do they lack epistemic access to the deliciousness of food? Further,

given objectivism, why are people not more careful in making taste judgments? In sum, objectivism strongly clashes with our every day use of predicates of personal taste.

Secondly, there exists an even more radical form of relativism, sometimes called content relativism. (My characterisation of relativism does not apply to content relativism. Since only a brief sketch of this position is offered, the same term will be used.) According to content relativists, the standard of taste relevant in some context of assessment is part of the proposition expressed by a sentence with a predicate of personal taste (see e.g. Weatherson [2009] in relation to indicative conditionals). Accordingly, the proposition expressed by a sentence used in a context of use and assessed in a context of assessment expresses different proposition in relation to different contexts of assessment. For instance, Marta's utterance of the sentence "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious" expresses different propositions in relation to different contexts of assessment. If she assesses her utterance herself, the sentence expresses the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Marta*. However, if Kurt assesses Marta's utterance of the sentence, it expresses the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Kurt*. Content relativism is a radical position, as the content expressed by a sentence containing a predicate of personal taste cannot be determined in the context of use. Its content can only be determined with recourse to a context of assessment and it varies with different contexts of assessment. I agree with MacFarlane that this kind of relativism describes the dialectic in disagreement about taste wrongly (MacFarlane [2014], p. 74): If content relativism was right, then Kurt would claim that Marta asserted the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Kurt*. Marta would certainly deny having asserted this proposition, as she knows perfectly well that Kurt does not like the wine in question. No further attention will be paid to this kind of relativism.

Thirdly, there is the option to leave truth-conditional semantics behind and move on to expressivism. Expressivist theories are mostly developed for moral language (see Ayer [1959] and Stevenson [1963], for more modern versions of expressivism, see e.g. Gibbard [1990], [2003]). It is argued that sentences involving moral expressions like "It's wrong to kill people" do not express a truth-apt content, but instead, simply express the speaker's moral disapproval of murder. In the same vein, sentences involving predicates of personal taste do not express a truth-evaluable proposition. Rather, they express the speaker's like or dislike for various

food. Expressivists are aware that without beliefs with truth-evaluable content, they are not able to account for disagreements involving the beliefs of contradictory contents (see e.g. Ayer [1936]). Accordingly, expressivist theories cannot meet the relativist challenge of disagreements about taste. Further, they face problems due to the lack of a truth-conditional semantic (see MacFarlane [2014] p. 17ff). Those are the reasons why I do not progress this option any further. The next section turns to MacFarlane's motivation for relativism.

## 2. MacFarlane's Motivation for Relativism

### 2.1 Judgments of Taste

#### 2.1.1 The Taste Principle

Before launching his arguments against contextualism, MacFarlane points out that our ordinary use of predicates of personal taste is guided by the taste principle (TP) (MacFarlane [2014] p. 4). In his example, he makes use of the predicate of personal taste "is tasty", however, the motivation for relativism holds for different predicates of personal taste like "is delicious" or "is tasty" equally.

- (TP) If you know first-hand how something tastes, call it "tasty" just in case its flavor is pleasing to you, and "not tasty" just in case its flavor is not pleasing to you.

Stating (TP), MacFarlane requires first, that one knows how some food tastes, because one has to be justified in making a taste judgment (MacFarlane [2014] p. 3). In his view, one is not justified in calling some food "tasty" or "not tasty" anymore after brushing the teeth or after eating *Synsepalum dulcificum* (a berry changing the perception for sweetness so that even lemons taste sweet). As such cases lack justification, they do not count as knowledge and they are therefore excluded from (TP). Further, MacFarlane requires that knowledge be first-hand (MacFarlane [2014] p. 3). In doing so, he accommodates the fact that we don't call food "tasty" just because someone told us that it tastes like something we like. The view that (TP) mostly guides our use of predicates of personal taste does not

seem to be contentious.<sup>4</sup> MacFarlane argues for the taste principle in pointing out that the following speeches would sound strange (MacFarlane [2014] p. 4):

- (1) "I'm not sure whether espresso is tasty, but I hate how it tastes."
- (2) "I've never been able to stand the taste of durian. Might it be tasty?"
- (3) "I love orange juice and hate tomato juice. But who knows? Perhaps tomato juice is tastier."

In order to argue for semantics for predicates of personal taste not respecting (TP) (such as objectivism), one has to explain away the intuitive appeal of (TP). For the moment, (TP) will be taken for granted. Before the discussion moves on to MacFarlane's arguments against contextualism it will take a closer look at how judgments about taste evolve.

### 2.1.2 Evolution of Taste Judgments

Mostly, philosophers thinking about the semantics of predicates of personal taste do not investigate how sense of taste relates to taste judgments. Like MacFarlane with his (TP), they only care about the evaluation of food. Surprisingly, in relation to disagreement about taste, only this question matters. Nonetheless a few words are in order about why and how we experience taste. These considerations below are interesting for everyone who thinks about taste, even philosophers arguing about the semantics for predicates of personal taste. Furthermore, they help to localise different kinds of disagreement about taste. Thereby, the relativists' target disagreement about taste can be narrowed down.

A taste sensation is a physical reaction to constituents of food: different molecules trigger different reactions in our body. Thereby, the impression of taste is a complex interaction mainly of gustatory and olfactory perception (the following is a summary of (Chiras [2008] p. 218ff). Gustatory perception is due to receptors in the taste buds mainly located on the tongue. There are receptors for at least five

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<sup>4</sup> Hazel Pearson, for instance, argues amongst others that predicates of personal taste are first-person oriented because they require first-hand experience (Pearson [2013] p. 117). A few authors distinguish different uses of predicates of personal taste (see e.g. Lasersohn [2005] p. 670f.): autocentric uses concern the speaker's standard of taste while exocentric uses concern the standard of taste of some other person(s) (for similar distinctions see Egan [2010] p. 525, Pearson [2013] p. 121). MacFarlane only seems to consider the more common autocentric use of predicates of personal taste, otherwise (TP) wouldn't hold.

different sensations: sweetness, sourness, saltiness, bitterness, and umami (meat taste). These are triggered by different molecules characteristic for a certain taste; the salt-receptor, for instance, is triggered by common table salt and a few other mineral salts. When activated, the receptors transmit the signal to the brain. (Other sensations are triggered through other mechanisms; hotness in terms of spice, for example, is a signal of pain). However, the predominant part of a taste sensation is caused by volatile flavourings passing through the throat into the nasal cavity and activating the olfactory receptors. Humans have at least 1000 different kinds of receptors in the nasal cavity. The simultaneous stimulation of several receptors generates an even greater number of odour sensations. Hence, taste is largely a matter of smell.

Different disagreements may occur regarding taste judgments. Opponents could argue about the ingredients of some food:

Marta: "Château La Lagune 2014 contains blackberry flavouring."

Kurt: "No, Château La Lagune 2014 does not contain blackberry flavouring."

In this example, suppose that Château La Lagune actually does contain blackberry flavouring and Marta, a trained wine expert, smells it. Kurt smells the flavouring as well. However, as he is not trained, he is not able to identify it and therefore wrongly assumes that the wine contains no hint of blackberry. In the situation described, there is disagreement: Marta and Kurt believe contradictory propositions. However, the disagreement is not faultless; in not recognising the blackberry flavouring, Kurt makes a mistake, since he believes a false proposition. This is not a situation of disagreement of interest to relativists.

Nonetheless, it is important to be aware that there are differences in taste sensations among human beings. Not only do different people have different amounts of receptors and thus experience taste sensations more or less intensely, but there are also differences in receptors. Some people, for instance, are unable to sense the bitterness of phenylthiocarbamide due to a mutation in their PTC sensitive receptor, *hTAS2R38* (Standke [2012] p. 5f). The following example assumes that a malicious winegrower from a competing vineyard added phenylthiocarbamide to some bottles of Château La Lagune 2014. Suppose further that Kurt, contrary to Marta, has a mutation in his PTC sensitive receptor. The two wine drinkers engage in the following disagreement:

Marta: "Château La Lagune 2014 is bitter."

Kurt: "Château La Lagune 2014 is not bitter."

Is this a case of faultless disagreement? Because the opponents believe contradictory propositions, they disagree. Is their disagreement faultless? Contrary to Marta, Kurt cannot sense the bitterness. Hence, in relation to their sensory apparatus, they both express a true proposition. However, MacFarlane probably would not classify the situation as a faultless disagreement: in a similar case where a colour-blind person cannot recognize red, he accuses that individual of making a mistake (MacFarlane [2014] p. 2f.). In his view, "red" refers to the dispositional property to affect (non-disabled) human visual perception in a certain way. In a similar vein, bitterness can be considered to be the objective property of affecting non-disabled human olfactory perception in a certain way. Thereby, the enriched Château La Lagune 2014 possesses this property. If Kurt, due to the mutation in the PTC sensitive receptor *hTAS2R38*, believes the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is not bitter*, he believes a false proposition and makes a mistake.

However, as already mentioned, relativists do not care about disagreements regarding the flavourings of food. Rather, they are concerned about disagreements in relation to the *evaluation* of food. Why do we love or hate certain flavourings? Scientists say nothing about the neurological connection of experiencing a flavouring and experiencing a feeling of like or dislike. Even the transmission of certain signals from taste receptors to the brain is not yet fully understood. However, it is reasonable to suppose that the experience of certain flavourings somehow triggers a positive or negative reaction probably in the form of activating the release of certain hormones. But for all that, does it not follow that two persons with more or less the same sensory apparatus react in more or less the same way to every food? This is a nice idea, however, it does not seem to be the case. People seem to disagree about the deliciousness of food, even if they recognise the same flavourings in the same intensity. There exists, for instance, disagreement about the deliciousness of some wines between the most trained wine experts and it seems reasonable to suppose that they are able to track wines for the same flavourings in more or less the same intensity. There are some flavourings such as vanilla that are almost universally liked. A biological explanation for this phenomenon might be that breast milk contains vanilla flavouring. However, it is very uncommon that two persons agree on the tastiness of all food. Furthermore,

the taste of an individual can undergo change. As a baby, Marta did not like Château La Lagune 2014. Grown up and being a wine expert, she drinks Château La Lagune 2014 with relish.

In connection with this consideration the question could be posed as to whether a sensory experience like sweetness is the same for every person. Could the stimulation of receptor R for sweetness result in a completely different sensation in Marta than the stimulation of R in Kurt? Thought experiments regarding the so-called problem of inverted spectrum or inverted qualia dating back to John Locke are ubiquitous in the philosophy of mind (Locke [1689/1975], E II, xxxii, 15). Be that as it may, it is a fact that people judge food differently. Relativists do not need more to motivate their position: they do not have to care about the evolution of the emotional response to certain food.

Attention will now quickly turn back to MacFarlane's taste principle (TP): Roughly, a particular food should only be called "tasty" or "not tasty" if one knows how it tastes. The question could be posed as to when the taste of food is *known*? In case of an individual with a well-trained and unimpaired sensory apparatus who can distinguish all recognisable flavourings of some food, it can be assumed that there is knowledge of taste. As relativists care about the daily use of predicates of personal taste, they likely do not put forward such high demands on knowledge of taste. Otherwise, only experts are justified in judging some food to be delicious. However, it could be asked whether there is no difference in knowledge of taste between a wine expert and a layman regarding their disagreement about the deliciousness of some wine. As long as their senses are not impaired, do they both know how a certain wine tastes, even though the layman is not able to identify all flavourings? MacFarlane would probably answer this question in the affirmative. In his view, Sam, a student attending an apple-tasting course should not remain agnostic when asked at the beginning of the course to judge which of several apples is the tastiest one for him – even though the instructor tells him that his taste will change during the course (MacFarlane [2014] p. 6f.). Accordingly, in MacFarlane's view, a wine expert and a layman both know how a certain wine tastes, even though the former's taste sense is better educated. In my view, it is at least contentious that a wine expert and a layman both know equally well the taste of some wine. Further, a layman is unlikely to start an argument about the deliciousness of some wine with a wine expert. Rather, arguments about taste mostly seem to take place between opponents with a sensory apparatus on more or less

the same level of education. In order to circumvent objections, opponents involved in a *paradigmatic* case of faultless disagreement will be characterised as follows:

*Opponents in a Paradigmatic Case of Faultless Disagreement*

Opponents in a paradigmatic case of faultless disagreement (i) have about the same sensory apparatus (they are able to sense the same flavourings in the disputed food), (ii) their sensory apparatus is more or less on the same level of education.

It cannot be denied that a disagreement between a wine expert and a layman could be a case of faultless disagreement. However, it would not amount to a paradigmatic case of faultless disagreement. As it seems most charitable to test the relativist position regarding paradigmatic situations of faultless disagreement, it is supposed that Marta and Kurt engage in a *paradigmatic* case of faultless disagreement: They both take a sip of Château La Lagune 2014 and both experience the same spectrum of flavourings in the same intensity. Nevertheless, they engage in an argument about the deliciousness of the wine in question.

Let's now turn to MacFarlane's main motivation for relativism; his argument about disagreement.

## **2.2 MacFarlane's Argument about Disagreement**

### **2.2.1 Contextualists's Loss of Disagreement**

MacFarlane is not happy with the contextualist description of disagreements about taste. If the sentence "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious", as used by Marta, expresses the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Marta* while Kurt's uttered negation of the sentence expresses the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Kurt*, then the opponents express compatible propositions and there is no disagreement (MacFarlane [2014] p. 8). (In the early passage of his book, wherein he offers his argument against contextualism, MacFarlane does not clarify his notion of disagreement at hand. As in his view, there is no disagreement if the opponents utter "compatible claims", he seems to suppose that a disagreement involves incompatible propositions. His different kinds of disagreement will be presented later.) According to MacFarlane, contex-

tualists must face the challenge of disagreement. In his view, it is not an option to explain away disagreement about taste for several reasons: first, people disagree about taste. They do so even when they are aware that the disagreement is due to having different tastes. MacFarlane argues for this point in emphasising that dialogues about taste sound wrong if they are not formulated as disagreements (MacFarlane [2014] p. 8):

- A: "It's tasty, isn't it?"  
 B: "I disagree – though it might be tasty to you."  
 A: "It's tasty, isn't it?"  
 B: # "I agree, but it's not tasty to me."<sup>5</sup>

Second, he points out that similar dialogues with predicates that are clearly context sensitive in Kaplan's sense ((CS)<sub>C</sub>) are not formulated as disagreements. MacFarlane offers the following dialogues involving "local" to support his claim (MacFarlane [2014] p. 9). The character of "local" is something like the rule that "local" refers to the surroundings of the contextually relevant location. Thereby, Abe's use of "local" expresses the content *local to Anchorage* and Sam uses the word to express *local to Savannah*:

- Abe: "Sarah's favourite bar is a local bar."  
 Sam: # "I disagree – though it might be local to you."  
 Abe: "Sarah's favourite bar is a local bar."  
 Sam: "I agree, but it isn't local to me."

Contextualists need to explain this difference between predicates of personal taste and other context sensitive expressions.

Third, MacFarlane emphasises that besides "I disagree", people arguing about taste use other marks of disagreement like "no", "you're mistaken" or "that's false" (MacFarlane [2014] p. 9):

- A: "Licorice is tasty."  
 B: "No/I disagree/You're mistaken / That's false, it's not tasty."  
 A: "Licorice tastes good to me."

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<sup>5</sup> # " indicates an infelicitous move in conversation.

B:       #"No/I disagree/You're mistaken/That's false, it doesn't taste good to me."

Usually, such marks of disagreement are taken to target the asserted proposition. However, this explanation is not open for contextualists since marks of disagreement are not appropriate if taste judgments are taken to express relativised and compatible contents.

Fourth, MacFarlane notes that people not only talk as if they disagree, but sometimes also offer arguments for their position. He illustrates this point with the following dialogue (MacFarlane [2014] p. 11):

"Brussels sprouts, tasty? They taste like grass! Do you also say that grass is tasty? Doesn't their bitterness completely overwhelm other flavours?"

MacFarlane points out that such arguments do not target the opponent's taste. Contextualists need to offer an explanation for how such arguments work.

It comes as no surprise that contextualists have developed different strategies to overcome the relativist objection. Many launch a counteroffensive, claiming that relativists themselves fail to account for disagreement about taste in a satisfying way. These arguments will be examined in the third chapter of this part of the thesis. Beforehand, I will present two contextualist strategies that fail to challenge MacFarlane's motivation for relativism.

### 2.2.2 Sorting out some Replies

First, some contextualists argue that opponents in a disagreement about taste argue about some general standard of taste (see e.g. Stojanovic [2007], [2012], Iacona [2008], López de Sa [2008], Sundell [2011], Barker [2013]). This might be the standard of taste of the two speakers, of a certain group, or of a normal or idealised speaker. Different views exist about how this standard is expressed: some think it is part of the proposition expressed by the taste judgments, others hold that the general standard of taste is part of a presupposition. Marta and Kurt may for instance argue about the truth of the proposition *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for most wine experts*. However, as most authors concede, if the opponents disagree about whether some food is delicious with respect to some general standard of taste, their disagreement is no longer faultless: either some food is

delicious or it is not with respect to the standard of taste in question and one of the opponents believes a false proposition. To discover who is right, a survey can be carried out.

In MacFarlane's opinion, such explanations for disagreement about taste are not convincing, as (TP) is violated (MacFarlane [2014] p. 12). If it was common for predicates of personal taste to be used for general standards of taste, sentences motivating (TP) such as (1) – (3) would not sound strange. Further, it would be expected that speakers in a disagreement about taste would be more careful to assert that some food is delicious as soon as they learn that the opponent does not like the food in question. However, as MacFarlane notes, mostly the opponents continue to disagree. This thesis does not seek to settle the question as to whether speakers only use predicates of personal taste with respect to their own standard of taste. However, it can be suggested that MacFarlane merely wants to explain the semantics of predicates of personal taste if they are used (and assessed) regarding the standard of taste of the speaker (or the assessor). It is likely not contentious to say that most common predicates of personal taste are used with respect to the speaker's own standard of taste. At the least, this will be maintain in our paradigmatic case of faultless disagreement: Marta and Kurt use the predicate of personal taste with respect to their own standard of taste. If contextualists talk about disagreements arising when predicates of personal taste are used with respect to some general standard of taste, they don't consider the cases about which relativists are concerned. If they wish to claim that predicates of personal taste are only used with respect to some general standard of taste, they must put forward an argument against the taste principle. However, contextualists don't argue in this direction. As this study seeks to investigate whether relativists and contextualists can account for disagreement in paradigmatic cases of faultless disagreement about taste, it will not consider explanations concerning disagreements about some general standard of taste any further.

A second popular contextualist reply is to argue that disagreements involving a predicate of personal taste used according to (TP) do not amount to disagreements at all. They are only faultless conversations about the opponents' own taste (see e.g. Stojanovic [2008] and Iacona [2008]). Stojanovic, for example, argues for the latter point in emphasising that apparent cases of faultless disagreement often boil down to misunderstandings. In her view, conversations about taste often begin as disagreements involving nonrelativised taste judgments but end up in agreement.

She illustrates her point with the following disagreement about whether a particular ice cream is delicious (Stojanovic [2008] p. 692f.):

Tarek: "This is delicious."

Inma: "That's not true. This isn't delicious at all."

According to Stojanovic, Tarek and Inma talk about their own taste. They realize that after a while and solve the disagreement in making the relativisation explicit:

Tarek: "OK. To my taste, this ice cream is delicious;  
that's all I am saying."

Inma: "OK, and to my taste, it isn't delicious; that's all I am saying."

Apparently, MacFarlane does not accept that opponents in a disagreement about taste do mostly relativise their judgments after some time. If he did, he would not accuse contextualists, who try to explain away disagreement about taste, of ascribing systematic errors to ordinary speakers. In his opinion contextualists first blame ordinary people for engaging in arguments even though there is nothing to argue about (MacFarlane [2014] p. 11). Second, in his view, contextualists describe ordinary speakers as making a semantic mistake because they use nonrelativised taste judgments for taste judgments that are actually relativised. It could be asked whether MacFarlane or Stojanovic are right about the ordinary use of taste judgments: are they mostly relativised after some time? A linguistic investigation might give an answer to this question. However, even if it turned out that people do not relativise their taste judgments, it prompts the question as to how much is proven by the ordinary use of language. People often make mistakes and are often irrational. Yet, the relativist proposal may be understood as abductive explanation: the semantic theory that can explain more of the linguistic data without facing severe problems is preferred. Relativists do not show that the semantics espoused by contextualists is false or incoherent. They claim, though, to have a semantic theory that explains more than the contextualists' semantic theory. If relativists can explain disagreement about taste without facing other problems, their semantic theory achieves better explanatory work. For the moment, it is supposed that people mostly do not relativise their taste judgments, so let's investigate whether relativists do succeed in explaining disagreements about taste.

### 3. Summary

Contextualists assume context sensitivity  $(CS)_C$  for sentences involving predicates of personal taste. In their view, Marta and Kurt, in disagreeing about the sentence "Château la Lagune 2014 is delicious", express compatible propositions about the opponents' tastes. Accordingly, there is no disagreement involving contradictory beliefs. However, contextualists should be able to explain disagreement about taste, as argued by MacFarlane (at least, if they want to provide a semantics for the ordinary use of taste judgments): first, there is disagreement about taste, even though the opponents know that they each have a different taste. Second, dialogues involving other expressions that are context sensitive  $(CS)_C$  are not formulated as disagreements. Third, people use marks of disagreement when arguing about taste and such marks usually target the expressed propositions.

In order to explain disagreements about taste relativists are ready to depart from traditional semantics. They assume a further kind of context sensitivity  $(CS)_R$  for assessment sensitive expressions and for such expressions they reject Kaplan's understanding of truth in context  $(TC)_C$ : in their view, a proposition expressed by a sentence in a context of use may be evaluated with respect to some further contexts of assessment. Accordingly, an expressed proposition may hold different truth values with respect to different contexts of assessment as circumstances of evaluation. Relativists can explain faultless disagreement about taste: in their view there is disagreement between Marta and Kurt, as they express contradictory propositions, but their disagreement is faultless, as both of their believed propositions are true when evaluated with respect to their own context of assessment as circumstance of evaluation. However, that is not yet the end of the story. As we will see in the third chapter of this part of this thesis, MacFarlane distinguishes different kinds of disagreements and in his view relativists are in a position to provide the most convincing explanation of disagreement about taste. In order to evaluate whether relativists succeed in explaining disagreements about taste, it seems most charitable to test their semantics for a paradigmatic case of faultless disagreement about taste. For such a disagreement, it is assumed that opponents have more or less the same sensory apparatus and that their sensory apparatus is more or less on the same level of education.

Contextualists employ different strategies to overcome the relativist objection. They may, for example, claim that in disagreements about taste, opponents argue

about some general standard of taste or may deny that there is any disagreement at all. In MacFarlane's opinion, such explanations of disagreement about taste are not convincing, as they do not respect the taste principle (TP) or ordinary speakers are accused of making systematic errors. As we have seen, MacFarlane is best understood to provide an abductive explanation of disagreement about taste; he does not claim that the contextualist semantics is false or incoherent, however, it is his view that relativists can explain more of the linguistic data without facing severe problems.

Before the discussion turns to MacFarlane's different characterisations of disagreements, Sundell and Plunkett's view on metalinguistic negotiations will be presented in the next chapter. It can be interpreted as an additional rejoinder to MacFarlane's claim that contextualists fail to account for disagreement about taste in a satisfying way.

## **Chapter II**

### **A Contextualist Reply:**

### **Disagreements about Taste as Metalinguistic Disputes**

Sundell and Plunkett provide a contextualist account of disagreement that attempts to meet some of MacFarlane's challenges. Among the many contextualist replies to relativism I choose to discuss Sundell and Plunkett's view, as their position is not refuted by MacFarlane's considerations presented so far. In addition, they offer an interesting account of disagreement and even an account of verbal dispute that will be further discussed in the final part of this thesis.

Sundell and Plunkett argue that some disagreements involving normative or evaluative terms are best analysed as metalinguistic negotiations about some pragmatically communicated content. With this analysis they seek to block the common argument according to which semantic conclusions are drawn from the intuition of disagreement. From the premise that opponents substantively disagree quite a few philosophers conclude that the opposing parties express the same meaning with their terms – even if they use them differently. If it was supposed that opponents use the same term with different meanings (to express different contents), the disagreement would be lost and the opponents would rather talk past one another. Sundell and Plunkett point to different examples of this argument in the literature. Mainly, the examples involve normative or evaluative terms like "good" or "tasty". In their view, relativists regarding predicates of personal taste make use of this move as well: they observe that opponents in a disagreement about taste disagree about a sentence and then conclude that the different parties express incompatible contents by the sentence and its negation. Usually, this conclusion is justified by the remark that the disagreement would be lost if the opponents expressed compatible contents through the disputed sentences. In particular, contextualists who claim that "is delicious" is context sensitive and expresses different contents in different contexts of use (*is delicious for Marta* and *is delicious for Kurt*, for instance) are blamed for not being able to explain disagreements about

taste. Sundell and Plunkett suppose that proponents of the so-called disagreement-based argument take the disagreement in question to be about the literally expressed contents of the disputed sentences. However, in their view, a disagreement can also be substantive<sup>6</sup> if the pragmatically expressed contents are incompatible.

Sundell and Plunkett cite Lasersohn in order to support their view that relativists make use of the disagreement-based argument (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 6). Do their considerations also hold for MacFarlane's position? And would he accept their analysis of disagreements about taste? Before addressing these questions in the final sections of this chapter, Sundell and Plunkett's preliminary clarifications of the notions of meaning and disagreement will be presented. Thereafter, their characterisation of metalinguistic disputes will be illustrated and it will be investigated whether it applies to disagreements about taste.

## 1. Preliminary Clarifications

### 1.1 Meaning

Sundell and Plunkett point out that it is widely accepted by linguists and philosophers of language that one should distinguish between the domain of semantics – dealing with information expressed through the linguistically-encoded content of words – and that of pragmatics – dealing with information communicated by virtue of other features of the use of such words (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 8). Presuppositions or implicatures are examples of pragmatically communicated information. Among philosophers of language it is common to distinguish between semantic content – the information linguistically encoded by the content of the words – and pragmatic content – the information communicated in virtue of other features of the use of these words. Presuppositions or implicatures are examples of pragmatically communicated information. Presuppositions are information presupposed by the literal content of a sentence. If Kurt utters the sentence "I regret having taken Marta to Aare", then the information that he actually took her to Aare is presupposed by the literal content. Implicatures are communicated

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<sup>6</sup> Sundell and Plunkett talk about genuine disagreements, but I will use the term "substantive".

through the literal content. If Marta utters the sentence "Kurt saw some of his grandchildren" then through the literal content it is implicated that he did not see all of them. Further, Sundell and Plunkett emphasise that regarding the *meaning* of a normative or evaluative term they talk about its *semantics*. Even after this clarification, there remain two senses of meaning: Kaplan's *character* and *content* of an expression (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 8, Kaplan [1977]). The character is the linguistically-encoded contextually invariant meaning of a term, while the content of an expression is its reference or denotation in a context of use (for a more detailed discussion of Kaplan's view, see p. 9). With this distinction at hand, it can be more precisely stated as to how two persons might *mean* something different with an expression (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 9); they may not only mean something different when using the same term with a different character, but also when using the same term with the same character to express a different content. In different contexts of use two persons may, for instance, use "tall" with a different content – *tall for a basketball player* or *tall for an ordinary Englishman* – although they attach the same character to the expression, namely *having maximal degree of height greater than the contextually supplied threshold*.

## 1.2 Canonical Dispute

Sundell and Plunkett further characterise *canonical disputes* as disagreements in which speakers disagree about the literally expressed content (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 9.):

### *Second-Pass Definition of a Canonical Dispute (CD)*

A dispute consisting in Speaker A's utterance of *e* and Speaker B's utterance of *f* is canonical just in case there are two objects *p* and *q* (propositions, plans, etc.) such that Speaker A's utterance of *e* literally expresses *p* and Speaker B's utterance of *f* literally expresses *q*, and *q* is fundamentally in conflict with *p* in the manner appropriate to objects of that type. (By *p* entailing not-*q* in the case of propositions; by the satisfaction of *p* precluding the satisfaction of *q* in the case of desires; by *p*'s implementation precluding *q*'s implementation in the case of plans, etc.)

I take Sundell and Plunkett to offer necessary and sufficient conditions for a canonical dispute, since they talk about a definition of a canonical dispute (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 9). In short, they define canonical disputes regarding doxastic attitudes as disagreements involving literally expressed contents that are incompatible.<sup>7</sup>

Sundell and Plunkett seek to show that some non-canonical disagreements can nonetheless be substantive. Their goal is to provide an account of substantive disagreements that can additionally be applied to some non-canonical disagreements. Their characterisation of substantive disagreements is presented in the next section.

### 1.3 Substantive Disagreement

Sundell and Plunkett formulate the following principle of disagreement (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 11):

*Disagreement Requires Conflict in Content (DRCC)*

If two subjects A and B disagree with each other, then there are some objects p and q (propositions, plans, etc.) such that A accepts p and B accepts q, and p is such that the demands placed on a subject in virtue of accepting it are rationally incompatible with the demands placed on a subject in virtue of accepting q. (Perhaps, though not necessarily, in virtue of q entailing not-p.)

They call (DRCC) a principle. Accordingly, it is likely that they do not take (DRCC) to be a definition of disagreement. That said, it may be taken as a sufficient condition for disagreement. At a minimum, Sundell and Plunkett assume different parties to be in a disagreement where (DRCC) is met. Further, they take disagreements that meet (DRCC) to be substantive (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 11).

The authors emphasise that (DRCC) involves rational incompatibility between contents *accepted* by the opponents, hence it is about the propositional content of

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<sup>7</sup> Mostly, the content of a sentence is understood as the proposition it expresses. However, some theories understand the content of sentences as desires or plans (see, for instance, Hare's metaethical non-cognitivism, Hare [1991]). In order not to exclude such theories of meaning, Sundell and Plunkett define canonical disputes in a more general way as presented above.

*attitudes* – beliefs, desires, intentions, etc. (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 11). They point out that accepting is a mental attitude. Thereby, a mental content can be expressed or represented through both semantic and pragmatic mechanisms. Accordingly, (DRCC) is a notion of disagreement not restricted to the literally expressed content of an uttered sentence: There is room for disagreements that are not canonical disputes. Sundell and Plunkett posit that there are many disagreements that do not have the form of canonical disputes. Some of their examples are presented in the following sections.

## 2. Non-Canonical Disputes

### 2.1 Non-Canonical Disputes and Substantive Disagreements

Disagreements about some implicated content are common non-canonical disagreements in Sundell and Plunkett's view. They provide the following example (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 12):

- A        "There is one proton in the nucleus of a helium atom."  
 B        "No, there are two protons in the nucleus of a helium atom."

The opponents do not literally express incompatible contents: According to Paul Grice's view of numbers, they express the literal contents *there is at least one proton in the nucleus of the helium atom* and *there are at least two protons in the nucleus of the helium atom*. However, as Sundell and Plunkett point out, they *believe* and *communicate* incompatible contents through implicature (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 21): A communicates that *there is exactly one proton in the nucleus of the helium atom* while B communicates that *there are exactly two protons in the nucleus of the helium atom*. According to Sundell and Plunkett, their disagreement is substantive as (DRCC) is met. Further, A is mistaken because he believes that there is exactly one proton in the nucleus of the helium atom, while there are in fact exactly two (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 22). In addition, in Sundell and Plunkett's view, there are less common non-canonical disagreements, such as metalinguistic disputes. They will be presented below.

## 2.2 Metalinguistic Disputes

### 2.2.1 Factual Content Disagreements

Sundell and Plunkett provide two kinds of examples for so called metalinguistic disputes. Both involve the metalinguistic use of a term. Either the disagreement concerns the content or the character of an expression. Character disagreements will be discussed later. To illustrate content disagreements, the authors explain that context sensitive expressions can be used metalinguistically. Let's recall that generally, context sensitive expressions like "tall" only denote a specific property if some parameter – a threshold along a scale height – is settled by the context of use (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 13). For contextualists, such expressions always have the same character – for "tall", the character is something like *having a height greater than the average person in the relevant context*. Its content, however, may vary in different contexts of use: Uttered in a context involving basketball players, the sentence "Feynman is tall" expresses the false proposition that *Feynman is tall for basketball players*. Uttered in England in an ordinary context, it expresses the true proposition that *Feynman is tall for an average Englishman*. Thereby, the utterance of the sentence "Feynman is tall", for instance, not always conveys information about Feynman's height. If the hearer knows the height of the person talked about, the sentence can provide useful *information about the context of use*. Chris Barker calls this the sharpening, or *metalinguistic usage* of a term (Barker [2002], p. 1f.). He offers the example of a person, C, who asks A what counts as tall in her country – say England. A responds by pointing at Feynman, who they both know, and saying "Feynman is tall". With this sentence, A does not provide information about Feynman's height, rather, she gives guidance that the average standard of height in England is lower than Feynman's height so that "tall" applies to him. Sundell and Plunkett state that disagreements about such metalinguistic uses of a term are metalinguistic disputes (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 14). B, for instance, a fellow countrywoman of A, could become involved in the conversation and A and B might engage in the following metalinguistic dispute:

*Factual Content Disagreement*

- A "Feynman is tall."  
B "No, Feynman is not tall."

Sundell and Plunkett do not further elucidate this example, but their requirement for disagreement (DRCC) seems to be met: A and B pragmatically express incompatible contents, namely that *in England, the average standard of height is such that "tall" applies to Feynman* and that *in England, the average standard of height is not such that "tall" applies to Feynman*. Further, there also seems to be a canonical dispute: A and B use "tall" in the same context of use. Accordingly, they seem to express the contradictory contents that *Feynman is tall for an Englishman* and that *Feynman is not tall for an Englishman*. Hence, the opponents are even involved in a canonical dispute about Feynman's height.<sup>8</sup>

Regarding the pragmatically communicated metalinguistic dispute above, there exist facts about the context: Either the average standard of height in England is such that Feynman counts as tall or does not. Further, one of the opponents gets the context right. Sundell and Plunkett point out that there could be content disagreements without facts about the context. Their example of metalinguistic negotiation is presented in the next section.

### 2.2.2 Non-Factual Content Disagreements: Metalinguistic Negotiation

In some content disagreements the context of use for a context sensitive term may be negotiable. To illustrate their point, Sundell and Plunkett provide the following example of a disagreement between Oscar and Callie who prepare food for a party and taste a chilli (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 15).

*Non-Factual Content Disagreement*

- A "That chilli is spicy!"  
 B "No, it's not spicy at all."

As Sundell and Plunkett emphasise, in this example, the disagreement does not need to be about some independently determined threshold of spiciness. Accordingly, there may be no facts about the context. Rather, Oscar and Callie negotiate regarding which standard of "is spicy" should be used. Sundell and Plunkett call disagreements involving negotiation of the appropriate use of language *metalinguistic negotiations* (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 15). The normative disagree-

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<sup>8</sup> Whether the literally expressed contents include information of the context is disputable. If it is supposed that "is tall" is context sensitive (CSC), as assumed by Sundell and Plunkett, in the same context opponents express contradictory contents.

ment about the use of a term can be made explicit if it is formulated as canonical dispute:

*Canonical Variant of Metalinguistic Negotiation*

- A "We should use "spicy" in such a way that it applies to that chilli."  
 B "No, we should not use "spicy" in such a way that it applies to that chilli."

In the opinion of Sundell and Plunkett, (DRCC) is met in the original formulation of the disagreement even though the rationally incompatible contents are expressed pragmatically rather than semantically (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 16). Further, disagreements of this kind are worth having according to Sundell and Plunkett. In their view, the use of words matter; it is important to know how "spicy" should be used in order to decide whether more chilli should be added to the meal, for instance (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 15). Apparently, they take a metalinguistic dispute to be worth having if something important rests on the use of words.

It is not clear whether the semantically or literally expressed contents are incompatible in the original example. If it is supposed that the opponents talk about their own taste, they express the compatible contents *that chilli is spicy for Oscar* and *that chilli is not at all spicy for Callie*. In such a situation, there is only disagreement (DRCC) regarding the pragmatically expressed contents. This is likely the case that Sundell and Plunkett have in mind, as their goal is to show that non-canonical disagreements can be substantive nonetheless. However, it is also possible that the opponents use "spicy" in the same context of use, regarding the threshold of spiciness of the kitchen-team, for instance. In such a situation, the opponents in the original disagreement would express incompatible contents, namely *that chilli is spicy for the kitchen-team* and *that chilli is not at all spicy for the kitchen-team*. Thereby, the dialogue above would be connected to two disagreements meeting (DRCC): Besides the normative metalinguistic dispute about how "spicy" should be used, there is the canonical dispute about whether the chilli is spicy for the kitchen-team. The latter has a factual answer: Either the chilli is spicy in relation to the average standard of spiciness in the kitchen-team, or it isn't.

In the examples presented in this section so far, the opponents agree about the character of context sensitive terms. The character of "is tall" is taken to be something like *is tall for the contextually supplied threshold of height* and the character of "is spicy" probably is *is spicy for the contextually supplied threshold of spiciness*. Sundell and Plunkett state there are even some disagreements involving different views about the character of some term that meet (DRCC). One such example is presented below.

### 2.2.3 Character Disagreements: Metalinguistic Negotiations

Sundell and Plunkett provide the following example of a character disagreement – observed by Peter Ludlow in sports radio (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 16f., Ludlow [2008]):

*Character Disagreement*

- A        "Secretariat is an athlete."  
B        "No, Secretariat is not an athlete."

The two parties disagree about whether Secretariat, a racehorse, should be included in the list of the greatest athletes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The opponents seem to agree about all the facts at hand. They agree about Secretariat's speed, strength, and so on. Further, in contrast to the content disagreements presented above, the expression "athlete" does not seem to be context sensitive. Rather, as highlighted by Sundell and Plunkett, the opponents systematically use the term differently: B applies the term to humans only, while A uses the term to include non-human animals as well (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 16). Accordingly, it is reasonable to conclude that the opponents use the term in the same context with a different character. According to Sundell and Plunkett, the speakers both express literally true contents about which they agree. They may, for instance, be described to express the following contents *Secretariat is a non-human sports competitor* and *Secretariat is not a human sports competitor*. Hence, their disagreement is not canonical. However, for Sundell and Plunkett there is a normative disagreement about the pragmatically expressed content nearby: the opponents disagree about how to use the word "athlete". Brought into canonical form, the disagreement can be expressed as following:

*Canonical Variant of Metalinguistic Negotiation*

- A "Athlete" should be used in a way including non-human sports competitors as Secretariat."
- B "No, "athlete" should not be used in a way including non-humans sports competitors as Secretariat."

The authors elucidate that the opponents engage in a disagreement about what they call conceptual ethics; that is, a debate about what concept is more appropriate to the context of the conversation and should be expressed by the term "athlete" (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 17). Thereby, it is supposed that while asserting their sentences in the original disagreement the opponents pragmatically advocate for the concept they use.

Sundell and Plunkett emphasise that character disagreements as metalinguistic disputes are not uncommon. In their view, many normative and evaluative disagreements can be analysed as metalinguistic disputes. As I am mainly concerned with disagreement about taste, I will not illustrate their analysis of moral disagreements.

**2.2.4 Some Clarifications**

Sundell and Plunkett emphasise different points regarding their view of metalinguistic negotiations. First, they highlight that the normative background views that motivate opponents to engage in a metalinguistic dispute must be distinguished from the content of the actual disagreement (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 17). In the example regarding Secretariat, for instance, the different parties may hold different normative views about the kind of recognition deserved by animals. It may be tempting to take these normative views to be the subject of their disagreement. However, in the opinion of Sundell and Plunkett, they provide only the reason why the different parties engage in the disagreement. The actual disagreement is about how the term "athlete" should be used.

Second, they emphasise that people may care a lot about which concepts (i.e. characters) are associated with certain words, as some words – mainly independent of which concept they express – fulfil specific and important roles in normative and evaluative practice (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 20).

Thirdly, Sundell and Plunkett point out that metalinguistic negotiations are disagreements worth having. They argue for this thesis by emphasising that matters of

word usage are not limited to mere stipulation; rather, they may be decided objectively with the help of descriptive considerations in natural sciences. They illustrate this point with the following example of a disagreement in a biology classroom (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 22):

*Metalinguistic Dispute Worth Having*

A "Tomato is a fruit."

B "No, tomato is not a fruit."

As the example is designed, A is a plant biologist while B is a chef and they define "tomato" differently (*fruit* vs. *vegetable*). Accordingly, they use the term with a different character. For Sundell and Plunkett, the opponents are involved in a metalinguistic negotiation about how "tomato" should be used. In their view, however, A's character associated with the term is clearly better suited to the scientific context of the biology classroom than B's. They point out that this is not a matter of convention or stipulation; A's character is objectively better. The objects in the extension of the biologist's character of the term go together metaphysically more naturally than the objects in the chef's extension. Further, in the context of the biology classroom, the speakers aim to identify the metaphysically more natural meaning or character of the term (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 22f.). Thus, although the disagreement about tomatoes is analysed as a metalinguistic negotiation, one of the opponents is mistaken. Apparently, Sundell and Plunkett do not only take metalinguistic negotiations to matter if something important rests on the use of words. Additionally, they take a metalinguistic negotiation to be worth having if the use of words can be decided objectively.

Fourth, Sundell and Plunkett consider a potential objection that metalinguistic negotiations remain less substantive than canonically expressed disputes (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 23). They try to spell out this intuition by describing opponents ceasing to argue as soon as they realise that they only engage in a metalinguistic negotiation about how some term should be used. In answer to this potential objection, Sundell and Plunkett emphasise two points (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 23f): First, in their view, it is unlikely that ordinary speakers have fine-grained intuitions about how a disagreement is communicated. In particular, they do not seem to have intuitions about the involved distinction between semantics and pragmatics about which even experts disagree. Second, according to Sundell and Plunkett it is also unlikely that ordinary speakers have intuitions regarding the

theoretical question about whether a first order issue or a closely related issue in conceptual ethics is at the centre of a disagreement. Further, even if the metalinguistic analysis of the disagreement should conflict with the speakers' intuitions about disagreement, whether they continue arguing depends upon whether there is something at stake in the disagreement and whether they realise this (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 24).

If Sundell and Plunkett's considerations are so far convincing, they succeed in blocking the argument from disagreement to semantics: there are substantive disagreements – i.e. disagreements about some pragmatically communicated content meeting (DRCC) – that are non-canonical. Hence, it is not justified to conclude that opponents literally express incompatible contents solely from the observation that they disagree substantively. In their view, disagreements involving normative or evaluative terms are often best understood to be metalinguistic negotiations about how a term should be used. Before investigating whether Sundell and Plunkett's analysis of metalinguistic negotiations holds for disagreements about taste and whether they succeed in challenging MacFarlane's arguments against contextualism, the following point is highlighted: as seen above, the authors emphasise that ordinary speakers do not have fine-grained intuitions about what they disagree about. With this move, they prevent their view on metalinguistic negotiations from being supported by ordinary speakers. Investigating whether people engaging in a normative or evaluative disagreement will agree with a metalinguistic analysis of their disagreement would not support Sundell and Plunkett's view. Perhaps, the intuitions of philosophers of language would count for their analysis. Otherwise, their view on metalinguistic negotiations would only amount to a rational reconstruction of the disagreements in question – a reconstruction that is not empirically verifiable by intuitions of speakers. Thereby, their thesis is not as strong as it may appear to be. The next section will turn to disagreements about taste.

### 3. Sundell and Plunkett vs. MacFarlane

#### 3.1 Disagreements about Taste as Metalinguistic Negotiations?

Sundell and Plunkett's characterisation of metalinguistic negotiation is probably expected to apply to disagreements about taste as well, as these involve the evaluative term "is delicious". Marta and Kurt are arguing about the truth of the sentence "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious". Sundell and Plunkett would likely analyse the case in a similar vein as the disagreement about whether some chilli is spicy. First, they would take Marta and Kurt as negotiating the context and disagreeing about the pragmatically conveyed contents "*is delicious*" *should be used in such a way to include Château La Lagune 2014* and "*is delicious*" *should not be used in such a way to include Château La Lagune 2014*. Second, in their view, such a disagreement is worth having, as something important might rest upon the use of "is delicious" – for instance when the opponents are about to decide whether they should offer a bottle of this Bordeaux to their guests. Further, according to Sundell and Plunkett, Marta and Kurt probably express compatible literal contents (*Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Marta* and *Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious for Kurt*) since they likely suppose that "is delicious" is context sensitive (CS<sub>C</sub>). Hence, in their view, Marta and Kurt do not seem to be involved in a canonical dispute.

It may be possible that opponents in a disagreement about taste tacitly argue about how a predicate of taste should be used and may even express their disagreement in a canonical variant of the original disagreement. Do Sundell and Plunkett's considerations impress MacFarlane? This question will be addressed in the next section.

#### 3.2 Sundell and Plunkett vs. MacFarlane

The discussion now turns to examine whether MacFarlane can be accused of employing the disagreement-based argument. In noting that the disagreement gets lost if opponents are taken to express compatible contents, he argues against the contextualist's analysis of predicates of taste (MacFarlane [2014] p. 8). Hence, at first sight, he makes use of a modified version of the disagreement-based argument, concluding from the fact that people express compatible contents that they

do not disagree. However, as will be presented in the next chapter, he characterises different kinds and subkinds of disagreements and in all of these he takes attitudes (doxastic attitudes such as beliefs or non-doxastic attitudes like desires) to be in conflict. Hence, his characterisations of disagreement are not restricted to the literally expressed contents of sentences. He even explicitly considers disagreements regarding pragmatically communicated contents (MacFarlane [2014] p. 10). In his view, contextualists fail to make plausible that the disagreement is about some other content than the literally expressed content. Usually, if there is disagreement about some pragmatically communicated content, this content is explicitly negated in a discourse. MacFarlane provides the following example of a negated presupposition to illustrate his point (MacFarlane [2014] p. 10):

- A: "Your wife is very beautiful."  
 B: "No/You are mistaken. We're not married."

However, in a disagreement about taste, the speaker explicitly negates the asserted content (MacFarlane [2014] p. 10):

- A: "Licorice is tasty."  
 B: "No/I disagree/You're mistaken. / That's false, it's not tasty."

If the example above was constructed in the same way, the negation would clearly target the asserted content, as MacFarlane notes:

- A: "Your wife is very beautiful."  
 B: "No/You are mistaken. She's not very beautiful."

In MacFarlane's view one has to come up with clear examples of negations of presuppositions or implicatures that work analogously when seeking to contend that a disagreement about taste is about some pragmatically communicated content. Otherwise, the answer seems to be ad hoc.

In their paper, Sundell and Plunkett try to meet this challenge. In line with Laurence Horn, they point out that metalinguistic negation – i.e. negation that objects to some other feature of an assertion than the literal content – usually shows the following three characteristics (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 32f., Horn [1989]): First, it tends to consist as a denial and a correction component (the examples are to be read with emphasis on the italicised words):

- A: "John saw some of his students at the party."  
 B: "No, John didn't see *some* of his students at the party; he saw *all* of them."

In the example, B objects to the implicated content, namely that *John didn't see all of his students*. Second, metalinguistic negation does not allow for morphological embeddings of negation in the usual way:

- A: "He is happy."  
 B: "No, he is not *happy*; he is *ecstatic*."  
 B: # "He is *unhappy*; he is *ecstatic*."

Third, metalinguistic negation does not tolerate negative polarity item – lexical items such as "any" that can only appear in a negative environment such as negation – in the usual way:

- B: # "John didn't see *any* of his students at the bar; he saw *all* of them."

Sundell and Plunkett agree with MacFarlane that negation in dialogues involving normative or evaluative predicates does not show the characteristics of metalinguistic negation (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 33). Their example of metalinguistic negotiation involving the sentence "Secretariat is not an athlete", for instance, does not usually appear in a denial and correction component. Further, the example allows for morphological embeddings:

- B: "Secretariat is a *non-athlete*."

Third, even polarity items may appear in the usual way:

- A: "Secretariat has always been an athlete."  
 B: "No, Secretariat has not ever been an athlete."

Hence, it is tempting to think that normative and evaluative disagreements are not metalinguistic negotiations. However, Sundell and Plunkett point out that some disagreements about pragmatically communicated contents do not show the features of metalinguistic negation. They illustrate their point with the following example of relevance implicature (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 33f.):

- A: "Sally was able to solve the problem."

A literally expresses the content that *Sally had the ability to solve the problem* while it is implicated that *Sally actually did solve it*. Metalinguistic negation should be used if some interlocutor agrees with the literal content that *Sally was able to solve the problem* but denies the implicated content that *Sally solved the problem*. However, metalinguistic negation does not apply in this example. Negation only works when B is interpreted as responding to the literal content, as Sundell and Plunkett contend (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 34):

B: # "Sally wasn't *able* to solve the problem; she didn't solve it."

B: "Sally wasn't able to solve the problem; she didn't solve it."

The first negation cannot be read as stating that Sally was able to solve the problem but did not actually solve it for some other reason. However, there is an explanation as to why metalinguistic negation does not work. Following Horn, Sundell and Plunkett point out that in metalinguistic negation, there are usually two incompatible components involved: the denial and the correction components are logically incompatible, if they are interpreted descriptively (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 34f.). This is the case regarding the sentence "John didn't see *some* of his students at the party; he saw *all* of them": if John didn't see some of his students at the party, he could not have seen all of them. According to Horn, this feature of metalinguistic negation forces the hearer of the metalinguistic negation to interpret the denial component as a response to some feature of the utterance other than the literal content (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 34). In the example of Sally, this is not the case; there is no inconsistency in saying that Sally was not able to solve the problem and saying that she did not solve it. That is the reason why metalinguistic negation is not possible. As Sundell and Plunkett stress, this explanation also works for the denial of evaluative or normative sentences. To illustrate this point, they present the Secretariat example as metalinguistic negation (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 34f.):

A: "Secretariat is an athlete."

B: "Secretariat is not an athlete; "athlete" can only apply to humans."

Sundell and Plunkett state that even if B is correctly interpreted as objecting to some pragmatically conveyed content of A's sentence, the objection cannot be expressed via metalinguistic negation, as there is no inconsistency between the contents that *Secretariat is not an athlete* and that "*athlete*" can only apply to hu-

*mans* (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 34). It is their view that metalinguistic negotiations should be analysed parallel to the example of Sally and other cases of relevance implicature. Sundell and Plunkett interpret it to speak in favour of their analysis that metalinguistic negotiations do not show the characteristic features of metalinguistic negation.

Sundell and Plunkett offer a solution to MacFarlane's challenge. Is their answer convincing? MacFarlane may concede that some disagreements about taste concern some pragmatically communicated content while propositions about the opponents' own tastes are uttered. However, as previously noted, MacFarlane stresses that similar dialogues with predicates that are clearly context sensitive (CS)<sub>C</sub> are not usually formulated as disagreements (MacFarlane [2014] p. 9). Accordingly, he would likely invite Sundell and Plunkett to offer an explanation as to why there is a difference between predicates of personal taste and other context sensitive predicates (CS)<sub>C</sub>. In MacFarlane's opinion, clear examples of negations of presuppositions or implicatures that work analogously must be given if disagreements about taste are considered to be about some pragmatically communicated content (MacFarlane [2014] p. 10f.). Accordingly, he would most likely wish to learn more about how and through which mechanisms the pragmatic content is conveyed. Is the content, how an expression should be used, an implicature or a presupposition and which examples involving context sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>C</sub> work analogously? Do opponents in a disagreement about taste intend to communicate the pragmatic content suggested by Sundell and Plunkett? Moreover, he would probably like to ascertain whether metalinguistic negotiations behave similarly to disagreements involving relevance implicature in some other respects as well (despite neither licensing metalinguistic negation).

I thus take Sundell and Plunkett to be in a position to offer an interesting idea for how disagreements about taste could work. However, regarding MacFarlane's possible rejoinder, they have to develop their view on metalinguistic negotiations in more detail and with more argumentative force in order to refute his arguments against contextualist positions.

#### **4. Summary**

Sundell and Plunkett offer a principle for disagreement (DRCC): regarding doxastic attitudes, opponents disagree according to (DRCC) if they believe propositions that are rationally incompatible. As beliefs can be expressed through both, semantic and pragmatic mechanisms, (DRCC) allows for disagreements about pragmatically communicated contents. In the opinion of Sundell and Plunkett, there may be disagreement (DRCC) about some pragmatically communicated content, despite the literally expressed propositions not being incompatible. With this move they can block the disagreement-based argument: from the observation that opponents disagree substantively it is not justified to conclude that they literally express incompatible proposition. In their view, many disagreements involving evaluative or normative contents are best analysed as metalinguistic negotiations that are disagreements about some pragmatically expressed contents regarding the use of words.

Sundell and Plunkett would likely analyse disagreements about taste as metalinguistic negotiations about how "is delicious" should be used. They even provide an explanation about why metalinguistic negotiations may not show metalinguistic negation: similar to the disagreement about relevance implicature there is no inconsistency between the denial and correction components. However, MacFarlane would probably not accept their analysis of disagreements about taste as metalinguistic negotiations. Most likely, he would request that Sundell and Plunkett elaborate in more detail the pragmatic mechanism being present in disagreements about taste in order to be convincing.

## **Chapter III**

### **A Relativist's View on Disagreement: MacFarlane's Characterisations of Substantive Disagreement**

As presented in the first chapter, relativists are proud to be in a position to explain faultless disagreement about taste. For now, their motivation for relativism and their arguments against contextualism will be accepted and it will be examined whether MacFarlane offers convincing characterisations of disagreement and whether he succeed in explaining disagreements about taste. Sundell and Plunkett's account of disagreement already suggests that there are different notions of disagreement at play in the debate between contextualists, nonindexicalists, and relativists. In order to investigate whether relativists succeed in explaining faultless disagreement and whether disagreements about taste are instances thereof, it is helpful to clarify what kinds of disagreements MacFarlane and the different semanticists are after. In the presentation of the different semantic positions in the first chapter, Koelbel's characterisation of disagreement was applied. He does not explicitly define disagreement, but his characterisation of disagreement involves opponents believing contradictory propositions (Koelbel [2004a] p. 53, 72).<sup>9</sup> However, MacFarlane makes use of a different notion of disagreement: as previously mentioned, at first, MacFarlane unspecifically takes a disagreement to involve incompatible beliefs. In a subsequent passage of his book, he disentangles different kinds and subkinds of disagreement and he investigates which semantic theory can best explain the kinds of disagreements present in disagreements about taste.

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<sup>9</sup> Probably, Koelbel's characterisation of disagreement only amounts to a sufficient condition for disagreement. At least, it is reasonable to suppose that he would describe opponents believing incompatible but not contradictory propositions as disagreeing as well. This would be the case if A believes p and B believes q while p entails non-q.

Before moving on to MacFarlane's distinctions, it is important to take note of the following terminological remark: throughout this thesis, different characterisations of disagreement will be discussed and it can be easy to lose track of the notion of disagreement at play. I will characterise and indicate the various notions of disagreement at play when it is not obvious that a specific notion of disagreement is discussed. Otherwise, "disagreement" is used as a neutral and unspecified term for all kinds of disagreement.

## 1. MacFarlane's Different Kinds of Disagreement

### 1.1 Five Clarifications

Before presenting MacFarlane's notions of disagreement, five clarifications will be made. First, MacFarlane adopts a distinction of Cappelen and Hawthorne in that he distinguishes *disagreement as state* from *disagreement as activity* (MacFarlane [2014] p. 119f., Cappelen & Hawthorne [2009] p. 60f.). According to MacFarlane, *disagreement as state* is a function of the opponent's first-order attitudes towards one another. However, he does not elucidate the notion much further. He notes that opponents can be in a disagreement as state, even though they don't know each other. In addition, he provides the example of the ancient Greeks and ancient Indians who are in a disagreement as state about whether the bodies of the deaths should be buried. They disagree, even though they did not know of one another. According to MacFarlane, attitudes include doxastic attitudes like beliefs or nondoxastic attitudes such as desires, likings, or preferences (MacFarlane [2014] p. 122). Further, he contrasts first-order attitudes with attitudes the opponents have towards each other (MacFarlane [2014] p. 119). He does not clarify this distinction, but according to his examples, attitudes towards one another concern the views about a certain issue that opponents ascribe to each other, while first-order attitudes seem to be the attitudes maintained by opponents regarding the issue in question. Disagreement as state concerns first order attitudes and MacFarlane probably takes the contents of these attitudes to be related in a certain way in order to count as disagreement as state. In his example, the ancient Greeks and ancient Indians believe contradictory contents.

*Disagreements as activity*, in contrast, does not concern first-order attitudes but attitudes held by opponents towards one another (MacFarlane [2014] p. 119). Opponents might be in disagreement as activity with or without underlying disagreement as state. The latter may be the case if opponents take their views about an issue to differ due to a misunderstanding. MacFarlane would likely consider the previously presented disagreement between an Englishman and an American about the sentence "Mostly, burgers are served with chips" to be a disagreement as activity without disagreement as state. As the apparent opponents both believe that *mostly, burgers are served with deep-fried long chunks of potato*, they agree about the relevant issue at stake. However, the opponents take the other party to express and believe a proposition they consider to be false: the American assumes the Englishman to wrongly believe that *mostly, burgers are served with deep-fried thin slices of potato* while the latter considers the former to wrongly deny that *mostly, burgers are served with deep-fried long chunks of potato*. Cappelen and Hawthorne point out that disagreement as activity involves some interaction between individuals. It is reasonable to suppose that opponents engage in an argument or at least somehow express their disfavour towards what they take to be the opponent's view.

According to MacFarlane, disagreement as state is the fundamental notion. In his view, it is plausible to suppose that disagreement as activity relies upon disagreement as state because opponents involve in a disagreement as activity if they take themselves to be in a disagreement as state. MacFarlane is only interested in disagreements as state. In his view, his different kinds of disagreements are all disagreements as state; this is probably why he does not specify the notion any further.

Second, presenting his different kinds of disagreement, MacFarlane talks about attitudes and in relation to doxastic attitudes he talks about beliefs. However, he presents his position of relativism in terms of propositions expressed through sentences. Although, occurring beliefs can be taken to have a proposition as content and this content can be regarded as having a context of use – the context in which the belief is thought – as well as contexts of assessment – contexts from which a belief is assessed. Accordingly, the relativistic framework can be applied to beliefs. Yet, beliefs are sometimes taken to be dispositional and dispositional beliefs don't seem to have a context of use and contexts of assessment. MacFarlane may thus be forced to restrict his accounts of disagreements to occurring beliefs.

Third, I would like to point out that MacFarlane presupposes a view of centred proposition: he assumes that sentences and thoughts express a proposition containing almost no information about the context. Rather, propositions have their truth value with respect to a possible world and a "centre" of this world, that is, a certain point of view in the world usually represented by a time, location, or individual (MacFarlane [2014] p. 125). Generally, MacFarlane is interested in the truth value of propositions with respect to their actual context of use and actual contexts of assessment; hence he does not consider other possible worlds. For MacFarlane, his distinctions of disagreements could be made, even though if it is assumed that propositions are uncentred (MacFarlane [2014] p. 124). Below, I will discuss this point further.

Fourth, in MacFarlane's view, all the different kinds and subkinds of disagreement presented below are substantive.<sup>10</sup> However, he does not further specify why this is so, nor does he – unlike other authors – distinguish substantive disagreements from nonsubstantive ones. His goal is to identify different kinds of (substantive) disagreements and to find out which kinds of disagreements are present in a certain dialogue of interest (MacFarlane [2014] p. 119). Thereby, the different semantic theories can be compared in relation to what kind of disagreement they take to be present in disagreements about taste. Quite a few philosophers consider verbal disputes to be nonsubstantive disagreements (see part II for different views on verbal disputes). MacFarlane does not talk about verbal disputes. In relation to contextualists, who are often accused of describing opponents in a disagreement about taste to engage in a verbal dispute, he maintains that there is no disagreement if apparent opponents make compatible claims (MacFarlane [2014] p. 8, [2007] p. 18).

Fifth, MacFarlane does not specify whether he offers definitions of the different disagreements. The way he formulates his characterisations, he at least seems to offer sufficient conditions for the different kinds and subkinds of disagreement. The discussion will now turn to MacFarlane's distinctions of disagreement.

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<sup>10</sup> MacFarlane talks about genuine or real disagreement. He does not further specify whether he uses the two terms with a difference in meaning. In many places, he seems to use the terms interchangeably. Other authors talk of substantive disagreements instead. If not specified differently, I will use the expressions "genuine", "real", and "substantive" interchangeably. In order to prevent confusion, only the latter term will be used.

## 1.2 First Kind of Disagreement: Noncotenability

First, MacFarlane characterises disagreement as noncotenability of attitudes (NC) (MacFarlane [2014] p. 121):

*Disagreement (NC)*

A disagrees with B's attitude if B's attitude is noncotenable with A's attitudes, that is if A could not adopt B's attitude (an attitude with the same content and force<sup>11</sup>) without changing her mind – that is, without dropping one of her current attitudes.

Probably, considerations of rationality would lead opponents in a disagreement (NC) to a change of mind. Disagreement (NC) holds for doxastic as well as for nondoxastic attitudes, as MacFarlane illustrates in the following examples (MacFarlane [2014] p. 121f.):

*Example 1: Doxastic Disagreement (NC)*

- (A) George believes that *all bankers are rich*.
- (B) Sally believes that *Vern is a poor banker*.

*Example 2: Nondoxastic Disagreement (NC)*

- (A) Jane likes Bob.
- (B) Sarah hates Bob.

In MacFarlane's view, George cannot adopt Sally's belief without changing his mind, because he cannot coherently believe that *all bankers are rich* and that *Vern is a poor banker* (and vice versa). Similarly, Jane cannot adopt Sarah's attitude, as it is practically incoherent to hate and like Bob at the same time (and vice versa). In considering full beliefs, disagreement (NC) leads to the following intuitive view of disagreement (MacFarlane [2014] p. 121):

*Simple View on Disagreement: Disagreement (NC) for full Beliefs*

To disagree with someone's belief that p is to have beliefs whose contents are jointly incompatible with p.

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<sup>11</sup> Depending on how the content is presented (as claim, desire, question, ...), it has a different force.

### 1.3 Second Kind of Disagreement

#### 1.3.1 Preclusion of Joint Satisfaction

Disagreements may involve a tension that can only be resolved if one or both opponents change their mind, as MacFarlane notes (MacFarlane [2014] p. 123). However, in the case of disagreement (NC) above between Jane and Sarah there is no such tension. This point is even more obvious in the following example (MacFarlane [2014] p. 123):

*Example 3: Nondoxastic Disagreement (NC) as Disagreement?*

- (A) Jane only wants to be with Bob rather than with anyone else.
- (B) Bob only wants to be with Jane rather than with anyone else.

The wishes of the lovers are practically noncotenable: Jane cannot wish to be only with Bob as well as only with Jane without being practically incoherent (and vice versa). Nevertheless, there is no tension between them; they are perfectly happy. MacFarlane makes use of a distinction of C.L. Stevenson to introduce a new kind of disagreement. Stevenson distinguishes between disagreement consisting of opposing beliefs that cannot both be true, and disagreement involving opposing attitudes that cannot both be satisfied (MacFarlane [2014] p. 123, Stevenson [1963] p. 2). Disagreement as *preclusion of joint satisfaction* (PJS) can now be introduced in relation to opposing nondoxastic attitudes that cannot both be satisfied:

*Disagreement (PJS)*

A disagrees with B's attitude if B's attitude precludes the satisfaction of A's attitude(s).

According to MacFarlane, noncotenability of attitudes depends upon the content of the attitude and its force. The satisfaction of (nondoxastic) attitudes additionally depends upon the contexts in which they occur. Thereby, it is possible that disagreement (PJS) and disagreement (NC) come apart. MacFarlane provides the following example for disagreement (PJS) without disagreement (NC) (MacFarlane [2014] p. 124):

*Example 4: Disagreement (PJS) without Disagreement (NC)*

- (A) Alvin wants to eat the cupcake on the table.
- (B) Melvin wants to eat the cupcake on the table.

It is not possible that Alvin and Melvin's wishes can both be satisfied: The cupcake can only be eaten by one of them and thus there is disagreement (PJS). However, it is suggested by MacFarlane that Alvin and Melvin have cotenable wishes because in relation to the cupcake, they have a wish with the same content: Alvin can acquire Melvin's wish *to eat the cupcake on the table* without giving up one of his present wishes (and vice versa), hence disagreement (NC) is not fulfilled.<sup>12</sup> Next, MacFarlane provides an example where only disagreement (NC) but not disagreement (PJS) is met (MacFarlane [2014] p. 124):

*Example 5: Disagreement (NC) without Disagreement (PJS)*

- (A) Meg wants to eat the frosting of the cupcake only.
- (B) Peg wants to eat the cake part of the cupcake only.

Meg and Peg have noncotenable wishes: Meg cannot take up Peg's wish *to eat the cake part of the cupcake only* without giving up one of her present wishes (and vice versa) and disagreement (NC) is met. However, disagreement (PJS) is not fulfilled: they can share the cupcake in the desired way and both wishes can be satisfied. (Similar considerations hold for the example with the two lovers, Jane and Bob: their wishes can both be satisfied if Jane and Bob stay together for the rest of their lives. This is the case, even though disagreement (NC) is met.)

### 1.3.2 Preclusion of Joint Accuracy

So far, disagreement (PJS) was distinguished from disagreement (NC) in relation to nondoxastic attitudes. However, similar considerations hold for doxastic attitudes. In context, doxastic attitudes are not considered to be satisfied but, rather accurate. MacFarlane specifies accuracy as a property of doxastic attitudes or speech acts (such as the thought of a belief or the utterance of a sentence). He provides the following rough characterisation of accuracy (MacFarlane [2014] p. 126f.):

*Accuracy (Rough Characterisation)*

To say that an attitude or speech act is accurate is to say that it (or its content) is true with respect to the circumstance that matters.

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<sup>12</sup> Please remember that according to MacFarlane the contents of the wishes in question are centred. If one takes the wishes to express uncentred contents then disagreement (PJS) as well as disagreement (NC) is met (see later).

Later, he characterizes accuracy more precisely as following (MacFarlane [2014] p. 127):

*Accuracy*

An attitude or speech act occurring at  $c_1$  is accurate, as assessed from a context  $c_2$ , just in case its content is true as used at  $c_1$  and assessed from  $c_2$ .

Accordingly, accuracy is a different way to talk about truth in context as illustrated in the first chapter: roughly, speech acts or doxastic attitudes are accurate if the expressed proposition is true with respect to the context of use (or the context of assessment) as circumstances of evaluation. Thereby, the utterance of some sentence (such as the utterance of "It's 10pm" at 10pm in the actual world) might be accurate even though the expressed proposition could be false evaluated with respect to some other context as circumstance of evaluation (e.g. evaluated with respect to 2pm in the actual world).

With the notion of accuracy at hand, disagreement as *preclusion of joint accuracy* (PJA) can be specified<sup>13</sup>:

*Disagreement (PJA)*

A disagrees with B's attitude if the accuracy of B's attitude precludes the accuracy of A's attitude.

Similar to disagreement (PJS), MacFarlane considers disagreement (PJA) and disagreement (NC) to be independent from one another. First, he provides the following example of a disagreement (PJA) without disagreement (NC) (MacFarlane [2014] p. 125):

*Example 6: Disagreement (PJA) without Disagreement (NC)*

- (A) In the actual world at 2pm, Andy believes the proposition that *I am eating a sandwich*.
- (B) In the actual world at 3pm, David believes the proposition that *nobody was eating a sandwich an hour ago*.

There is no disagreement (NC) as the two expressed beliefs are cotenable: Andy and David can believe both, *I am eating a sandwich* and *nobody was eating a sandwich an hour ago* without being incoherent. However, with respect to their

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<sup>13</sup> Later, MacFarlane distinguishes two subkinds of disagreement as preclusion of joint accuracy. This distinction is not yet important as in the examples discussed so far, there are no assessment sensitive sentences involved.

context of use, their beliefs cannot both be accurate: Andy's belief is accurate if he eats a sandwich at 2pm in the actual world. David's belief, however, is accurate if no one ate a sandwich an hour before 3pm, that is 2pm in the actual world. It is not possible that Andy eats a sandwich at 2pm in the actual world, while it is the case that no one eats a sandwich at 2pm in the actual world. Hence, Andy's belief cannot be accurate without David's belief being inaccurate (and vice versa) and there is disagreement (PJA).

Further, disagreement (NC) may occur without disagreement (PJA), as MacFarlane illustrates with the following example (MacFarlane [2014] p. 128):

*Example 7: Disagreement (NC) without Disagreement (PJA)*

- (A) Jane, living in the actual world, believes that *Mars has two moons*.
- (B) June, inhabitant of another possible world, believes that *Mars has one moon*.

The two beliefs are noncotenable and there is disagreement (NC): Jane and June cannot believe that *Mars has two moons* and that *Mars has one moon* without having incoherent beliefs. However, both of their beliefs can be accurate: Jane's belief is accurate if in her context of use – that is the actual world – Mars has two moons. Thereby, June's belief can be accurate as well, namely if in her context of use – in possible world  $W_2$  – Mars only has one moon.

Before moving on, I would like to take up the point that MacFarlane presupposes a conception of centred proposition for his illustration of disagreements. In taking propositions to be uncentred and to contain much information of the context – as contextualists do – then disagreement (NC) and disagreement (PJS) or disagreement (PJA) go together (MacFarlane [2014] p. 124 and 128). In example four, for instance, contextualists would describe Alvin and Melvin to desire the noncotenable contents that *Alvin eats the cupcake* and that *Melvin eats the cupcake*. Accordingly, there would be disagreement (NC) as well as disagreement (PJS) in their view. However, according to MacFarlane, the distinction between disagreement (NC) and disagreement (PJS) or disagreement (PJA) is not pointless, even if the two kinds of disagreement go together. In his view, it can at least be accepted that the distinction is purely notional (MacFarlane [2014] p. 124 and 127). Failing to make this distinction carries the risk of making use of equivocations in arguments regarding disagreements, as MacFarlane notes (MacFarlane [2014] p. 127). How-

ever, his examples could be more compelling had they not contained expressions like "I" that – in its ordinary reading – seem to be context sensitive in the contextualist sense  $(CS)_C$ . In addition, it could be questioned as to why contextualists should accept a distinction with no practical significance. Be this as it may, this thesis will grant MacFarlane's view on centred proposition and turns to MacFarlane's subkinds of disagreement (PJA).

### 1.3.3 Preclusion of Joint Accuracy & Assessment Sensitivity

According to MacFarlane, disagreement (PJA) can be understood in two ways if assessment sensitive expressions come into play. Before presenting this distinction, a brief reminder of the difference between relativists and nonindexicalists and contextualists will be provided: for truth in context, the latter two evaluate all contents of utterances with respect to the context of use as circumstance of evaluation  $((TC)_C$ ). Relativists, though, assume a further kind of context sensitivity  $(CS)_R$ , also called assessment sensitivity. The content of an assessment sensitive sentence is evaluated with respect to some context of assessment as circumstance of evaluation that may be different from the context of use  $((TC)_R$ ).

So far, MacFarlane's examples have not contained any assessment sensitive expressions. Accordingly, the respective propositions were always evaluated with respect to the context of use as circumstance of evaluation. However, if there is an assessment sensitive expression involved, the context of assessment as circumstance of evaluation must be specified. And it can be specified in two different ways: either the context of use of the different parties additionally serves as context of assessment. This leads to disagreement as *preclusion of joint reflexive accuracy* (PJRA), as MacFarlane notes (the following is a modified version of MacFarlane's (PJRA) which he did not formulate as disagreement between A and B, see MacFarlane [2014] p. 130):

*Disagreement (PJRA)*

A disagrees with B's attitude if the accuracy of B's attitude (*as assessed from B's context of use*) precludes the accuracy of A's attitude (*as assessed from A's context of use*).

However, it is also possible that the context of assessment is fixed to be the same context for A and for B's attitudes. This leads to the following notion of disagree-

ment that MacFarlane calls *preclusion of joint accuracy*. In order to prevent confusion with the notion of disagreement (PJA) above, heretofore it will be referred to as disagreement *preclusion of joint irreflexive accuracy* (PJIA) (this is a modified version of MacFarlane's (PJA), see MacFarlane [2014] p. 129):

*Disagreement (PJIA)*

A disagrees with B's attitude if the accuracy of B's attitude (*as assessed from any context*) precludes the accuracy of A's attitude (*as assessed from that same context*).

The difference between disagreement (PJRA) and disagreement (PJIA) can be illustrated with the disagreement about taste between Marta and Kurt:

*Example 8: Disagreement about Taste*

- (A) Marta believes the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious*.
- (B) Kurt believes the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious*.

First, it must be considered whether disagreement (PJRA) is met: if the proposition Marta believes is assessed with respect to the standard of taste operative in the context of use – that is Marta's taste – the proposition is true and her belief is accurate. The same holds for Kurt's belief: evaluated with respect to Kurt's standard of taste – the relevant standard in the context of use – the proposition he believes is true and his belief is accurate. Thereby, both beliefs can be accurate: the accuracy of Marta's belief does not preclude the accuracy of Kurt's belief (and vice versa). However, things look different regarding disagreement (PJIA): if Marta's and Kurt's believed propositions are evaluated with respect to the same context of assessment, not both of their beliefs can be accurate. If Marta's standard of taste serves as standard in the context of assessment, only her belief is accurate. The content of Kurt's belief is evaluated as false and Kurt's belief is not accurate (similar considerations hold the other way around if Kurt's standard of taste is taken to be relevant in the context of assessment).

Having distinguished those various kinds and subkinds of disagreement, MacFarlane seeks to analyse which of those are present in disagreements about taste. Further, he investigates what semantic position regarding predicates of personal taste

can account for what kind of disagreement. His considerations are presented below.

Before moving on, I would like to highlight that MacFarlane did not distinguish disagreement (PJRA) and disagreement (PJIA) regarding disagreements involving assessment sensitive expressions. Rather, he would probably take disagreement (PJRA) and disagreement (PJIA) to be met in disagreements without assessment sensitive expressions as well.<sup>14</sup> This may work for disagreement (PJRA) if "assessed" is read neutrally as *evaluated* with respect to A or B's context of use as circumstance of evaluation. However, disagreement (PJIA) seems to hold for disagreements involving assessment sensitive expressions only. At least, propositions expressed and believed in different contexts of use can only be assessed from the same context of assessment if they involve assessment sensitive expressions. In the following, the term "disagreement (PJA)" will be used for disagreements without assessment sensitive expressions while "disagreement (PJRA)" and "disagreement (PJIA)" will refer to disagreements involving assessment sensitive expressions (if not specified differently).

#### 1.4 Varieties of Disagreement in Disagreement about Taste?

MacFarlane points out that in disagreements about taste, disagreement (NC) in relation to nondoxastic attitudes is fulfilled (MacFarlane [2014] p. 130). Marta and Kurt have different feelings towards Château La Lagune 2014 and cannot adopt the feeling of the other person without being practically incoherent. However, as MacFarlane notes, even contextualists are able to explain disagreement (NC) in relation to nondoxastic attitudes: even if it is supposed that Marta and Kurt express cotenable propositions containing information about their own taste, there may be different noncotenable feelings associated with these propositions. MacFarlane suggests that noncotenable feelings could be a reason to engage in an argument, as the disputants may want to change one another's preferences.

However, in his view, disagreement (NC) regarding nondoxastic attitudes does not explain disagreement about taste. For MacFarlane, in disagreements about taste there often are disagreement markers such as "No". Further, propositional anaphora like "that" or "what" are often used in expressing disagreement in rela-

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<sup>14</sup> At least MacFarlane's remark that disagreement (PJRA) is met in paradigm objective disagreements (MacFarlane [2014] p. 130) points in this direction.

tion to a taste judgment such as "I don't believe that" or "What you are saying is false". In his view, this can only be explained by claiming disagreement in relation to the beliefs of the opposing parties (MacFarlane [2014] p. 131). Disagreement (NC) regarding doxastic attitudes satisfies this requirement. In contrast to contextualists, nonindexicalists and relativists can further account for disagreement (NC) in relation to doxastic attitudes in disagreements about taste: as they assume that the sentence "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious" and its negation uttered and believed by Marta and Kurt express contradictory propositions, Marta cannot adopt Kurt's belief without being incoherent (and vice versa).

According to MacFarlane, relativists can grasp disagreements about taste even more precisely: in their view, besides disagreement (NC) in relation to nondoxastic and doxastic attitudes, there is also disagreement (PJIA) (as shown above). Nonindexicalists fail to account for the latter. In their view, Marta and Kurt's beliefs are both accurate, since its accuracy depends upon the standard of taste operative in the respective contexts of use. However, according to relativists, different beliefs about taste held in different contexts of use may be assessed with respect to the single taste of an assessor operative in any given context of assessment.

Why should relativists be better off accounting for disagreement (PJIA) in disagreements about taste? MacFarlane points out one main advantage: relativists can explain the fact that in a disagreement about taste, opponents not only want to change the belief of the other person but want to refute it (MacFarlane [2014] p. 132). It is MacFarlane's view that a refutation is successful if the other person – apart from changing her mind – retracts her original utterance as inaccurate. For retraction, people use phrases like "I take that back" to undo the normative changes effected by the original utterance (MacFarlane [2014] p. 108). MacFarlane goes on to illustrate this point with the following examples: if a question is retracted, the audience does not have to answer any more. In addition, if a speaker retracts her utterance, it no longer must be defended and the audience is not entitled to rely on the accuracy of that utterance any more. According to MacFarlane, only relativists can explain this phenomenon, because there must be a context of assessment with respect to which the content of an utterance made in a context of use can be evaluated to be inaccurate.

Summing up, MacFarlane offers a characterisation of two kinds of disagreements: the first concerns the noncotenability of doxastic and nondoxastic attitudes (disa-

greement (NC)) while the second kind concerns the satisfaction of nondoxastic attitudes (disagreement (PJS)) and accuracy of doxastic attitudes. For the second kind of disagreement, the context of use or context of assessment of the attitudes in question are taken into account. Disagreement regarding doxastic attitudes are further divided into three subkinds: disagreement (PJA) regarding disagreements without assessment sensitive expressions and disagreement (PJRA) and disagreement (PJIA) for disagreements involving assessment sensitive expressions. Regarding disagreement about taste, contextualists can explain disagreement (NC) of nondoxastic attitudes while nonindexicalists can additionally explain disagreement (NC) regarding doxastic attitudes. Besides these two subkinds of disagreement, relativists can further account for disagreement (PJIA) in disagreement about taste. According to MacFarlane, with disagreement (PJIA) relativists elucidate disagreements about taste the most successful since they not only explain why opponents use disagreement markers but also why they want to refute the other party's belief. If disagreement (PJIA) is convincing, relativists might be better off than contextualists and nonindexicalists. Before investigating whether MacFarlane's disagreement (PJIA) is convincing, MacFarlane's view on faultlessness will be examined.

### 1.5 MacFarlane on Faultlessness

In the first chapter, the different semantic theories were introduced with regard to whether they can account for faultless disagreement. However, so far, MacFarlane has only talked about disagreement. He explains that he is mainly interested in disagreement about taste and that he even tries to avoid talking about faultless disagreement (MacFarlane [2014] p. 133f). In his view the phrase is ambiguous: there are not only several notions of disagreement, but "faultless" can be understood differently as well. He lists four ways to understand the term, as follows (MacFarlane [2014] p. 133):

- (i)  $\text{faultless}_w = \text{epistemically warranted}$
- (ii)  $\text{faultless}_t = \text{true}$
- (iii)  $\text{faultless}_a = \text{accurate}$
- (iv)  $\text{faultless}_n = \text{not in violation of constitutive norms governing belief/assertion}$

MacFarlane tests the different kinds of faultlessness against two kinds of disagreement: doxastic disagreement (NC) and disagreement (PJIA). His goal is to investigate whether there is any interesting sense of faultless disagreement. In discussing the different notions of faultless disagreement, MacFarlane takes a disagreement to be faultless if the opponents can coherently take themselves to be in faultless disagreement with the other party (in the senses of disagreement and faultlessness specified).

First,  $\text{faultless}_w$  works with both kinds of disagreement (MacFarlane [2014] p. 134). In disagreement (NC) and in disagreement (PJIA), the opponents can coherently take the other party to hold a warranted belief. However, in MacFarlane's view, the characterisation of  $\text{faultlessness}_w$  does not lead to any interesting form of faultless disagreement because it only concerns the warrant of beliefs. A disagreement (NC) about objective facts, for instance, might be  $\text{faultless}_w$  once both disputants have a warranted belief even though one of their beliefs is false.

Second,  $\text{faultlessness}_t$  cannot be combined with either disagreement (NC) or disagreement (PJIA), as noted by MacFarlane. For him,  $\text{faultlessness}_t$  concerns the monadic truth predicate. (In his view, relativists are free to treat the monadic truth predicate just as any other predicate in the object language – the language for which a semantics is given).<sup>15</sup> He only explains why there is no  $\text{faultless}_t$  disagreement (NC) (MacFarlane [2014] p. 134): if B coherently characterises A's belief as true (using the monadic truth predicate), then it is not coherent for B to take himself to be in disagreement (NC) with A. Rather, it is possible for B to hold A's belief without giving up any current beliefs, and A's attitude is cotenable with B's attitudes. Similar considerations seem to hold for  $\text{faultless}_t$  disagreement (PJIA): if B coherently takes A to hold a true belief (using the monadic truth predicate), there is no room for disagreement (PJIA) because it is incoherent for B to take some belief to be true (using the monadic truth predicate) while evaluating it as not being accurate with respect to B's context of assessment as circumstance of evaluation.

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<sup>15</sup> MacFarlane offers the following semantics for the monadic truth predicate (MacFarlane [2014] p. 93):

*Semantics for monadic "true"*

"True" expresses the same property at every context of use – the property of being true. The extension of this property at a circumstance of evaluation  $e$  is the set of propositions that are true at  $e$ .

The relativist view of monadic truth will not be explored any further, as these considerations are not important for the following parts of this thesis.

Regarding the third kind of faultlessness,  $\text{faultless}_a$ , it is important to remember that the accuracy of some assessment sensitive attitude may be specified differently (as true with respect to the respective contexts of use as context of assessment or as true with respect to some further context of assessment as circumstance of evaluation). It is likely that MacFarlane deliberately does not specify "accuracy" in  $\text{faultless}_a$ , as he wishes to test the notion with respect to both specifications of accuracy. In his view,  $\text{faultless}_a$  cannot be combined with disagreement (PJIA) (MacFarlane [2014] p. 134): if the accuracy of attitudes as *assessed from the same context of assessment* as circumstance of evaluation is precluded (as required in disagreement (PJIA)), then in a disagreement at least one of the disagreeing attitudes is inaccurate. Accordingly, the opponents cannot describe the other party as holding a belief that is accurate (assessed from the same context of assessment). In contrast,  $\text{faultless}_a$  can be combined with doxastic disagreement (NC), as MacFarlane notes (MacFarlane [2014] p. 134). There may be beliefs with contents that are doxastically noncotenable, while both beliefs are accurate as *assessed from the respective contents of use as context of assessments*. Kurt's and Marta's beliefs regarding the deliciousness of Château La Lagune 2014, for instance, can both be accurate even though the contents of the beliefs are doxastically noncotenable.

In MacFarlane's view, the fourth kind faultlessness,  $\text{faultless}_n$ , is compatible with disagreement (PJIA) and disagreement (NC) (MacFarlane [2014] p. 134): the norms governing beliefs and assertions are connected to accuracy specified by the believer's or assessor's context of assessment.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, both specifications of "accuracy" are anchored in norms governing assertions. Thereby,  $\text{faultless}_n$  disagreement (NC) is possible: opponents may hold beliefs with contents that are not cotenable although neither belief violates norms of beliefs/assertion as they are accurate, that is, its contents are true with respect to the contexts of use as context of assessment. As seen above, that is the case according to the nonindexicalist analysis of the disagreement between Marta and Kurt. Further,  $\text{faultless}_n$  disa-

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<sup>16</sup> For instance, MacFarlane specifies the following reflexive truth rule and the retraction rule (MacFarlane [2014] p. 103, 108)

*Reflexive Truth Rule*

An agent is permitted to assert that p at context  $c_1$  only if p is true as used at  $c_1$  and as assessed from  $c_1$ .

*Retraction Rule*

An agent in context  $c_2$  is required to retract an (unretracted) assertion of p made at  $c_1$  if p is not true as used at  $c_1$  and assessed from  $c_2$ .

greement (PJIA) is possible as well: there is disagreement (PJIA), as the beliefs of the disagreeing parties cannot both be accurate since its contents cannot both be true when evaluated with respect to the same context of assessment as circumstance of evaluation. However, the disagreement may be faultless<sub>n</sub>, as neither belief might violate norms of belief/assertion as its contents might be true when evaluated with respect to the different contexts of use as contexts of assessment. This kind of *faultless<sub>n</sub> disagreement (PJIA)* is compatible with the relativist theory of predicates of personal taste: while Marta regards Kurt's belief to be inaccurate, she acknowledges that he did nothing wrong in asserting his belief because its content is true evaluated with respect to his context of assessment: hence, his belief is accurate if his context of use is considered to be the context of assessment. MacFarlane succeeds in accounting for different kinds of faultless disagreement. However, in order to avoid misunderstandings, he does not want to use the notion any further (MacFarlane [2014] p. 136). For his motivation of relativism, MacFarlane only makes use of the notion of disagreement. In this thesis faultlessness will not be explored further and attention will be directed to MacFarlane's different characterisations of disagreement. Thereby, mainly disagreements regarding doxastic attitudes will be discussed, particularly MacFarlane's core notion for disagreement about taste – disagreement (PJIA) – that is highly disputed.

## 2. Objections to MacFarlane's Characterisations of Disagreement

### 2.1 Doxastic Disagreement (NC)

Before discussing objections to MacFarlane's disagreement (PJIA), this section will examine whether disagreement (NC) and disagreement (PJRA) are convincing kinds of disagreement. Primarily, a remark will be made about the connection between doxastic disagreement (NC) and truth and accuracy.<sup>17</sup> MacFarlane presents disagreement (NC) regarding doxastic attitudes by pointing out that two doxastic attitudes are noncotenable if one person cannot coherently adopt the other person's attitude without giving up a current attitude (MacFarlane [2014] p. 121). In his examples, the beliefs seem to be incoherent because the expressed

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<sup>17</sup> Thanks to Sebastian Schmoranzer for this point.

propositions cannot both be true with respect to the *same* circumstance of evaluation. Hence, disagreement (NC) in relation to doxastic attitudes concerns the truth of propositions of beliefs with respect to the same circumstance of evaluation: A cannot adopt the proposition expressed by B's belief without believing two propositions that cannot both be true with respect to A's context of use (and context of assessment) as circumstance of evaluation (and vice versa). In other words, if A adopted the proposition expressed by B's belief, she would have two beliefs that cannot both be accurate. Thereby, nothing is said about whether the proposition of B's belief is true with respect to *his* context of use (and context of assessment) as circumstance of evaluation, hence nothing is said about the accuracy of *his* belief. Let's now examine whether disagreement (NC) is a convincing kind of disagreement. Again MacFarlane's example is considered wherein disagreement (NC) is fulfilled without disagreement (PJA) being met (MacFarlane [2014] p. 128):

*Example 7: Disagreement (NC) without Disagreement (PJA)*

- (A) Jane, living in the actual world, believes that *Mars has two moons*.
- (B) June, inhabitant of another possible world, believes that *Mars has one moon*.

Quite a few philosophers have recently literature pointed out that in their view, there is no (substantive) disagreement between Jane and June. According to Francén, for instance, there would only be substantive disagreement between Jane and June, if the opponents at least intended their judgments to hold in the same circumstance of evaluation (Francén [2010] p. 25). In an earlier paper, even MacFarlane noted that there is no substantive disagreement between Jane and June, as both their beliefs/assertions are accurate (MacFarlane [2007] p. 23). At the least, Stevenson's tension is missing in the example: the apparent opponents have no interest in changing the other person's belief, because both beliefs are accurate. (Similar considerations hold in relation to nondoxastic attitudes in MacFarlane's fifth example.) And it remains unclear what the opponents disagree about. There seems to be a lack of an intuition of disagreement according to both Francén and early MacFarlane. Later, in his book *Assessment Sensitivity*, MacFarlane takes the example of Jane and June to be a kind of substantive disagreement because disagreement (NC) is met. However, MacFarlane should further motivate

such a position on disagreement (NC). At the least, he should try to explain away contrary intuitions.

Please note that nonindexicalists cannot explain doxastic disagreement about taste anymore if disagreement (NC) is not considered to be a kind of substantive disagreement. With their semantics they cannot account for disagreement (PJIA). Hence, if disagreement (NC) is not considered to be a substantive kind of disagreement, nonindexicalists are no better off than contextualists; they must fall back on an explanation of disagreement about taste in terms of nondoxastic disagreements.

## 2.2 Disagreement (PJRA)

This section will explore disagreement (PJRA). So far, MacFarlane has not provided a positive example of a disagreement (PJRA). Are there disagreements involving assessment sensitive expressions that amount to a disagreement (PJRA)? Julia Zakkou attempts to provide an example where disagreement (PJRA) is met (Zakkou [MS] p. 7):

*Example 9: Disagreement (PJRA)*

- (A) A believes the proposition that *liquorice is delicious*. Further, A loves liquorice.
- (B) B believes the proposition that *liquorice is delicious*. However, B hates the taste of liquorice.

Evaluated with respect to the respective contexts of use as circumstances of evaluation, A's belief is accurate as A likes liquorice while B's belief is inaccurate as he hates liquorice and disagreement (PJRA) is met. However, as Zakkou notes, example 9 does not seem to amount to a substantive kind of disagreement – again, the intuition of disagreement does not seem to be met. The only tension regarding the example concerns B's belief and his preferences in matter of taste: the proposition expressed by his belief is false according to his standard of taste hence his belief is inaccurate. However, disagreement seems to be a relation between the beliefs of two persons or between the earlier and subsequent beliefs of the same person. Further, in the example, MacFarlane's taste principle (TP) is violated, because B calls some food delicious even though its flavour is not pleasing to him.

Accordingly, the example does not provide a convincing case of disagreement (PJRA).

It seems difficult to find a plausible example involving assessment sensitive expressions where disagreement (PJRA) is met. As already noted, MacFarlane may take disagreement (PJRA) to be met in disagreements without assessment sensitive expressions as well. Thereby, "assessed" in disagreement (PJRA) could be read neutrally as *evaluated* with respect to A or B's to the circumstance of evaluation specified in the context of use. If this was the case, there would be disagreement (PJRA) in any disagreement where disagreement (PJA) is met: if not both beliefs of the opponents can be accurate with respect to the respective circumstances of evaluation specified in the contexts of use as, there is disagreement (PJRA) as well as disagreement (PJA). It is possible to still distinguish these different subkinds of disagreement. Thereby, disagreement (PJRA) would be the more general notion of disagreement than disagreement (PJA) since theoretically, it may help classify arguments involving assessment sensitive expressions to be a disagreement as well. However, the question could be posed as to why such a distinction should be of any help, as there does not seem to be any application.

### **2.3 Disagreement (PJA)**

If disagreement (PJA) is restricted to disagreements without assessment sensitive expressions – as suggested – it does not seem to be a contentious subkind of disagreement. At least, MacFarlane's examples of disagreement (PJA) are not disputed to be substantive disagreements.

### **2.4 Disagreement (PJIA): No Clash of Truth Values in Disagreement (PJIA)**

The following parts will discuss three kinds of objections against MacFarlane's disagreement (PJIA). First, Stojanovic and Francén argue that disagreement (PJIA) is not a convincing kind of disagreement: there is no clash in truth value between the opponents' expressed propositions as the different parties know that they are evaluated with respect to different contexts as circumstance of evaluation. Dreier and Marques, belonging to the second group of challengers, do not attack MacFarlane's disagreement (PJIA) directly, but argue that relativised accuracy does not make any conversational sense. Third, Carter and Schafer's views will be

presented and discussed. They consider whether disagreement (PJIA) is substantive, even though in a peer disagreement about taste relativists are not able to explain why peers are rationally required to revise their beliefs.

#### 2.4.1 Stojanovic: With Semantic Competence against Disagreement (PJIA)

Stojanovic negates the possibility of faultless disagreement in the first place. However, her claim is stronger: even if there was faultless disagreement, she argues, relativists would not be able to account for it. Her argument starts with the following assumption (Stojanovic [2008] p. 696):

*Semantic Competence (SC)*

Speakers of English are semantically competent with predicates of taste: they master their meaning and truth conditions.

Stojanovic argues that relativists, as well as contextualists, subscribe to (SC). If faultless disagreement is endorsed, (SC) should be accepted. Otherwise the disagreement in question may only be a byproduct of the ignorance of how predicates of personal taste contribute to truth conditions. With the help of (SC) Stojanovic launches the following argument (Stojanovic [2008] p. 696f., adapted to the disagreement between Marta and Kurt): given (SC), Marta first knows that the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious* can be true or false depending on the standard of taste with respect to which the proposition is evaluated. The same holds for Kurt. Secondly, they know that a proposition and its negation are inconsistent if they are evaluated with respect to the same standard of taste. Thirdly, they both know that Marta intends her proposition to be evaluated with respect to her taste and that Kurt wants the negation of Marta's proposition to be evaluated with respect to his taste. If the propositions are evaluated with respect to the intended standards of taste, there is no clash in truth values between their expressed propositions, as Stojanovic notes, and they both know that. As there is no clash in truth values, it is her view that there is no disagreement, rather only a divergence in preferences (Stojanovic [2008] p. 697).

Stojanovic could be interpreted as claiming that disagreement (PJRA) (not disagreement (PJIA)) is not fulfilled: the disputants know that their utterances are both accurate if the expressed proposition is evaluated as being true with respect to the context of use as circumstance of evaluation. Further, they do not offend to the

opponent due to their different evaluation of the expressed proposition because they are aware that propositions can be evaluated differently with respect to different standards of taste.

However, if Stojanovic's argument is read as being directed against disagreement (PJRA), MacFarlane might reply that he never claimed that disagreement (PJRA) is met in disagreements about taste. Rather, in his view, disagreement (PJIA) is fulfilled. However, with the help of (SC) it is possible to argue against disagreement (PJIA) as well: first, Marta knows that Kurt is not only in the position to evaluate the negation of her proposition with respect to his standard of taste. Indeed, she knows that he can evaluate her uttered proposition with respect to his standard of taste relevant in the context of assessment. Second, she knows that according to Kurt's standard of taste not both propositions can be true. As propositions can be evaluated differently with respect to different standards of taste, she knows thirdly that it is possible (and according to the conversation, reasonable to believe) that Kurt judges her proposition to be false and his negation of the proposition to be true with respect to his standard of taste operative in the same context of assessment. As similar considerations hold the other way round, there is again no clash in truth values between their expressed propositions, because they know that they are evaluated with respect to different standards of taste. There would only be a clash of truth values if they evaluated the expressed propositions differently with respect to the *same* standard of taste.

In her argument, Stojanovic seems to suppose that there is only disagreement if there is a clash of truth values between the expressed propositions when they are evaluated with respect to the same context as circumstance of evaluation. Francén makes this point explicit, as will be seen in the following section.

#### **2.4.2 Francén: Disagreement (PJIA) is no Disagreement between Persons**

According to Francén, there is only disagreement between two persons if they disagree about the truth values of the disputed propositions in question at a given circumstance of evaluation. He formulates his necessary condition for disagreement as following (Francén [2010] p. 29):

*Disagreement (DP) (Disagreeing Persons)*

There is a circumstance of evaluation, C1, such that each person holds some proposition to be true at C1, and the two propositions cannot both be true at the same circumstance of evaluation.

He argues for disagreement (DP) by pointing out that the opponents do not disagree about the truth value of some proposition when they do not disagree about its truth value *in a given circumstance of evaluation*, as a proposition does not have a truth value independent of a circumstance of evaluation (Francén [2010] p. 29). In relation to the example of Marta and Kurt, Francén would likely criticise the lack of circumstance of evaluation (i.e. lack of context of assessment as circumstance of evaluation) for which they disagree about the truth value of the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious* and its negation. Rather, they agree about the truth value of the propositions at every context of assessment: for instance, Marta acknowledges that Kurt judges her uttered proposition to be false while Kurt accepts his uttered proposition to be evaluated as false with respect to Marta's standard of taste – at least if (SC) is given (see above). If Marta and Kurt agree about the truth values of the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious* and its negation in every circumstance of evaluation, there is no room for disagreement about truth in Francén's view (Francén [2010] p. 30). This leads to a lack of intuition of disagreement (similar to the lack of intuition of disagreement regarding disagreement (NC)). Again, Stevenson's tension is missing; as both beliefs are accurate, the apparent opponents have no interest in changing the other person's belief. Accordingly, it remains unclear what disagreement (PJIA) is about, since at least the disagreement does not seem to be about the truth of the expressed propositions because the opponents agree about their truth values in every circumstance of evaluation.

In addition, the question arises as to who is disagreeing with whom in disagreement (PJIA). In disagreement (PJIA) only one context of assessment and hence only the context of one person at a time serves as circumstance of evaluation. Disagreement (PJIA) mainly says that the contents of two beliefs cannot both be true when evaluated with respect to the same context of assessment as circumstance of evaluation. Thereby, at least one belief is evaluated differently as intended by one of the believers. And it is questionable whether there exists disagreement if beliefs are evaluated differently than intended. A believer would probably emphasise that she didn't want the content of her belief to be evaluated with respect to a context

different from her context of use. If she does not succeed in stopping the assessor, she would probably retract the belief as soon as it is evaluated with respect to a different context as circumstance of evaluation – and it is difficult to talk about disagreement if one person denies believing the content in question. At least, it is natural to conceive of disagreement as a relation regarding the beliefs of two persons (or maybe regarding beliefs of one person held at different times).

### 2.4.3 A Possible Rejoinder: Disagreement about Standard of Taste

As a possible rejoinder to the arguments above, MacFarlane may claim that disagreements about taste are about the standard of taste. Thereby, the disagreement would only be implicitly about the truth of the proposition: Marta does not mainly object that according to Kurt's standard of taste her proposition is evaluated as false. However, she objects that the proposition is evaluated as false because she regards his standard of taste to be worse than hers. Accordingly, Marta and Kurt might be taken to disagree about which standard of taste should be used to evaluate judgments of taste.

However, if standard of taste is taken to be the topic of disagreements about taste, we encounter two problems. First, it seems questionable whether it is reasonable to object to the standard of taste of some other person. At least, there does not seem to be a chance for success in changing a standard: how can one influence an affective response that is physically triggered? What seems to be open to influence is the perception of flavourings: that is why taste can be trained. However, as presented in the first chapter, MacFarlane does not conceive disagreements about taste as disagreements about the sensation of some flavouring.

Second, one may ask for an explanation why the disagreement centres on the standard of taste, while the opponents utter contents concerning the deliciousness of some food. It might, for instance, be claimed that there is a disagreement about some pragmatically communicated content such as *Marta's standard of taste is better than Kurt's standard of taste* and its negation. However, as presented in the last chapter, MacFarlane denies that disagreements about taste concern some pragmatically communicated content. In addition, if MacFarlane took disagreements about taste to be about the standard of taste, he would not have to introduce disagreement (PJIA) at length. Rather, there would be disagreement (NC) or disagreement (PJA) regarding some pragmatically communicated content. According-

ly, disagreement about some pragmatically communicated content regarding the standard of taste does not seem to be an option for MacFarlane.

Summing up disagreement (PJIA) does not seem to be a very convincing subkind of disagreement. As the opponents know that they evaluate the contents of their beliefs with respect to different contexts as circumstances of evaluation, there is no tension between their beliefs and it remains unclear what opponents disagree about. Further, conceiving disagreement about taste as disagreement about the standard of taste – which was suggested as a rejoinder to the difficulties of disagreement (PJIA) – is not an option for MacFarlane.

As it is questionable what opponents in a disagreement (PJIA) disagree about, it could be asked as to why they engage in a disagreement in the first place. Dreier and Marques argue that according to MacFarlane's view on relativised accuracy, disagreements about taste make no conversational sense. Their objections are presented in the next section.

## **2.5 Disagreement (PJIA): What is the Goal of Relative Accuracy?**

### **2.5.1 Dreier: (PJIA) as Disagreement without Sense**

James Dreier objects to MacFarlane that disagreement (PJIA) makes no conversational sense (Dreier [2009]). He mainly criticises an explanation for the practical significance of disagreement (PJIA) provided by MacFarlane in *Relativism and Disagreement*. According to MacFarlane, relativists must motivate why the notion of accuracy is relativised to contexts of assessment (MacFarlane [2007] p. 27). In his view, an explanation can be given in terms of Brandom's conversational norms (MacFarlane [2007] p. 28, Brandom [1983], [1994]): an assertion is taken to be a move in the game of giving and asking for reasons. It is MacFarlane's opinion that the classification of assertions into accurate and inaccurate has the following practical significance (MacFarlane [2007] p. 28):

#### *Accuracy and Challenges*

Accuracy is the property we must show assertions to have in order to vindicate them in face of challenges, and it is the property we must show others' assertions not to have if our challenges are to be justified.

This account of accuracy can be applied to relativised accuracy as follows (MacFarlane [2007] p. 28f.):

- (i) one is entitled to challenge an assertion when one has good grounds for thinking that the assertion was not accurate (relative to the context of assessment one occupies in issuing the challenge), and
- (ii) a successful response to such a challenge consists in a demonstration that the assertion was, in fact, accurate (relative to the context of assessment one occupies in giving the response).

Dreier, discussing MacFarlane's paper, gives an example of a disagreement with relative accuracy involved (Dreier [2009] p. 102):

*Disagreement with relativised Accuracy and Challenges*

Suppose we introduce a sentence allowed to be asserted when the speaker has a headache. Well, we could play this game. I shout, "It is throbbly in here", and you challenge. You assess "It is throbbly in here" from your own perspective and, pain free, find it badly defective (inaccurate); you find you were entitled to your challenge. I now roll my eyes, place my head in my hands, grope around for Ibuprofen, thus demonstrating that from my perspective my assertion was entirely accurate; I have successfully (from my perspective) met the challenge. We could play this game. But it would be a bad game.

Before moving on, please note that MacFarlane probably would not accept Dreier's example, as he most likely would not take "throbbly" to be an assessment sensitive expression. Accordingly, the accuracy of "It is throbbly in here" is not relative. However, a similar game could be played with the sentence "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious". MacFarlane admits that a disagreement involving assessment sensitive expressions can look pretty silly (MacFarlane [2007] p. 29). He then goes on to explain what would be missing if we did not have assessment sensitive expressions: they foster controversy in subjective domains such as conversations about taste. Because controversy is usually uncomfortable, they encourage coordination. In disagreements about taste, coordination may be required because we want people to cook nice food when we are visiting. However, as MacFarlane notes, it is unclear why controversy about subjective matter should be uncomfort-

able in the first place. He admits that disagreement about taste may seem irrational. Nevertheless, people do disagree about taste and assessment sensitive expressions account for this fact – even though it might be claimed that it should not be a fact (MacFarlane [2007] p. 30). Indeed, as previously explained, in his book *Assessment Sensitivity*, he takes the main advantage of relativism to be the fact that it can explain why opponents engaging in a disagreement about taste not only want to change the belief of the other party, but why they want to refute it (MacFarlane [2014] p. 132). For refutation, a person should be able to judge an earlier utterance as inaccurate and that is only possible from a context of assessment from which the utterance made in a context of use can be assessed.

Dreier acknowledges MacFarlane's considerations. However, he emphasises that his point is not only that disagreements about taste are silly. In his view, they make no conversational sense at all (Dreier [2009] p. 102). According to Dreier, other pointless disagreements – a disagreement about whether human beings are four or three dimensional, for instance – at least make sense as a disagreement, even though there are no arguments that can convince the opponents of each other's position. However, he goes on to state that in a disagreement about whether or not it is throbbing, all that is happening is that one person has a headache while the other one does not and they both know that (Dreier [2009] p. 103).

However, Dreier does not really put forward an argument for his position or against disagreement (PJIA). He merely provides a disagreement that seems silly to him. Thereby, this disagreement contains an expression MacFarlane probably would not consider to be assessment sensitive. Further, Dreier doesn't give any criteria for non-silly disagreements.

It is acknowledged in this thesis that there is something unsatisfying or silly about MacFarlane's view on disagreement about taste and it could be because of his stance on relativised accuracy. But one has to formulate more precisely why it is unsatisfying. Teresa Marques offers a new interpretation for relativised accuracy. However, it turns disagreements about taste in pointless conflicts. Her considerations are presented in the following paragraph.

### **2.5.2 Marques: Accuracy to increase our Knowledge**

Marques has a slightly different view on the practical significance of accuracy than MacFarlane. She derives her idea from the role held by uncentred proposi-

tions in conversation. In her view, the information that a belief is true is used to infer that the proposition expressed is true and the hearer is in a position to update her knowledge (Marques [2014] p. 139). However, this picture no longer works if propositions are considered to be centred. In order to extend her knowledge, a hearer not only needs to know whether a belief is true, she further requires information of the relevant context (Marques [2014] p. 139f.). Marques provides the following example to illustrate her point: If Gonzo, speaking about a show, says "It's beginning", the hearer should know the relevant moment of time concerned otherwise the assertion is not very helpful. According to Marques, Gonzo only succeeds in communicating information if the hearer knows the context that matters in order to decide whether his assertion is accurate. Therefore, the accuracy or inaccuracy of speech acts matters to the hearer to make the right inferences. Marques' point might be more compelling if the context of use is not immediately accessible to the hearer. If someone on the phone says "It is sunny", for instance, the hearer cannot tell whether this assertion is accurate unless she knows of the interlocutor's at that moment. So let's grant Marques' view on accuracy for now.

In the view of Marques, accuracy should play the same role in matter of taste. Unfortunately, it does not, as she points out (Marques [2014] p. 140): first, a hearer gains no informational advantage from the knowledge that another person's attitude is accurate or inaccurate. That is because she may not have the possibility to know whether the context of assessment of the other person is relevantly like her own. Second, according to Marques not even the accuracy of one's own attitudes is worth considering: there may be no predictable way of knowing whether the own context of assessment will change soon. In Marques' opinion, disagreements about taste turn into pointless conflicts.

In my view, Marques criticism of accuracy regarding utterances of taste is not fully convincing. An assessor always evaluates an utterance of an interlocutor as being accurate or inaccurate with respect to *her own* context of assessment. If Kurt judges his own utterance of the sentence "Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious" to be accurate, Marta will know that his standard of taste is such that he does not like the wine in question. She knows that his standard of taste is different from hers because she evaluates Kurt's utterance to be inaccurate with respect to her context of assessment. From the information that an utterance is judged as accurate with respect to some context of assessment, one always gains at least some information about the context, namely about the preferences of the assessor.

This information can be used: Marta might, for instance, refrain from serving Kurt Château La Lagune 2014 when she next hosts dinner. Further, standards of taste do not change from one second to another: the accuracy of an utterance will hold at least for a certain time. Thereby, it can again be useful to know whether an utterance is considered to be accurate: Marta's knowledge that her utterance was accurate can, for example, help her decide to buy the same Bordeaux again. Hence, Marques' considerations are not persuasive. In addition, Marques does not argue against MacFarlane's view of accuracy in the first place. If she sought to criticise accuracy regarding utterances of taste, it would be fair if she did not only offer her own (and, in her view, unsatisfying) account of accuracy, but rather if she discussed MacFarlane's views on accuracy as well.

Summing up, I agree with Dreier and Marques that it is questionable whether disagreements about taste make any conversational sense. However, I agree also with MacFarlane that it is a fact that we argue about taste. So one has to come up with an explanation: As we have seen in the last two chapters, there are different options. It is possible to explain away disagreements about taste, it could be argued that the disagreement is about some general standard of taste or about some pragmatically communicated content such as which standard of taste is better or how "is delicious" should be used. However, in the first two options ordinary speakers are imputed to make mistakes and the third option is not elaborated convincingly enough. If ordinary speakers are taken seriously and if disagreements about taste are to be about the literally expressed content, different cutbacks must be made. So must MacFarlane; he has to admit that disagreements about taste are irrational or silly in the first place. Accordingly, there is something funny about disagreements about taste. After all, the various different explanations for disagreement about taste have faced problems thus far. The only option is to decide which problems to face. Thereby, MacFarlane chose to account for the speakers' ordinary use of predicates of taste while acknowledging that disagreements about taste might be irrational.

There is a further objection directed against disagreement (PJIA): some argue that disagreement (PJIA) would only be substantive when the opponents are willing to change their beliefs in face of disagreement – but they are not. These considerations are connected to a debate about peer disagreements in epistemology, as will be presented in the following section.

## **2.6 Disagreement (PJIA):**

### **Disagreement about Taste in face of Epistemic Peers**

#### **2.6.1 Carter: Disagreement (PJIA) without Epistemic Significance**

Carter investigates whether disagreement (PJIA) exhibits the epistemic significance that substantive disagreements are supposed to embody (Carter [2014]): in his view, disagreement (PJIA) would only be epistemically significant if relativists were able to explain why it is rationally required to revise one's belief in response to disagreement (PJIA) with an epistemic peer. Hence, Carter connects the semantic debate about whether relativism can explain disagreement with a debate about peer disagreement in epistemology. In the second debate it is discussed whether one should rationally revise one's belief that *p* in response to an epistemic peer who believes non-*p*. Epistemic peers are mostly characterised as being on par with respect to their cognitive ability and evidence relevant to determine whether *p* (Carter [2014] p. 44, Lackey [2010]). As Carter illustrates, there are three positions arguing for different reactions in relation to peer disagreements. First, conformists like Adam Elga and David Christensen suppose that before actually making a judgment, epistemic peers should take into account that both are equally likely to get it wrong (Carter [2014] p. 44, Elga [2007], Christensen [2007]). Further, if it comes to a disagreement, the disagreeing parties should – as a reaction to the first point – at least lower the credence of their beliefs. Strong views of conformism demand even a suspension of judgments. Second, there are so called non-conformists such as Thomas Kelly and Peter van Inwagen (Carter [2014] p. 45, Kelly [2005], van Inwagen [1996]) who allow for rational peer disagreement and see no need for peers to revise their beliefs if they recognise themselves as disagreeing. Conformists as well as non-conformists treat peer disagreements concerning different domains of discourse in the same way. However, as Carter notes, Lackey observed that certain cases of disagreement are usually used to support the conformist position, while others are typically used to support the non-conformist view (Carter [2014] p. 45, Lackey [2010]). If one is ready to treat different peer disagreements differently, there is room for a third and intermediate position. Lackey defends such a position, as Carter points out (Carter [2014] p. 45, Lackey [2010]): Lackey claims that it should be decided on a case-by-case basis whether it is rational to revise a particular belief or whether it is preferable to stick to the original judgment in the face of peer disagreement.

Carter does not wish to investigate the different positions any further; rather he points out that if some class of peer disagreement mainly seems to support conformism, this is a reason to endorse a conformist view regarding such cases (Carter [2014] p. 46). He states that peer disagreements that support conformism concern controversial subject matter including politics, religion, philosophy and taste. In Carter's view, peer disagreements about taste thus support conformism. Accordingly, regarding peer disagreement about taste, relativists should be able to explain why opponents are rationally required to revise their beliefs.

Is the disagreement between Marta and Kurt a case of peer disagreement? As the disagreement was presented in the first chapter of this thesis, it seems to be a case of peer disagreement: first, in relation to their cognitive and physical abilities they seem to be on par, since the opponents were taken to have more or less the same sensory apparatus on more or less the same level of education. Second, they have the same evidence, as they taste the same wine. However, relativists are unable to explain why it should be rational for epistemic peers about taste to revise their beliefs in face of a peer disagreement. As Carter explains, this is because, according to relativists, the connection between epistemic peerhood and the likelihood of getting it right breaks down (Carter [2014] p. 49): Cognitive and evidential equality does not entail equality of standards of taste. Thereby, the standard of taste is as important as evidence and cognition to make a true taste judgment. And it may be that epistemic peers about taste have a different standard of taste, thus they judge some of the foods in question differently. As relativists are unable to explain why it is rational for epistemic peers about taste to revise their beliefs, Carter doubts whether disagreement (PJIA) can be considered a substantive disagreement at all (Carter [2014] p. 49).

I think Carter is right – relativists are not able to explain why epistemic peers about taste should revise their judgment. However, relativists make no effort to try to meet this challenge. Rather, they seem happy to conceive disagreements about taste to remain unchanged in face of epistemic peers. Do disagreements about taste thereby fail to be substantive? The answer to this question depends upon whether epistemic peers about taste are in fact rationally required to revise their own judgment. Relativists must find an explanation why epistemic peers about taste are rationally required to hold onto their original belief. Karl Schafer attempts to meet this challenge regarding moral disagreements. His considerations

are presented below and will be tested as to whether they apply to disagreements about taste as well.

### 2.6.2 Schafer: Disagreement (PJIA) and Rationally Holding to One's Belief

#### *Moral Disagreements as substantive and resistant*

Similar to Carter, Schafer investigates whether substantive disagreement with a peer should lead to the suspension of judgment and if relativists can account for this. He studies moral disagreements but later discussion will move onto disagreements about taste as well. Schafer starts with some thinker believing the claim *p* and sketches the sceptical argument also run by Carter as follows (Schafer [2012] p. 603):

- (1) I have a peer with respect to *P* who believes that *P* is false.
- (2) Thus, I have a genuine [i.e. substantive] disagreement with this peer concerning *P*.
- (3) When I have a genuine [i.e. substantive] disagreement about *P* with a peer with respect to *P*, I ought to suspend judgment concerning *P*.
- (4) Thus, I ought to suspend judgment concerning *P*.

As presented above, in Carter's view relativists are unable to accept the argument in relation to peer disagreements about taste because they are not able to account for substantive disagreement (premise (2) is not fulfilled). Schafer, however, takes relativists to be in the position to reject the sceptical argument in not accepting premise (3). In his view, with regard to disagreement (PJIA), relativists succeed in meeting the following two conditions (Schafer [2012] p. 605):

#### *Depth of Disagreement*

It preserves our sense that my disagreement with my peer concerning *P* is more than merely skin-substantive. At the very least, it explains why such disagreements have many – if not all – of the features we associate with genuine [i.e. substantive] empirical disagreements.

#### *Resistance to Disagreement*

It explains why it can be rational to maintain our beliefs about *P* in the face of moral peer disagreement – at least, to a greater degree than is true in the empirical case.

According to Schafer, relativists are able to account for resistance to disagreement because they relativise truth. He assumes, roughly, that it is permissible to judge and assert  $p$  if  $p$  is true with respect to one's current context of assessment (Schafer [2012] p. 609). Further, in his view, the fact that a proposition might be false in relation to another context of assessment does not force a peer to suspend judgment in order to be rational, so long as she knows that the proposition expressed by belief is true with respect to her context of assessment. Thus, step (3) in the argument above is blocked.

However, the question arises – as asked by Carter – whether relativists succeed in rejecting (3) while being able to account for Schafer's depth of disagreement. In Schafer's view, relativists can account for deep – or substantive, as it will be called – disagreement if the following conditions are met (Schafer [2012] p. 611):

- (i) The parties to the disagreement possess judgments that cannot be held by a single party at the same time without irrationality.
- (ii) Indeed, the parties possess judgments that cannot simultaneously be true, in the ordinary  $\text{true}_O$  sense [that is the truth predicate that obeys the equivalence scheme, MacFarlane talks about the monadic truth predicate, (MacFarlane [2014], p. 38)].
- (iii) So long as the conversation continues, the parties will generally regard themselves as being under some obligation to try to bring it about that they converge upon a shared view of the issues under dispute.
- (iv) Finally, the parties will regard straightforward moral assertions and conversations as fully successful only if they have achieved such a convergence.

According to Schafer relativists succeed in meeting (i) – (iv) for disagreement (PJIA) if they combine their semantic views with the norms governing moral discourse. In his view, conditions (i) and (ii) are fulfilled (Schafer [2012] p. 611f): within the disagreement discussed by relativists the two parties believe contradictory propositions  $p$  and  $\text{non-}p$ . Further, they consider it to be a fact about the concept *not* that it is never rational to believe both  $p$  and  $\text{non-}p$  (due to conceptual role semantics), thus (i) is met. Schafer expands the latter idea to relativised notions of truth: according to the concept *not*,  $p$  and  $\text{non-}p$  can never both be true with respect to a single context of assessment. The same will also hold for the

propositions  $p$  is  $true_O$  and  $non-p$  is  $true_O$  respectively (remember that MacFarlane treats the monadic truth predicate like any other predicate in the object language). Accordingly, relativists can explain why  $p$  and  $non-p$  can never both be true independently from whether truth is understood as  $true_O$  or true in the relativised sense. Thereby, (ii) is fulfilled as well.

In Schafer's view, relativists are further able to account for conditions (iii) and (iv) (Schafer [2012] p. 613f.). In his view, this becomes clear if the purpose of moral assertions is considered. Schafer formulates the aim of assertion and aim of conversation – adapted to a relativistic semantics – in relation to Stalnaker (Schafer [2012] p. 616, Stalnaker [1999]):

*Aim of Assertion*

When one asserts an assessor sensitive proposition in straightforward conversation, one aims to bring it about that this assertion is true relative to the context of assessment of every person in one's conversational context.

*Aim of Straightforward Conversation*

When one asserts an assessor sensitive proposition in straightforward conversation, one aims to bring it about that this assertion has the same truth value relative to the context of assessment of every person in one's conversational context.

According to Schafer, there is pressure to reach agreement – otherwise the conversation is abandoned. In his view, this pressure to converge is an important feature of moral disagreements (Schafer [2012] p. 616): opponents perform speech acts trying to make the other person change her context of assessment and so her moral standard. The moral standard of a context of assessment depends upon moral beliefs and attitudes in Schafer's opinion. The result being that a conversation can change these beliefs. Accordingly, it is also possible that beliefs that are first taken to be true are evaluated differently with respect to the new moral standard. Therefore, actions (iii) and (iv) regarding moral disagreement are met.

If with a moral assertion, one aims to bring about that the proposition expressed is true with respect to the opponent's context of assessment, and if the goal of a moral conversation is to achieve a common attitude towards a certain proposition, the question arises as to how opponents in a moral peer disagreement can rationally maintain their original beliefs. According to Schafer, peers need only to feel a pressure to arrive at a common view if they wish to remain in conversation with

each other (Schafer [2012] p. 617f.). In such a situation, the following norm for peer disagreement is met (Schafer [2012] p. 618):

*Norm for Peer Disagreement*

If a peer with respect to some assessor sensitive P asserts or judges that P, and P is not true relative to one's own context of assessment, then one must alter one's confidence in P only insofar as one is committed to achieving a successful resolution to potential conversations with that peer about such matters.

However, Schafer suggests that peers are also free to stop arguing – because they realise that the conversation is pointless, for example – as long as the controversial proposition is true with respect to their own context of assessment. In this view, relativists are therefore in a position to explain the depth of moral disagreement as well as resistance to it.

Would relativists agree to Schafer's solution? Are his considerations convincing? Further, it can be asked whether Schafer's explanation holds for disagreement about taste as well. These questions will be answered below.

*Taste Disagreements as substantive and resistant*

Even though MacFarlane does not specify the actions licensed or required by disagreement, he may accept conditions (i) to (iv) as being associated with substantive disagreement. He would probably take (i) and (ii) to be fulfilled regarding disagreement (PJIA). At least, when introducing disagreement (PJIA) he notes that in relation to incompatible taste propositions, there is no context of assessment in which beliefs regarding these incompatible propositions are both accurate (MacFarlane [2014] p. 129).

In relation to condition (iii), MacFarlane has a slightly different view of the aim of an assertion. As seen above, MacFarlane talks about a game of giving and asking for reasons (MacFarlane [2007] p. 28): to vindicate an assertion in the face of a challenge, it must be shown that the assertion is accurate and to challenge an assertion it must be shown that an assertion is not accurate. Thereby, the question can be raised as to why assertions should be challenged in the first place. Yet, a reasonable answer along Schafer's line can be given: assertions are challenged because it is hoped to bring the opponent to judge a proposition to have the same truth value as it is judged to have. Accordingly, MacFarlane would probably agree

to condition (iii). Condition (iv) seems to be more contentious insofar as MacFarlane never talks about successful conversations and he may consider a conversation to be successful even though there is no convergence.

However, even though MacFarlane seems to agree with Schafer's general ideas, he does not seem to be in a position to describe disagreements about taste as suggested. As already explained, it is Schafer's view that the aim of moral conversations is to achieve a common attitude towards a certain proposition. Thereby, opponents try to change the other party's context of assessment and this is only possible if the other party changes her moral standard. Accordingly, the disagreement implicitly seems to be about the moral standard – regarding taste judgments, it would be about the standard of taste. Thereby, the same problems arise as previously discussed: most of all, in contrast to moral disagreements, in disagreements about taste a standard of taste cannot be changed easily. Either one likes a certain food or one does not. Why and when taste changes remains mostly obscure. Further, it seems strange to assume that the standard of taste changes due to a conversation about food. Additionally, such a disagreement would not be about the literally but instead about some pragmatically communicated content about the moral standard. Furthermore, as presented in the last chapter, MacFarlane denies that disagreements about taste are about some pragmatically communicated content.

Independently from whether MacFarlane would accept Schafer's explanation for substantive disagreement applied to disagreements about taste, the question arises as to whether Schafer's considerations are convincing. In my view, Schafer's explanation faces the following problem: while the disagreement is substantive, opponents argue about some moral claim, and so his four conditions relating to substantive disagreements are met. However, if it is decided to stop arguing in face of an epistemic peer, conditions (iii) and (iv) do not hold any more. Thus, epistemic peers may be rational in maintaining their original beliefs in the face of peer disagreement, but their conversation ends and the situation no longer amounts to a substantive disagreement in Schafer's sense. Hence, Schafer seems to end at the same point as Carter: either the opponents disagree, but are then rationally required to achieve convergence in their moral view. Or the opponents are not ready to suspend judgment, but there is no longer any place for substantive disagreement. Schafer may be correct in holding that relativists succeed in explaining both why peers are not rationally required to revise their beliefs in the face of peer disagreements, and why there is substantive disagreement between them. However,

he does not seem to be able to explain that both phenomena hold at the same time. To sum up, with disagreement (PJIA) about taste, relativists fail to provide an account of substantive disagreement that takes opponents in a peer disagreement to rationally revise their beliefs. According to Carter, disagreement (PJIA) thus fails to be substantive and Schafer's considerations are of no help for relativists. However, relativists could refuse to take suspension of judgment in the face of peer disagreement to be a necessary condition for substantive disagreement. Carter simply assumes such a necessary condition for substantive disagreements without further arguing in support of this claim. Relativists could also plead for non-conformism and argue that it is not required to suspend judgment in the face of epistemic peer disagreement at all. Accordingly, there are options in which relativists can meet Carter's challenge, but this thesis will not elaborate any further on them. For now it is important to record that disagreement (PJIA) is also questioned to be a substantive disagreement from an epistemic point of view.

### **3. Summary**

MacFarlane takes upon himself the arduous task of characterising and disentangling different kinds and subkinds of disagreement. However, considering doxastic attitudes, only disagreement (PJA) is not disputed. There was no convincing example of disagreement (PJRA) and some examples meeting disagreements (NC) showed no tension, remaining unclear as to what the apparent opponents disagreed about. Disagreement (PJIA) is the relativist core notion of disagreement: only relativists are in a position to explain this subkind of disagreement and it is supposed to explain why opponents in a disagreement about taste not only want to change the other party's belief, but why they want to refute it. There must be a context of assessment from where the utterance made in a context of use (different from the context of assessment) can be evaluated as inaccurate. However, disagreement (PJIA) adopts the most difficult stand. First, as Stojanovic and Francén remark, there is no clash in truth values between the expressed propositions as the opponents agree about the truth values of the propositions evaluated with respect to every circumstance of evaluation. Accordingly, the tension between the opponents' claims is missing and it remains unclear what the opponents disagree about. Because MacFarlane refuses to consider disagreements about taste

as disagreement about some pragmatically communicated content, there seems to be no way to meet the challenge posed by Stojanovic and Francén. Second, Dreier and Marques argue that MacFarlane's relative accuracy turns disagreements about taste in silly or pointless conflicts. In my view, Dreier and Marques' criticism is not fully convincing since they interpret MacFarlane's view not only charitably. However, he must admit that disagreements about taste seem irrational or silly. Perhaps he set the target too high in terms of explaining disagreement about taste as being disagreements about the literally expressed content. However, as has been seen, all positions considering disagreements about taste face serious problems. It seems as if one must choose which problems are the lesser of the evils. Third, Carter objects that disagreement (PJIA) is not substantive, as in the face of peer disagreement opponents are not ready to suspend judgment. Schafer tries to show that disagreement (PJIA) in moral discourse could be substantive even though peers might not suspend judgment in the face of peer disagreement. However, his considerations do not carry over to disagreements about taste in a way satisfying for MacFarlane. So he must find a different way out from this challenge.

## **Conclusions to Part I**

Relativists praise their semantic theory because they take themselves to offer the best explanation for disagreements about taste. MacFarlane disentangles different kinds and subkinds of disagreements and he offers the relativists' most sophisticated account of disagreement about taste. However, disagreement (PJIA) – the relativist core notion of disagreement – is not a convincing subkind of disagreement and MacFarlane is forced to defend it on several fronts simultaneously. Criticism of disagreement (PJIA) hits MacFarlane especially hard, as he motivated and built up his semantic theory of relativism in order to explain disagreement about taste. Without convincing characterisation of disagreement about taste that distinguishes relativism compared to other semantic theories, relativism as a whole semantic theory is challenged. However, as already mentioned, it is not yet clear whether other semantic theories perform better. They also face serious problems regarding disagreements about taste and in order to decide which one is the best performer, it is important to investigate which disadvantages are outweighed. This task will be left to others. The goal of this part of the thesis was to assess MacFarlane's characterisations of disagreement and to explore whether he succeeded to explain disagreements about taste. I consider him to fail to explain disagreement about taste in a satisfying way. Further, even though he made some useful distinctions in presenting his different kinds and subkinds of disagreements, only his account of disagreement (PJA) regarding disagreements without assessment sensitive expressions is convincing. In the following part of this thesis, the discussion will move on to ontological disagreements about whether there exist temporal parts – a second disagreements that cannot easily be judged to be verbal disputes or a substantive disagreements.



Part II

Ontological Disagreements

## Chapter I

### Hirsch's Characterisation of Verbal Disputes

There is a second fervently discussed disagreement in philosophy: ontologists argue as to whether some ontological disagreements are substantive disagreements or verbal disputes. Eli Hirsch defends a limited version of Rudolf Carnap's thesis that issues in ontology amount to nothing more than choosing one language over another (Hirsch [2009], Carnap [1945]). Contrary to Carnap, he does not claim that this holds for all, rather only some disagreements in ontology – especially for the disagreement between perdurantists and endurantists such as the disagreement between Edna and Pedro, who argue about whether there exist temporal parts of an object (Hirsch [2009] p. 240):

Pedro: "In front of us there is a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence." (S)

Edna: "No, in front of us there is no succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence." ( $\neg$ S)

In a series of essays, Hirsch carries out the undertaking to characterise verbal disputes (Hirsch [2005], [2008a], [2008b], [2009], [2013]). In his paper *Ontology and Alternative Languages* – the main focus of this thesis – he offers the following characterisation of a verbal dispute (Hirsch [2009] p. 239):

(VD)<sub>H</sub> A disagreement is a verbal dispute if, given the correct view of linguistic interpretation, each party will agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language.

As already illustrated at the beginning of this thesis, (VD)<sub>H</sub> applies to the paradigmatic case of a verbal dispute between an Englishman and an American arguing about the truth of the sentence "Mostly, burgers are served with chips". The

latter may interpret the former to talk about deep-fried long chunks of potato, while the former may interpret the latter to talk about deep-fried thin slices of potato. Further, they both agree with the content they interpret the other party to express, as they both agree that *mostly, burgers are served with deep-fried long chunks of potato* and that *mostly, burgers are not served with deep-fried thin slices of potato*. (Hirsch has a strict conception of language as two persons speak a different language if they use an expression such as "chips" with a different meaning). As will be illustrated in section 2 of this chapter, Hirsch argues that (VD)<sub>H</sub> applies to the disagreement between Edna and Pedro as well.

Other philosophers, among them Theodore Sider and David Chalmers, are unhappy with Hirsch's result and they put forward arguments in order to show that the disagreement is substantive (e.g. Sider [2009], [2014], Chalmers [2009], [2011]). In Hirsch's characterisation of verbal disputes, it is not only important that the opponents agree with the content they interpret the other party to express; the interpretation must be correct too. Thereby, the speaker's linguistic behaviour and Donald Davidson's *principle of charity* are the keys to correct interpretation: a speaker should be interpreted as using an expression as reasonable and faultless as possible (Hirsch [2009] p. 240, Davidson [1984]). If in a linguistic community speakers utter a sentence, S, only when an apple is present, they should not be interpreted as talking about elephants. Chalmers and Sider do not agree with Hirsch's view on correct interpretation. In their view, speakers may express the same content with an expression despite difference in use. Sider claims that ontologists use the existential quantifier with the same meaning to talk about the structure of reality (Sider [2009]). Additionally, he suggests that in some situations interpreters should be in a position to partially and locally suspend considerations of charity (Sider [2014] p. 567f.). Chalmers argues that some ontological disagreements involve bedrock expressions – expressions that express the same content even when used differently. Such disagreements appear to be verbal disputes at first sight while being substantive disagreements called bedrock disputes (Chalmers [2011]).

The first chapter of this part of the thesis centres on Hirsch's account of a verbal dispute. After a sketch of the dialectic of the debate between endurantists and perdurantists Hirsch's characterisation of verbal disputes will be presented. Thereafter, it will mainly be examined whether his (VD)<sub>H</sub> is a useful criterion to identi-

fy verbal dispute. In passing, it will be considered whether the disagreement between Edna and Pedro is convincingly described as verbal dispute.

In the second chapter, an illustration of Chalmers' characterisations of verbal disputes and bedrock disputes will follow. It will also be investigated whether his characterisations are convincing and whether it is reasonable to describe Edna and Pedro to engage in a bedrock dispute.

The debate between Sider and Hirsch will not be discussed any further. Sider and Chalmers' main idea that some ontological expressions such as the existential quantifier express the same meaning despite difference in use are alike. I chose to discuss Chalmers' views as contrary to Sider he also puts forward his ideas regarding verbal disputes and substantive disagreements. In addition, the presentation of Sider's view of the meaning of the existential quantifier would require many elucidations and clarifications that are of no help regarding the main goal of this thesis – the characterisation and comparison of various characterisations of verbal disputes and substantive disagreements.

Before moving on, take note of the following terminological remark: in order not to lose track of the notion of (substantive) disagreement or verbal dispute under discussion, the different notions will be indicated if necessary. Otherwise, especially before it is clear what notion of disagreement and verbal dispute a particular author has in mind, the expressions will be used as neutral and unspecified terms. I will also use "disagreement" for dialogues that are not yet determined to be substantive disagreements or verbal disputes.

## **1. Ontological Disagreement between Pedro and Edna**

### **1.1 Endurantism vs. Perdurantism**

Nikk Effingham provides a helpful overview of the different positions in relation to perdurantism and endurantism. He describes a perdurantist as a metaphysician who believes that ordinary objects are stretched in space as well as time (Effingham [2012] p.170f.). Accordingly, objects have temporal parts analogous to spatial parts. A person, say Effingham, born 1979, has a 1979 temporal part, that is him from his birth until the end of 1979. He has a 1980 temporal part as well and

if he reaches 100 years of age, he will have 100 one-year-long temporal parts, one for every year. A temporal part can be more fine-grained; it can be a day-long temporal part or an attosecond long temporal part. According to Effingham, Sider's definition of temporal part is currently the most popular (Effingham [2012] p. 171, Sider [2001] p. 53 – 62):

*Temporal Part*

$x$  is a temporal part of  $y$  during interval  $T$  =df (i)  $x$  is a part of  $y$  at every moment during  $T$ ; (ii)  $x$  exists during, but only during,  $T$ ; and (iii) for any sub-interval  $t$  of  $T$ ,  $x$  overlaps every part of  $y$  at  $t$ .

Further, as Effingham specifies, perdurantists believe that an ordinary physical object bears an atemporal relation to its parts; hence an object has its temporal parts with no temporal qualification. In contrast, Effingham characterises an endurantist as denying the perdurantist assumptions that objects have temporal parts (Effingham [2012] p.171). According to endurantists, objects rather are wholly present whenever they exist: they move through time and do not occupy it analogously to how spatially extended objects occupy regions of space.

There are different ways to understand the debate between perdurantists and endurantists. Hirsch, one of the most prominent critics of their alleged disagreement, interprets endurantists and perdurantists to disagree about what objects exist: they agree about the existence of ordinary objects, but they argue about whether there additionally exist temporal parts of ordinary objects (Hirsch [2009] p. 232). In Effingham's opinion, this is the most popular reading of the debate (Effingham [2012] p. 172). Perdurantists argue for their position by pointing out that with the assumption of temporal parts, quite a few metaphysical puzzles can be solved: they offer, for instance, a solution to the problem of change and the paradoxes of material constitution. Many endurantists state that the assumption of temporal parts is counterintuitive. Endurantists often argue for their position by showing that they can provide convincing endurantist answers for the problems that perdurantists are proud to solve. In order to get an impression of the dialectic of the disagreement some arguments regarding the problem of change are sketched below.

## 1.2 The Problem of Change

One problem in ontology is how change is possible. Ryan Wasserman, who provides an overview of the problem of change, explains that change may appear paradoxical because it requires sameness as well as difference (Wasserman [2006] p. 48): in considering a ripening banana changing from green to yellow, firstly, the ripe and the unripe banana must be identical; otherwise it remains unclear how *the banana* can change. Second, in order for the situation to involve change, the ripe and the unripe banana must also be different in some sense. Thereby, being green and being yellow are considered to be incompatible properties. However, the second condition for change conflicts with *Leibniz's Law* (LL), which says that two objects are identical only if they share all their properties (Wasserman [2009] p. 49):

(LL) For any  $x$  and any  $y$ , if  $x = y$  then  $x$  and  $y$  have all the same properties.

Hence, according to (LL), the green and the yellow banana must be two different objects.

Perdurantists offer a solution to this problem by pointing out that change involves having different parts with different properties: the banana has a temporal part that is yellow and a temporal part that is green. Thereby, the paradox regarding (LL) is avoided because the incompatible properties of being green and being yellow are attributed to different objects, namely to different temporal parts of the banana (see e.g. Lewis [1986] p. 204). There is some discussion as to whether perdurantists provide a convincing solution to the problem. John McTaggart, for instance, objects that having different parts with different properties is not sufficient for change. A poker does have a hot and cold part, however, it does not change (McTaggart [1926] chapter 33). Hugh Mellor offers a different argument against the perdurantist solution: in his view the banana as a whole is neither green nor yellow according to perdurantists hence it cannot change between these two stages. Further, the temporal parts are either permanently yellow or permanently green, so they cannot change either (Mellor [1998] section 8.4, Hawley [2010] p. 5).

Perdurantists provide different replies to these challenges. However, independently from whether these rejoinders are successful it is possible to wonder how en-

durantists solve the problem of change. They provide different answers. One straightforward solution for the problem of change defended by Mellor is to introduce a temporal element into the property: if the banana is green at  $t_1$  it has the property of being-green that stands in a relation to a certain time,  $t_1$ , hence the property being-green is time-indexed (Mellor [1981] p. 111ff. and [1998] chapter 8). For David Lewis, however, this solution is unsatisfactory because the properties of having a colour or having a shape are no longer intrinsic (Lewis [1986] p. 204). In his view, intrinsic properties are entirely about the thing that has this property while an extrinsic property is about some larger whole that includes the thing as a part (Lewis [1983c] p. 211f.). This definition may be more helpful if Lewis' examples of intrinsic and extrinsic properties are considered: having a certain shape is intrinsic as a thing has a certain shape even if it is considered apart from its relations to other things (Lewis [1986] p. 204). Being an uncle, on the contrary, is extrinsic. In order to be an uncle, a man must stand in a certain relationship to some other person, namely he has to be the brother of a parent. (Unsurprisingly, there is no consensus among philosophers about which properties are intrinsic.) If shape and colour are considered to be relations to certain times, they are not intrinsic properties any more – but they should be according to Lewis.

Again, the details of the arguments and rejoinders will not be discussed any further. For the purpose of this thesis it does not matter whether endurantists or perdurantists provide more convincing answers to the problem of change. The goal of this section is simply to illustrate the different positions: perdurantists believe in the existence of temporal parts because they take them to solve certain problems in ontology – the problem of change is only one of them. Endurantists, in contrast, judge the assumption of temporal parts to be counterintuitive. Further, they take themselves to provide convincing endurantist answers for the problems that perdurantists are proud to solve.

The discussion will now move on to Hirsch's characterisation of verbal disputes.

## 2. Hirsch's Characterisation of Verbal Disputes

Call to mind Hirsch's characterisation of a verbal dispute (Hirsch [2009] p. 239):

(VD)<sub>H</sub> A disagreement is a verbal dispute if, given the correct view of linguistic interpretation, each party will agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language.

In order to understand Hirsch's (VD)<sub>H</sub>, it is important to note primarily what he takes to be the correct view of linguistic interpretation and, second, what is needed for one party to agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language. I will try to clarify these two points in the following sections.

Before moving on, I will emphasise two points: first, Hirsch does not specify whether he offers a sufficient, a necessary or a necessary and sufficient condition for a verbal dispute. For all that he claims the disagreement between Edna and Pedro is a verbal dispute because (VD)<sub>H</sub> is met. Accordingly, he likely takes (VD)<sub>H</sub> to amount to a sufficient condition for a verbal dispute. If he sought to offer a necessary condition for a verbal dispute, he would have had to show that in every verbal dispute, opponents would agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language, given the correct view of linguistic interpretation. Thereby, Hirsch would presuppose several assumptions about rationality, e.g. that opponents engaging in a verbal dispute will always agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language. Second, Hirsch seems to oppose verbal disputes to substantive disagreements. In his paper *Ontology and Alternative Languages* [2009], Hirsch scarcely talks about substantive disagreements. However, in earlier papers and again, in a later one, he contrasts verbal disputes with substantive disagreements or substantive questions (see e.g. Hirsch [2005] p. 67, 72, 73, [2007] p. 368, 374, [2013] p. 437, 440). Despite this, he does not further characterise what a substantive disagreement amounts to.

### 2.1 Speaking the Truth in its own Language

#### 2.1.1 The Languages of Pedro and Edna

Recall the disagreement between Edna, the endurantist who does not believe in temporal parts, and Pedro the perdurantist, who believes in the existence of tem-

poral parts. It is to be questioned as to how Edna can agree that Pedro is asserting a true sentence in his language (and vice versa). In order to illustrate this point, Hirsch portrays Edna as an endurantist who wants for some reason to pass herself off as a perdurantist. In order not to lie (i.e. to say something she herself believes to be false), she secretly endows perdurantist sentences with a different meaning. According to Hirsch, she records this fact in her diary (Hirsch [2009] p. 233):

Henceforth I will use the expression "temporal part of an object" when I want to talk about how an object is at a certain time. I'll say "Lincoln had in 1860 a temporal part that was bearded" to describe the situation in which Lincoln was bearded in 1860. In general, I'll use a sentence of the form "*a* has at time *t* a temporal part that is *F*" to be true of a situation in which *a* is *F* at *t* [...].

Similarly, Pedro endows endurantist sentences with a different meaning. In his diary he writes (Hirsch [2009] p. 234):

Henceforth I will in every context restrict my quantifier to objects accepted by endurantists – roughly, objects other than (proper) temporal parts of ordinary bodies.

Hirsch calls Edna's secret language P-English because according to Edna's interpretation of the language, she takes the sentences asserted by perdurantists to be true. Pedro's new language is called E-English as he considers endurantist sentences to be true. Confronted with the question as to whether objects have temporal parts the answer is "yes" in P-English and "no" in E-English. As the answer depends on the language spoken by the individual, Hirsch calls the disagreement about this question a verbal dispute (Hirsch [2009] p. 234).

Hirsch emphasises that it is not that easy to find an alternative language for the opponent's sentences. A proponent of a certain position – say Edna – must develop a language for the opponent's position – perdurantism – in which all propositions Edna believes can be expressed while asserting perdurantist sentences only. Thereby, it is important to note that nothing is said about the actual truth value of the sentences or the propositions they are taken to express. It is not required that the sentences or propositions to which Edna or Pedro assent are in fact true. They rather interpret the opponent's sentences in a way such that they *believe* that they are true.

While discussing these points it is useful to be aware of Hirsch's terminology (Hirsch [2009] p. 234): like David Lewis, he takes a *proposition* to be a set of possible worlds. Thereby, a proposition can be understood as the content of a sentence that is or determines the set of possible worlds in which it is true. Further, following David Kaplan, Hirsch considers the *character* of a sentence to be a function that assigns a proposition to a sentence (in a context of use) (Hirsch [2009] p. 234, Kaplan [1977], see p.9f. in this thesis for a detailed discussion of Kaplan's position). In addition, an *interpretation* of a language is taken to be a function that assigns a character to each sentence of a language. Further, Hirsch assumes that a language is *individuated* by an interpretation hence distinct languages do not have the same interpretation and different interpretations make for different languages. Apparently, Hirsch embraces quite a strict conception of what it means for languages to differ: as soon as two speakers use one expression with a different character they speak different languages.

However, there seems to be a problem with Hirsch's conception of a language. Perdurantism (Pedro's original language) and P-English (Edna's interpretation of Pedro's sentences), as well as Endurantism (Edna's original language) and E-English (Pedro's interpretation of Edna's sentences) do not seem to be the same language. This will become clear in a moment. First, it will be emphasised that according to Hirsch, Endurantism and P-English are distinct languages. As Hirsch describes the example, each language contains the same set of characters, however, they are redistributed over the sentences in shifting from one language to the other. The same holds for Perdurantism and E-English (Hirsch [2009] p. 235). In contrast, according to Hirsch's characterisation of a language Endurantism and Perdurantism seem to amount to the same language: the same sentences are associated with the same characters and they are taken to express the same propositions. However, Edna and Pedro do not believe the same propositions. In the following, Endurantism and Perdurantism will be taken as the same language – it might also be called the face value interpretation of Edna and Pedro's disagreement. I will nevertheless continue to talk about Endurantism and Perdurantism, as the example was set up in this manner.

Below, I will illustrate the different languages using the sentences  $S$  and  $\neg S$  of Pedro and Edna's original disagreement. It is important to note that Hirsch did not

compare the languages in this way. However, the description of the situation and his characterisation of Edna and Pedro's secret languages suggest such a reading.

*Endurantism (Edna's original language) and Perdurantism (Pedro's original language)*

S "In front of us there is a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence."

character In front of the speakers there is a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence. ( $c_{E1/P1}$ )

proposition In front of Edna and Pedro there is a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence. ( $p_{E1/P1}$ ) (Pedro believes this proposition while Edna does not believe it.)

$\neg$ S "No, in front of us there is no succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence."

character In front of the speakers there is no succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence. ( $\neg c_{E1/P1}$ )

proposition In front of Edna and Pedro there is no succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence. ( $\neg p_{E1/P1}$ ) (Edna believes this proposition while Pedro does not believe it.)

*P-English (Edna's interpretation of Perdurantism)*

S (see above)

character The stick in front of the speakers is different at different times. ( $cE2$ )

proposition The stick in front of Edna and Pedro is different at different times. ( $pE2$ ) (Edna believes this proposition.)

$\neg$ S (see above)

- character      The stick in front of the speakers is not different at different times. ( $\neg cE2$ )
- proposition    The stick in front of Edna and Pedro is not different at different times. ( $\neg pE2$ ) (Edna does not believe this proposition.)

*E-English (Pedro's interpretation of Endurantism)*

- S                    (see above)
- character      There exists (in a restricted sense) a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick in front of the speakers that persist for a moment and then go out of existence. (cP2)
- proposition    There exists (in a restricted sense) a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick in front of Edna and Pedro that persist for a moment and then go out of existence. (pP2) (Pedro does not believe this proposition.)
- $\neg S$                 (see above)
- character      There does not exist (in a restricted sense) a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick in front of the speakers that persist for a moment and then go out of existence. ( $\neg cP2$ )
- proposition    There does not exist (in a restricted sense) a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick in front of Edna and Pedro that persist for a moment and then go out of existence. ( $\neg pP2$ ) (Pedro believes this proposition.)

It now becomes apparent that Edna assigns Pedro's sentence S a character ( $cE2$ ) so that it expresses a proposition ( $pE2$ ) she believes. Similarly, Pedro interprets Edna's  $\neg S$  with the character  $\neg cP2$ ; accordingly, he believes the proposition ( $\neg pP2$ ) it expresses.

However, as mentioned above, Pedro's Perdurantism and Edna's P-English as well as Edna's Endurantism and Pedro's E-English seem to be different languages. Hirsch might insist that they amount to the same language. However, this seems to contradict his thesis that a language is individuated by a function that assigns a

character to each sentence. Pedro assigns different characters to the sentences in Perdurantism than Edna does in P-English, and the same holds for E-English and Endurantism. If Edna wants to pass herself off as a perdurantist while speaking P-English, she seems to speak a different language than Pedro does within Perdurantism – even though they associate the same truth value with the same sentences. Edna interprets Pedro speaking P-English in order to interpret him as saying something true. Thereby, she does not interpret him in the way Pedro himself understands his language, namely as speaking Perdurantism, because in this case she would interpret him as saying something she does not believe. Similar considerations hold for Endurantism and E-English. As will be discussed later, it may be questioned as to whether an interpretation that does not respect the beliefs the speakers intended to express is correct, and Hirsch's first condition for a verbal dispute might not be met. This point is pressing because the story can be told differently: Edna and Pedro can also be described as speaking the same language while holding different beliefs about the world.

Be this as it may, Hirsch's second condition for a verbal dispute is fulfilled in either case. Each party can be described as agreeing that the other party speaks the truth in its own language: Edna believes that Pedro speaks the truth in P-English while Pedro acknowledges that Edna tells the truth in E-English. However, there may be problems for Hirsch's conception of language. Two possible objections are discussed in the following sections.

### **2.1.2 Against Use Theory of Meaning**

One may wonder how it is possible that Edna and Pedro speak different languages since they belong to the same linguistic community. If it is supposed that the character of an expression is determined by its use in the wider linguistic community – as espoused by proponents of some use theories of meaning (see e.g. Burge [1979]) – two persons of the same linguistic community speak the same language. In order to circumvent this objection, Hirsch stipulates that the language of each side to a disagreement can be considered the language belonging to an imagined linguistic community consisting of members who exhibit a similar linguistic behaviour as the respective parties of the disagreement do (Hirsch [2009] p. 239). In the original disagreement, Pedro speaks like a perdurantist. Accordingly, his lan-

guage can be conceived as belonging to an imagined linguistic community of people who talk like perdurantists (similar considerations hold for Edna and her language). Thereby, it is possible for Edna and Pedro to speak different languages.

### 2.1.3 No Verbal Dispute despite Truth in One's own Languages

Hirsch notes that being in a position to describe the opponent as speaking a language in which her sentences are true is not a sufficient condition for a verbal dispute. The interpretation must be correct, too. He illustrates this point with a disagreement between Jews and Christians about whether some man is damned to hell (Hirsch [2009] p. 235ff). It is possible for Jews to adopt a secret language that endows the sentences of Christians with a different character (and vice versa). With the help of a fictionalist strategy, they can stipulate that in their secret language, the Christian sentence "On the assumption of Judaism, A"<sup>18</sup> has the same character as A has in the language of Christians. Further, if a sentence B uttered by Christians does not begin with "On the assumption of Judaism", Jews consider B to have the same character in their secret language as the sentence "On the assumption of Christianity, B" has in Christian language. Jews can now claim to speak truly while uttering "That man is damned to hell" (B). For reasons of simplicity, it is assumed that the man in question is Jaron and Hirsch's point is explained with the help of propositions. In the Jews' secret language, the sentence expresses the proposition that *on the assumption of Christianity, Jaron is damned to hell*. Further, Jews can also agree that the Christians' sentence "On the assumption of Judaism, that man is not damned to hell" is true. In their secret language, the sentence is associated with the same character as the Christians' sentence "That man is not damned to hell" (A) and it expresses the proposition that *Jaron is not damned to hell*.

However, Hirsch emphasises that finding a language in which the opponent's sentences are true does not follow a disagreement to be a verbal dispute. In order for (VD)<sub>H</sub> to be met, the opponent's language must be interpreted correctly. According to Hirsch, the Jews' interpretation of Christians' sentences is not correct. If the

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<sup>18</sup> "On the assumption of ..." suggests a conditional reading. However, Hirsch has a historical reading in mind that can be circumscribed with expressions like "According to studies of Judaism ..." (thanks to Christian Nimtz for this point).

sentences "That man is damned to hell" and "On the assumption of Judaism, that man is not damned to hell" are interpreted in a way that it is only an assumption of Christianity that Jaron is damned to hell while in fact Jaron is not damned to hell, the non-linguistic behaviour of the Christians and Jews is not taken into account in Hirsch's opinion (Hirsch [2009] FN 11). Christians might, for instance, draw pictures showing Jaron burning in the fire of hell while Jews' may draw Jaron's afterlife in paradise. Further, contrary to Jews, Christians may show pity when talking about what happened to Jaron after his death. Accordingly, it does not seem to be correct to interpret the Christians saying that Jaron is not damned to hell. In order to motivate  $(VD)_H$ , Hirsch must specify what he means with "correct interpretation". His considerations are presented in the following section.

## 2.2 Correct Interpretation:

### Charity to Perception and Charity to Understanding

Hirsch emphasises that the focus should be placed on the use of expressions in order to correctly interpret another language. Thereby, Donald Davidson's *principle of charity* plays an important role: other people should be interpreted as using a language as reasonably and faultlessly as possible (Hirsch [2009] p. 240, Davidson [1984]). If in a linguistic community speakers utter a sentence, S, only when an apple is present, it should not be interpreted as meaning that an elephant is present. An appeal to use should make the most sense out of people's use of language. According to Hirsch, in particular perceptual and a priori knowable assertions should almost always be interpreted as true: Hirsch talks about *charity to perception* and *charity to understanding* (Hirsch [2005] p. 71). As he notes, any language likely contains perceptual sentences to make perceptual reports it can be assumed that widely accepted perceptual sentences of a linguistic community are accurate to a fair degree of approximation. If we interpret speakers of another language to talk about elephants when apples are present, we needlessly impute mistakes to them – and violate charity to perception. Similarly, according to charity to understanding, it should be presumed that speakers sufficiently grasp the meaning of their concepts. If they utter apparent a priori knowable and conceptual sentences like "Bachelors are unmarried men", they should be interpreted as asserting true sentences – especially when these sentences seem to be quite simple.

The discussion will now turn to a consideration of the example of Edna and Pedro again: is Edna's interpretation of Pedro's language as P-English plausible (and vice versa)? If the answer is yes, the disagreement between Edna and Pedro is a verbal dispute (VD)<sub>H</sub>. According to Hirsch, charity to perception and charity to understanding force a judgment that the disagreement is a verbal dispute (Hirsch [2009] p. 240): confronted with an ordinary wooden stick, Pedro utters the sentence "In front of us there is a succession of highly visible wooden objects that persist for a moment and then go out of existence". If Edna interprets Pedro speaking Endurantism (or Perdurantism, as it is the same language), she accuses him of making a false assertion about a visible object right in front of his eyes. Edna would further describe perdurantists to assert in Endurantism the false a priori knowable sentence "Any persisting object necessarily consists of a succession of temporal parts and this is a priori knowable". Such an interpretation is not correct according to Hirsch. Edna should respect charity to perception and charity to understanding and interpret Pedro as asserting true perceptual sentences about the stick and true conceptual sentences about objects. In order to do so, she must interpret Pedro speaking P-English. In the same vein, Pedro should interpret Edna and endurantists speaking E-English. Since they should both correctly interpret the other party as speaking the truth in his/her language, the disagreement between Edna and Pedro is a verbal dispute, as it meets condition (VD)<sub>H</sub>.

Given how Hirsch presents his considerations of charity, it is reasonable to suppose that the interpretation of the sentences in question suits the general linguistic behaviour of the other party, i.e. the interpretation must fit the interpretation of further sentences to which the other party assents. At any rate, the interpretation of conceptual and perceptual sentences and of non-verbal behaviour linked to the sentences in question should be considered according to Hirsch. It will now briefly be investigated whether (VD)<sub>H</sub> in addition holds for disagreements concerning background assumptions such as sentences about how change is possible. If it does not (VD)<sub>H</sub> will be less convincing, as it does not hold regarding sentences linked to the disputed sentences in question. How would Edna, for instance, explain Pedro's assent to the following sentence: "The incompatible properties of being green and being yellow is attributed to two different objects, namely to different temporal parts of the banana, accordingly, there is no conflict with (LL)." It is probable that Hirsch would describe Edna as interpreting *what property the*

*banana has at a certain time* once Pedro talks about temporal parts as different objects of the banana. Accordingly, in P-English, the sentence above would express a proposition believed by Edna, namely that *the incompatible properties of being green and being yellow are attributed to the banana at different times, accordingly, there is no conflict with (LL)*. (Similarly, Hirsch would surely find a way for Pedro to interpret Edna's first denial of the sentence above.) In the following it will thus be supposed that Hirsch's interpretation of Edna's and Pedro's languages is compatible with their assent to sentences regarding background assumptions.

Before moving on to objections against Hirsch's characterisation of verbal disputes, the next section will illustrate how Hirsch examines arguments in support of a position held by a party engaging in a verbal dispute (VD)<sub>H</sub>.

### 2.3 Arguments regarding Verbal Disputes (VD)<sub>H</sub>

The question may arise as to what arguments in ontology amount to if the opponents engage in a verbal dispute (VD)<sub>H</sub>. Hirsch discusses David Lewis' argument for perdurantism (Hirsch [2009] p. 241, Lewis [1986] p. 204). He describes the two steps in the argument as follows: first, Lewis notes that intuitive qualities like shapes must not be treated as relations to time. Second, in his view, endurantism requires this treatment, hence the position is wrong. According to Hirsch, Lewis' argument can be rejected even without going into detail (Hirsch [2009] p. 242): Lewis argues for the truth of the philosophical sentence S, "Shapes and other intuitive qualities cannot be treated as relations to time", while claiming that the truth of S is incompatible with an endurantist position. Evaluating Lewis' argument, charity to perception and charity to understanding favour an interpretation according to which sentence S is taken to be true, as noted by Hirsch. Lewis claims that the truth of S conflicts with the endurantist position, hence S is false in Endurantism. According to Hirsch, however, respecting charity to perception and charity to understanding, endurantists should be interpreted as speaking truly as well. Hirsch notes that in such a position, one must weigh charity to perception and charity to understanding, which indicate that the opponent speaks truly in Endurantism, against charity to truth regarding Lewis' philosophical sentence S. For Hirsch it is an easy choice: Lewis' philosophical sentence must be considered as

false. In his view, it is more likely that some person makes a mistake about some abstract principle rather than it being the case that many people make mistakes about simply perceivable visible objects in front of them (Hirsch [2007] p. 372). Hirsch notes that regarding a verbal dispute  $(VD)_H$ , there might be a second disagreement – one on the meta-level (Hirsch [2013] p. 440, his considerations are adapted to the example between Edna and Pedro). The initial disagreement – the initial verbal dispute  $(VD)_H$  – is on the object level; Edna and Pedro disagree about whether there exist temporal parts of a stick. In contrast, the disagreement on the meta-level is about the truth of the sentences  $S$  and  $\neg S$  uttered by Edna and Pedro. Thereby, Pedro may insist that their original disagreement is not a verbal dispute  $(VD)_H$  and that Edna's sentence is false. Edna, in contrast, may argue that in the different languages they speak, both sentence are true. The following dialogue illustrates such a meta-level disagreement:

Pedro: "My sentence  $S$  is true while your sentence  $\neg S$  is false."

Edna: "No, both sentences are true in the different languages we speak."

This disagreement may be a verbal dispute  $(VD)_H$  if the opponents agree that – given the correct view of linguistic interpretation – the other party speaks the truth in their meta-languages. If this is not the case,  $(VD)_H$  is not met and the disagreement on the meta-level could be substantive. According to Hirsch, the meta-level-disagreement is substantive and Pedro is simply wrong: the object-level disagreement is a verbal dispute  $(VD)_H$  and Edna is right in claiming that both  $S$  and  $\neg S$  are true in the different languages they speak.

To take stock, Hirsch regards himself to have shown that the disagreement between endurantists and perdurantists is a verbal dispute  $(VD)_H$ : first, he suggests how opponents can agree that the other party speaks the truth in his or her language. Second, he argues that they interpret the other party's language correctly, because they respect charity to perception and charity to understanding. The next section of this chapter will first highlight different ways in which Hirsch's  $(VD)_H$  may be attacked. Second, the discussion will then shift to a difference between Hirsch's example of a verbal dispute between Edna and Pedro and a paradigmatic case of a verbal dispute. Due to this difference  $(VD)_H$  does not seem to amount to a sufficient condition for a verbal dispute. At best, it may be read as a fallible epistemic criterion to identify verbal disputes.

### 3. Objections to Hirsch's Characterisation of Verbal Disputes

There are different ways in which Hirsch's position may be criticised. First, there may be an objection that there is an asymmetry between Edna's and Pedro's languages, so that Edna is not in a position to make sense of P-English (for a similar objection regarding a different ontological disagreement, see McGrath [2008]). Hirsch specifies in detail how the different languages of Pedro and Edna should be spelled out and how some worries can be removed (Hirsch [2009] p. 244ff). Second, an objection could be raised that the disagreement between Pedro and Edna is not described correctly, since they do not assert simple perceptual sentences when talking about a stick in front of them. As I mainly wish to investigate whether Hirsch's notion of a verbal dispute (VD)<sub>H</sub> is convincing, the debate around Hirsch's detailed account of Pedro's and Edna's languages will not be presented. Neither will there be a discussion as to whether he describes their disagreement in a convincing way. Third, Brendan Balcerak Jackson offers an argument against (VD)<sub>H</sub> in order to criticise what he calls Hirsch's deflationism (Jackson [2013], [2014]). He characterises deflationism as a position assuming that in verbal disputes there is, firstly, nothing at stake besides the correct use of language and, second, no question to be answered by undertaking substantive ontology (Jackson [2014] p. 32). According to Jackson, Hirsch would successfully argue for deflationism only if he could further show that ontological disagreements contain claims that are either unrevisable or semantically underdetermined. However, in his view, Hirsch fails to do so. This debate between Jackson and Hirsch will not be presented any further, as Jackson's criticism is only directed against (VD)<sub>H</sub> as a sufficient criterion to establish deflationism.<sup>19</sup> Rather, the main goal of this chapter is to discover whether (VD)<sub>H</sub> is a useful criterion to identify verbal disputes, and Jackson does not show that Hirsch's (VD)<sub>H</sub> does not amount to a sufficient condition for a verbal dispute. Fourth, an objection can be raised that Hirsch's considerations of charity are not universally valid. Rather, in many situations we make use of a principle in the opposite direction: a teacher who tries to teach a foreign language to students, for instance, must interpret them as making mistakes in order to correct them and bring them to the point of speaking the language in question correctly.<sup>20</sup> As already mentioned, Sider formulates a similar

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<sup>19</sup> In my view, Hirsch succeeds in rejecting Jackson's criticism (Hirsch [2013], Nuspliger [MS]).

<sup>20</sup> Many thanks to Christian Nitz for pointing out this example.

objection against Hirsch's  $(VD)_H$ : in his view, considerations of charity may be partially and locally suspended (Sider [2014] p. 567f.). Edna and Pedro should be able to stipulate that the existential quantifier is a theoretical term with the same meaning referring to the quantificational structure of reality. I assume that Hirsch is aware that considerations of charity are not universally valid. He likely does not take Edna and Pedro's disagreement to be a situation in which some opposite principle holds. Still, if considerations of charity do not always lead to correct interpretation,  $(VD)_H$  may no longer be a sufficient condition for a verbal dispute, as the original disagreement may be a substantive disagreement, even though  $(VD)_H$  is met. I will elaborate on this last point in the following sections by pointing out that considerations of charity may not respect the opponent's original beliefs.

### 3.1 Original Beliefs in paradigmatic Verbal Disputes and Ontological Disagreements

There is a difference between paradigmatic verbal disputes and Hirsch's example of a verbal dispute in ontology. The difference concerns the relation between the *original disagreement* – the disagreement as it stands before analysing whether it is a verbal dispute  $(VD)_H$  – and the *new interpretation of the disagreement*, that is, the disagreement as it is perceived after having applied  $(VD)_H$ . In paradigmatic verbal disputes the opponents are newly interpreted in such a way that their original beliefs are taken into account. Consider again the example of the American and the Englishman. Both believe that *mostly, burgers are served with deep-fried long chunks of potato*. However, as they use "chips" with a different meaning, the American takes the Englishman to make the false claim *that mostly, burgers are served with deep-fried thin slices of potato*, while the Englishman interprets the American as wrongly denying that *mostly, burgers are served with deep-fried long chunks of potato*. That is the reason for their engagement in an argument. As seen above,  $(VD)_H$  can be applied to the case. First, both speakers can find a language for the opponent's sentences (the American might assign the Englishman's "chips" the character *deep-fried long chunks of potato* while the Englishman assigns the American's "chips" the character *deep-fried thin slices of potato*). Further, they take the claim they ascribe to the other party to be true, i.e. they agree that the other party speaks the truth in his or her own language. Second, the inter-

pretation seems to respect charity to perception and charity to understanding; simple perceptual sentences like "There are chips"/"There are no chips", and simple conceptual sentences, such as "'chips' are deep-fried thin slices of potato" or "'chips' are deep-fried long chunks of potato", are considered to be true in the respective languages. According to the new interpretation of the disagreement, the opponents should stop arguing. They each agree with how the other party interprets their language. This indicates that the new interpretation of the disagreement corresponds to the original beliefs of the opponents. Further, they agree that burgers are mostly served with deep-fried long chunks of potato and not with deep-fried thin slices of potato. This suggests that there is no disagreement left as soon as the opponents are re-interpreted.

Hirsch's example of a verbal dispute in ontology behaves differently from paradigmatic verbal disputes. It seems possible that Edna and Pedro both find an interpretation of the opponent's language so that  $(VD)_H$  is met, even if they both would not agree with the other party's interpretation of their own language and even if they both would not agree with the claim the opponents interpret themselves as expressing. In the original disagreement between Edna and Pedro, the former is taken to speak Endurantism while the latter Pedro is assumed to speak Perdurantism. After applying  $(VD)_H$  there exist new interpretations of the disagreement: according to Edna's new interpretation of the disagreement, she speaks Endurantism while Pedro speaks P-English. In Pedro's view, Edna speaks E-English while he himself speaks Perdurantism. They both agree with the claim they ascribe to the other party. However, they do not seem to agree with the interpretation placed upon their words. Pedro would hardly agree to Edna's interpretation of S as expressing the proposition that *the stick in front of Edna and Pedro is different at different times* ( $p_{E2}$ ). Further, he does not seem to believe proposition  $p_{E2}$ . He may insist that the stick as a whole is not different at different times: it only has different temporal parts. Accordingly, if he decided to speak P-English, he would – contrary to the designer of his language – dissent to S. Similar considerations hold the other way round: Edna likely would not agree that  $\neg S$  expresses the proposition that *there does not exist (in a restricted sense) a succession of highly visible wooden objects in front of the speakers that persist for a moment and then go out of existence* ( $\neg p_{P2}$ ). Accordingly, the new interpretation does not seem to respect her original belief. Further, she does not believe  $\neg p_{P2}$ : Edna would

likely refrain from talking about a restricted sense of "there exists". In her view,  $p_{P2}$  and  $\neg p_{P2}$  seem to lack a truth value. Accordingly, if she decided to speak E-English, she would not assent to  $\neg S$  – contrary to Pedro, the designer of her language. In contrast to the situation regarding paradigmatic verbal disputes, the new interpretation of the disagreement does not seem to respect the original beliefs of the opponents. Further, the new interpretation does not prevent them from arguing, as there seems to be disagreement regarding the newly ascribed claims.

This situation highlights a special feature of Hirsch's characterisation of verbal disputes: neither his view on correct interpretation (charity to perception and charity to understanding) nor  $(VD)_H$  as a whole specifies how the interpretations of the languages are related.  $(VD)_H$  is fulfilled as soon as Pedro and Edna find a plausible interpretation for the other party's language. The question arises as to whether correct interpretation – besides charity to use and charity to understanding – should not account for the original beliefs of the speakers. This point will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

### 3.2 $(VD)_H$ and Neutrinos

The section above suggested that it is possible that  $(VD)_H$  is met, even though the new interpretations of a disagreement do not correspond to the original beliefs of the opponents. To support this claim, consider the following hypothetical disagreement regarding  $\beta$ -decay of radium before the empirical discovery of the particle neutrino:

- Pauli: "In  $\beta$ -decay of radium, there are neutrinos leaving radium."  
(S)
- Meitner: "No, in  $\beta$ -decay of radium, there are no neutrinos leaving radium." ( $\neg S$ )

First, some background information about the disagreement: at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century scientists explored radioactivity and radioactive decay. It was found out that radioactive  $\beta$ -decay consists of electrons. In 1914 James Chadwick discovered that  $\beta$ -decay violated at first sight the law of conservation of energy (Close [2010] p. 15f.). The law of conservation of energy says that the total energy of an isolated system remains constant. By the radioactive transformation of the nucleus

of some element in  $\beta$ -decay, the emitted  $\beta$ -electron should always contain about the same energy (if there is only a  $\beta$ -electron emitted). Accordingly, the electron is expected to contain the same energy in every  $\beta$ -decay of some element. However, Chadwick showed that the energy spectrum of the  $\beta$ -electrons leaving radium after  $\beta$ -decay was continuous, meaning that the electrons did not always contain the same amount of energy (von Meyenn [2001] p. XII). First, Lise Meitner claimed that after  $\beta$ -decay all  $\beta$ -electrons possess the same speed and energy (von Meyenn [2001] p. XIIff.). In her view, the continuous  $\beta$ -spectrum could be explained with primary and secondary radiation. Some electrons leave the nucleus of radium directly, with full speed and energy, and constitute primary radiation. Secondary radiation, in contrast, consists of electrons that loose speed and energy on their way out of the nucleus. Later, her idea was experimentally shown to be wrong. Subsequently, Wolfgang Pauli explained the continuous  $\beta$ -spectrum in simply postulating a new particle (Pauli [1961] p. 159f.), subsequently named neutrino. In Pauli's view, in  $\beta$ -decay, besides the electron there is a neutrino emitted so that the sum of energy of the electron and the neutrino is constant. However, most physicians around Pauli were supportive of his idea. Niels Bohr, in particular, was rather willing to loosen the law of conservation of energy (Close [2010] p. 27). Pauli claimed that there exist neutrinos emitted by radium – a suggestion Bohr denied. Only years later – in 1956 – did Frederick Reines and Clyde Cowan first detect neutrinos in a nuclear reactor (Close [2010] p. 55). Pauli's neutrino particle is now specified more precisely as the antiparticle of the electron neutrino. For reasons of simplicity, I will continue to talk about neutrinos.

Bohr and Pauli further disagreed about the scope of the conservation of energy law. That is the reason why the hypothetical disagreement between Pauli and Meitner will be discussed: both suggested different explanations for the continuous  $\beta$ -spectrum without loosening the law of conservation of energy. I aim to investigate whether the disagreement between Pauli and Meitner can be described as a verbal dispute (VD)<sub>H</sub>. While this disagreement is hypothetical and only partly based on historical facts, it is quite possible and there were, and still are, similar disagreements regarding (hypothetical) particles in physics (e.g. about whether there exist gravitons). In Pauli and Meitner's disagreement, (VD)<sub>H</sub> seems to be met: Meitner can find an interpretation of Pauli's sentence with which she agrees;

she may, for instance, assign Pauli's sentence in Neutrino-English the character that *in  $\beta$ -decay of radium, there are electrons stopped by secondary processes leaving radium*. Similarly, Pauli might find an interpretation for Meitner's  $\neg$ S in Secondary-Effects-English, assigning it the character that *if one only allows empirically verified entities to exist, there are no neutrinos leaving radium in  $\beta$ -decay of radium*. Further, charity to perception and charity to understanding are met. By taking the two researchers to make simple perceptual sentences about the  $\beta$ -decay of radium in front of them (if perceptual sentences about  $\beta$ -decay are considered to be simple), charity to perception is respected, since the opponents interpret the other party to be telling the truth about radium in front of them. Further, charity to understanding is not violated either, as the opponents may describe the other party as uttering true conceptual sentences like " $\beta$ -decay consists of a neutrino and a electron leaving the original atom" (Meitner's assigned character:  *$\beta$ -decay consists of electrons stopped by secondary processes leaving the original atom*) or " $\beta$ -decay does not consist of neutrinos leaving the original atom" (Pauli's assigned character: *if one only allows empirically verified entities to exist,  $\beta$ -decay does not consists of neutrinos leaving the original atom*). Accordingly, the analysis of the hypothetical disagreement between Meitner and Pauli prior to the experimental discovery of neutrinos shows that  $(VD)_H$  is met.

The question arises as to whether the disagreement still meets  $(VD)_H$  after the experimental discovery of neutrinos. First of all, it can be held that it is reasonable to suppose that Pauli and Meitner would both have agreed with Reines and Cowan that the existence of neutrinos can be proven experimentally with the help of the detection of two events: positron annihilation and neutron capture (see Close [2010] p. 54f.). Meitner would likely have stopped to disagree with Pauli and agreed to have been mistaken back in 1930. Does this empirical resolution of the disagreement show the original disagreement to be non-verbal? In order to reach this conclusion, one further has to argue that the empirical resolution of a disagreement is a sufficient condition for a disagreement to be non-verbal. Thereby, it must be specified as to what is meant by "empirical" resolution. The term can for instance be specified by arguing that the resolution needs to be due to non-linguistic facts, i.e. the resolution cannot be reached through the clarification of the meanings of disputed sentences. In my view, such an argument is plausible. However, in arguing along these lines, a certain conception of non-verbal disa-

greement is being proposed. Further, such an argument does not show that (VD)<sub>H</sub> is no longer met: rather, it is posited that the original disagreement is non-verbal because there is an empirical resolution.

Second, it may be argued that the example shows Hirsch's criterion for correct interpretation not to be sufficient for correct interpretation. At least, it is reasonable to suppose that from 1956 onwards Pauli and Meitner speak the same language, given that they agree to the proof offered by Reines and Cowan. After 1956, Meitner and Pauli would likely have assented to a few new sentences linked to the original one; they may, for instance, assent to the following: "With 'neutrino', Meitner and Pauli referred to the particle that can now be proven to exist by positron annihilation and neutron capture". As discussed above regarding Hirsch's considerations of charity, the interpretation of the sentence in question must fit the general linguistic behaviour of the other party, i.e. it must fit in with the interpretation of other sentences to which the other party assents. Thereby, it seems much easier to account for the fact that Pauli and Meitner assent to the new sentence above if they are taken to interpret each other as speaking the same language and using "neutrino" with the same character; a character such as *a particle that explains why the sum of energy of electrons in  $\beta$ -decay of radium is constant*. Pauli's assent to "With 'neutrino', Meitner and Pauli referred to the particle that can now be proven to exist by positron annihilation and neutron capture", for instance, hardly makes sense if it is supposed that he associates the character *electrons stopped by secondary processes* to "neutrino". Electrons are not proven to exist by positron annihilation and neutron capture. Similarly, it seems to be incoherent if Pauli interprets Meitner using "No, in  $\beta$ -decay of radium, there are no neutrinos leaving radium" to express the proposition *if one only allows empirically verified entities to exist, there are no neutrinos leaving radium in  $\beta$ -decay of radium* – as Meitner now agrees that neutrinos are empirically verified entities.

In relation to these considerations it can be speculated as to whether Pauli and Meitner did not always associated the same character with the term "neutrino". Hirsch may claim that the character Meitner and Pauli associated with "neutrino" changed when they learned about Reines and Cowan's proof. Accordingly, they can be described as engaging in a different disagreement from 1956 onwards. However, a discussion about how an expression obtains its character and how the character changes will go too far. Still, Pauli and Meitner seem to have been talk-

ing about the same particle since 1930. At least, this intuition is again supported by the fact that in 1956, the particle was proven to exist and so Meitner would probably have stopped to disagree with Pauli. In addition, the opponents would likely accuse each other to have interpreted the own language wrongly back in 1930: Meitner could claim that she wanted to talk about neutrinos, not about the existence of empirically proven entities. In the same vein, Pauli might insist that he always talked about neutrinos, not about electrons stopped by secondary processes. Their emphasis about what beliefs they intended to express from 1956 onwards would likely lead Hirsch to concede that they had always been speaking the same language. Accordingly, an interpretation along considerations of charity does not always lead to correct interpretation. Rather, correct interpretation is under-determined by charity and Hirsch's considerations of charity are not sufficient for correct interpretation.

These considerations show, thirdly, that  $(VD)_H$  is an unreliable criterion for verbal disputes: regarding the same disagreement,  $(VD)_H$  is met a certain point in time and no longer met at a later point in time. Accordingly, it is not possible to know whether a certain disagreement is a verbal dispute  $(VD)_H$ , since later in time  $(VD)_H$  may not be met for the disagreement in question anymore.

Fourth, it could be argued that the considerations above suggest that  $(VD)_H$  does not amount to a sufficient condition for a verbal dispute. Regarding the correct interpretation of the disagreement between Meitner and Pauli, the opponents believe and express propositions that cannot both be accurate and their disagreement seems substantive and non-verbal. At least, MacFarlane's undisputed disagreement (PJA) – considered to be a sufficient condition for substantive and non-verbal disagreement – is met (see p. 59f.): the accuracy of Pauli's belief (that *neutrinos leave radium in  $\beta$ -decay of radium*, evaluated with respect to the actual world as circumstance of evaluation) precludes the accuracy of Meitner's belief (that *there are no neutrinos leaving radium in  $\beta$ -decay of radium*, evaluated with respect to the actual world as circumstance of evaluation). It is not possible that in the actual world there are neutrinos leaving radium and, simultaneously, that there are no neutrinos leaving radium in  $\beta$ -decay of radium. In addition, Sundell and Plunkett's principle for (substantive) disagreement (DRCC) is also met: the beliefs espoused by Pauli and Meitner are rationally incompatible. If their correctly interpreted disagreement is taken to be a substantive and non-verbal disagreement,

then  $(VD)_H$  is not a sufficient condition for a verbal dispute. However, in order to argue against  $(VD)_H$  as sufficient criterion for a verbal dispute, it is important to characterise substantive and non-verbal disagreements and show that the newly interpreted disagreement between them is substantive and non-verbal.

As mentioned above,  $(VD)_H$  may be saved from being an unreliable and not sufficient criterion for verbal disputes if a further constraint regarding the new interpretations of the disagreement was added: they must correspond to the beliefs which the opponents tried to express with  $S$  and  $\neg S$  in the original disagreement. Before elaborating on this point, discussion turns to how Hirsch might respond to this criticism.

### 3.3 Possible Rejoinders

#### 3.3.1 Original Beliefs as Necessary Condition for Correct Interpretation

Hirsch may react differently to the criticism above. First, he could question that it is a necessary condition for correct interpretation that the beliefs some person wants to express while uttering some sentence must be accounted for in the new interpretation of the language. However, I hardly see how he could argue for this position. A language is used to express beliefs and if an interpreter interprets some speaker in a way that the beliefs the latter maintains are no longer expressed, the interpretation can hardly be considered to be correct. Further, their communication does not seem to be successful. The goal of an interpretation is to have access to the speaker's beliefs or to the meanings of the sentences uttered – assuming that the speaker succeeds in expressing her beliefs by means of her sentences. It is possible that some speakers fail to do so. This might, for instance, be the case if *speaker meaning* (the meaning the speaker wishes to convey with a sentence) and *sentence meaning* (the meaning of the sentence as an upshot of what speakers ordinary mean by an expression) diverge (for the difference between speaker meaning and sentence meaning see Grice [1957], [1967], [1968]). If an interpreter then translates the sentence meaning into another language, he can hardly be blamed for having provided an incorrect interpretation. It is possible to distinguish a correct interpretation of sentence meaning from a correct interpretation of speaker meaning. As Hirsch introduces the example of Edna and Pedro he seems to assume that the speakers succeed in expressing the propositions they believe,

while asserting sentences of the respective languages (see e.g. Hirsch [2009] p. 233, 235). He does not seem to distinguish between sentence meaning and speaker meaning. As Hirsch tells the story, there seems to be a difference between speaker meaning/sentence meaning and the meaning attributed by the interpreter to the sentence: he could claim that in the original disagreement, Edna and Pedro attribute false meanings to the opponent's sentences, since charity to perception and charity to understanding are not respected. However, Hirsch likely agrees that an interpretation of some sentence should take into account the belief or meaning the speaker wanted to express while uttering it – at least if he does not defend a form of scepticism about meaning or belief (see below). The question posed asks how belief or meaning is accessed. Below, this point will be further discussed.

### 3.3.2 Neutrino vs. Pedro and Edna

Hirsch could secondly claim that there is a difference between the neutrino-disagreement and that between Edna and Pedro. He could posit that  $(VD)_H$  cannot be applied successfully to the neutrino-example: while in 1930 Meitner and Pauli show the same behaviour regarding the  $\beta$ -decay in front of them, they have the disposition to behave differently after the experimental proof of neutrinos. As already discussed, Meitner and Pauli would likely accept the proof offered by Reines and Cowan's regarding neutrinos and it is reasonable to suppose that the opponents are no longer in a position to agree that the other party speaks the truth in his or her language. Hirsch could now argue that besides the actual behaviour of the opponents, future or dispositional behaviour should also be taken into account in order to obtain a correct interpretation of the other party's language. Accordingly,  $(VD)_H$  cannot be applied to the disagreement about neutrinos any longer, even back in 1930. In contrast, as ontological sentences are necessary true/false and a priori knowable according to Hirsch (Hirsch [2009] p. 233), there is no future experiment that will prompt a difference in behaviour of Edna and Pedro regarding the stick in front of them.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Some authors argue that a priori justification is fallible (e.g. Bonjour [1995], Bealer [1998], and Sosa [1998]). If this claim is true, then  $(VD)_H$  cannot even be safely applied to necessary true/false and a priori knowable sentences. This view will not be discussed any further. The next section shows that  $(VD)_H$  is not safely applicable to necessary true/false and a priori knowable sentences even if a priori justification is not taken to be fallible.

However, if future or dispositional behaviour is taken into account when analysing a disagreement, opponents could safely apply  $(VD)_H$  only on necessary true/false and a priori knowable claims. Opponents in a disagreement are not epistemically ideal agents. Regarding empirical claims, they can never know whether there is some future experiment that would lead to a change in behaviour, even though  $(VD)_H$  is met at the time of the disagreement analysis. Accordingly,  $(VD)_H$  only seems to be helpful regarding disagreements involving necessary and a priori knowable claims. Hirsch may defend such a view. However, if he did, he is no longer in a position to handle  $(VD)_H$  as a general criterion for verbal disputes because it is only applicable to a very limited type of disagreement. Also, as will be discussed in the next section, he can only hold to this limited account of  $(VD)_H$  if he further argues for meaning scepticism.

### 3.3.3 Behaviouristic View of Language and Meaning Scepticism

Hirsch may persist with the distinction above between the neutrino-example and the disagreement between Pedro and Edna and insist that  $(VD)_H$  is only applicable to necessary true/false and a priori knowable sentences. However, if he did so, he would further have to argue for a strict behaviouristic understanding of language and for meaning scepticism. Otherwise, it seems possible that Edna and Pedro maintain incompatible beliefs – i.e. beliefs, that cannot both be accurate – regarding the stick in front of them, even though the difference is not visible in their behaviour. This would be the case if Pedro and Edna were speaking Endurantism/Perdurantism. In such a situation,  $(VD)_H$  is applicable to the disagreement in question, despite the disagreement seeming to be substantive.

Willard Quine defends a behaviouristic view of language and argues for meaning scepticism. Hirsch's illustration of the disagreement between Edna and Pedro has similarities to Quine's example of radical translation (Quine [1960], p. 27f.). Quine imagines a linguist who meets a people in the middle of nowhere speaking a language that is completely unknown to him. Further, there are no bilingual individuals or interpreters who can help him understand the new language. The only thing the linguist can do is observe the linguistic behaviour of the people. Quine's view of a language is behaviouristic: a language is a complex of present dispositions to linguistic behaviour and the linguist interpreter is asked to reconstruct a

language out of the people's currently observed responses (Quine [1960] p. 27f.). In Quine's view, it is recommended to start the translation of short sentences that speakers of the people utter if there is a sudden obvious change of situation – for instance if the speaker utters "gavagai" when suddenly a rabbit scurries by. In such a situation, the linguist might note "rabbit" or "there is a rabbit" as a tentative translation of the sentence. Later, from the meaning of sentences he will obtain the meaning of words. He does so in suggesting analytic hypothesis in which he identifies recurrent parts of heard utterances as words of the native language and equates them with English words (Quine [1960] p. 68). "Gavagai", for instance, might be taken to have the meaning of the English word "rabbit". Regarding this example, Quine formulates his thesis of indeterminacy of translation (Quine [1960] p. 79): in his view, the linguist may find two different incompatible translations for the language of the people that both match all linguistic behaviour of the natives. For instance, "gavagai" might be translated as "rabbit". However, it might also be translated as "rabbit stage" (undetached parts of a rabbit) or as "rabbithood" (fusion of all rabbits) (Quine [1960] p. 52f.). According to Quine, this problem cannot be solved by supplementary pointing or questioning of the native speakers. If one points at a rabbit, one simultaneously points at rabbit stages and a manifestation of rabbithood. This problem leads to indeterminacy of translation: "gavagai" may, for instance, be translated as "rabbit" as well as "rabbit stages". Both analytic hypotheses are possible in Quine's view, and both can be made to conform to all independently discovered translations of sentences and to all speech dispositions of the native speakers (Quine [1960] p. 72). Nevertheless, he supposes that both translations are radically unlike and incompatible. Accordingly, two different linguist interpreters may obtain two different incompatible translations of the native language without making a mistake.

As Geert Keil points out, Quine's thesis can only be understood with an awareness of his scepticism towards intensions as meanings (Keil [2015], p. 240f.). According to some theories of meaning, expressions are considered to have two meanings: roughly, a term's *extension* is the class of objects to which the term applies while its *intension* can be considered to be the definition or properties of the term's extension or a function from possible worlds to extensions. Quine's indeterminacy of translation could be challenged by pointing out that "rabbit" and "rabbit stage" do not have the same intension and that speakers are in a position to

clarify what intension they associate with a certain term. However, as Keil contends, Quine only considers truth and reference as indispensable semantic concepts that lead to the extension of a term (Keil [2015] p. 240). In Quine's view, semantic concepts such as intensions or mental attitudes, like beliefs, are dubious. Thereby, he uses his thesis of indeterminacy of translation to argue for meaning scepticism (Quine [1960] p. 79): if two speakers match in all dispositions to linguistic behaviour, there is no sense in imagining semantic differences between them.

Hirsch's example of Pedro and Edna is similar to Quine's example of radical translation. He asks Pedro and Edna to interpret the opponent's position with the help of their linguistic behaviour. Despite using different sentences to describe the situation, neither Edna nor Pedro show different behaviour regarding the stick in front of them. In the vein of Quine, it does not make sense to interpret the opponents as uttering incompatible propositions and speaking Endurantism/Perdurantism. In addition, if scepticism about intensions as meanings is assumed, the opponents are not in a position to clarify what intension they associate with the sentences in question. Accordingly, Quine would likely deny that the opponents speak Endurantism/Perdurantism while favouring E-English and P-English as interpretations.

However, Hirsch does not seem to be in a position to argue in the same way as Quine. His characterisation of a language suggests that he believes that sentences have intensions and extensions or at least character and content. As previously discussed, in his view a sentence is associated with a character and the character assigns the sentence a proposition in a context of use (Hirsch [2009] p. 234). Thereby, as Kaplan notes, the proposition expressed by a sentence in a context of use can be considered the intension of a sentence while its truth value, evaluated with respect to a circumstance of evaluation, amounts to its extension (Kaplan [1980] p. 506). Accordingly, Hirsch seems to make use of intensions of sentences and does not seem to be in a position to refrain from taking  $S$  and  $\neg S$  to express incompatible propositions, only due to a lack of difference in the behaviour of Edna and Pedro. Further, Hirsch does not seem to be sceptical towards mental attitudes; he takes Edna and Pedro as uttering sentences that express propositions they believe (Hirsch [2009] p. 235). In addition, he seems to equate their beliefs regarding the stick in front of them with the propositions expressed by the sen-

tences to which they assent (interpreted in their languages). Furthermore, Quine's behaviouristic understanding of language is no longer very popular. If Hirsch defended such a position, he would have to argue for it. Accordingly, Hirsch must accept that it is possible that Edna and Pedro maintain and express beliefs regarding the stick in front of them that cannot both be accurate. Hence,  $(VD)_H$  is not safely applicable to necessary true/false and a priori knowable sentences either.

There is, however, a different way for Hirsch to defend  $(VD)_H$  as criterion for verbal disputes; he may be a sceptic towards our knowledge of the beliefs of other persons. This point will be elaborated upon in the next section.

### 3.3.4 Original Beliefs, Presupposed Theories and Epistemic Criterion

Hirsch is not sceptic towards beliefs and intensions. However, there is room for speculation as to what beliefs are held by Edna and Pedro. There are different ways to tell their story. As soon as the descriptor of the example specifies the beliefs held by the opponents and what propositions they express through their sentences, it already seems to be settled whether  $(VD)_H$  can be applied successfully as it is decided whether  $(VD)_H$  respects the original beliefs of the speakers. How the example is told can be queried. Above, the languages and propositions expressed and believed by Edna and Pedro were reconstructed out of Hirsch's characterisation of the disagreement. However, in doing so, it is specified that they hold contradictory beliefs in the original disagreement. That is why the opponents do not retain their original beliefs according to the new interpretations of the disagreement. An anti-realist may object that there are no truths regarding the existence of temporal parts and that Edna and Pedro express compatible propositions without truth value. Some other theorists could hold that they talk past one another while expressing compatible and true propositions upon which they both agree (for instance the conditional propositions that *if there exist temporal parts, in front of Edna and Pedro there is a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence* and that *if there do not exist temporal parts, in front of Edna and Pedro there is no succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence*). Who correctly describes the situation between Pedro and Edna? If there are facts about what is meant and believed by an individual, one descriptor gets it right.

However, it might as well be questioned whether there are such facts at all. The inventor or descriptor of the example is no epistemic ideal thinker and may incorrectly describe the beliefs of Edna and Pedro. As argued above, it is not assumed that Hirsch defends a form of scepticism about intensions and mental attitudes; however, he might embrace scepticism towards the knowledge of these beliefs and intensions. At least, his description of Edna and Pedro's beliefs and expressed propositions may be so scarce because he did not want to settle facts about beliefs and meanings in advance.

From the way Hirsch presents the example, it can also be suggested that he is not so much interested in a definition of verbal disputes but instead cares about how interpreters have access to the beliefs of the other party. For correct interpretation, only the respective views of the arguing parties matter and their interpretations are not compared from a shared and agreed perspective. Thereby,  $(VD)_H$  serves as guide for interpreters to find out whether they engage in a verbal dispute and it may be considered to be an epistemic criterion or clue for verbal disputes only. At least, as was argued above,  $(VD)_H$  does not seem to be a sufficient condition for verbal disputes. If Hirsch meant to offer a sufficient condition for verbal disputes, he would likely have to refer to the original beliefs of the speakers in order to exclude that the interpretation is incorrect. Further, he would have to argue for a theory that specifies the beliefs and propositions the opponents originally wanted to express with their sentences. Thereby, he could show that  $(VD)_H$  can be applied successfully while respecting the original beliefs. However, if he did argue for such a sufficient condition for verbal disputes, his theory of meaning and belief would carry the main argumentative force in showing why a disagreement meets  $(VD)_H$ . Due to his behaviouristic approach, it seems that Hirsch did not wish to specify a sufficient condition for verbal disputes. He may even argue that such a condition is of no help, because interpreters, as epistemically non-ideal thinkers, can never know whether it is satisfied by some disagreement.

Be this as it may, I contend that  $(VD)_H$  is unsatisfying even as an epistemic criterion. Above, it was supposed that besides charity to perception and charity to understanding, the opponents' original beliefs should be taken into account. One way to do this from the opponents' respective point of view is to include the other party's view towards the new interpretation of their language. There seems to be a difference between Quine's example of radical translation and Hirsch's one dis-

cussing Pedro and Edna: the latter do not meet in the jungle, rather, they both seem to be competent speakers of ordinary English who are usually able to express their beliefs. Besides their disagreement regarding temporal parts, there is a lot of agreement between them and on many topics their communication is smooth. Why should they not be in a position to assess the new interpretation placed upon their sentences? Why should they not be able to lead a meta-ontological discourse and clarify what they are talking about? A disagreement regarding the new interpretation of a sentence at least suggests that charity to perception and charity to understanding may not be enough to obtain correct interpretation of the other party's language. In my view, it is reasonable to enrich  $(VD)_H$  with the condition that the opponents should agree with the new interpretation placed upon their language – even if  $(VD)_H$  is taken to be an epistemic criterion only. Thereby,  $(VD)_H$  still fails to be a sufficient condition for verbal disputes, as it is possible that the opponents make a mistake in analysing the interpretation placed on their sentence. Nevertheless, the opportunity to arrive at the correct interpretation of the other party's language and correctly describe the disagreement as verbal dispute seems to be increased.

#### 4. Summary

According to Hirsch's  $(VD)_H$ , opponents engage in a verbal dispute if – respecting correct interpretation – each party agrees that the other party speaks the truth in its own language. Thereby, opponents are asked to find an interpretation for the other party's sentences such that they agree with the expressed propositions. Correct interpretation is guaranteed by charity to perception and charity to understanding: the other party should be interpreted in a way that widely accepted perceptual sentences and simple a priori knowable and conceptual sentences are interpreted as true.

However, Hirsch's view on correct interpretation is questionable, as an interpretation along charity to perception and charity to understanding may not respect the opponents' original beliefs. Thereby, it is possible that  $(VD)_H$  is met, even though the opponents originally expressed beliefs that cannot both be accurate. If it is assumed that a disagreement between opponents who hold beliefs that cannot both

be accurate is substantive and non-verbal (MacFarlane's undisputed notion of substantive disagreement (PJA)),  $(VD)_H$  is not a sufficient condition for verbal disputes. In order to exclude the possibility that opponents engaging in a disagreement meeting  $(VD)_H$  disagree substantively according to (PJA) or (DRCC), Hirsch would have to ensure that the new interpretation of the disagreement respects the opponents' original beliefs.

Hirsch may, however, be a sceptic towards our knowledge of the beliefs of others. This would explain the behaviouristic approach to correct interpretation and the lack of a shared and agreed perspective. Thereby,  $(VD)_H$  can be interpreted as an epistemic criterion for verbal disputes that serves the opponents as a guide in discovering whether they engage in a verbal dispute. However, even if  $(VD)_H$  is taken to be an epistemic criterion for verbal disputes, its success seems to be more promising if a further condition is added: the opponents should agree with the new interpretation placed upon their sentences.

Regarding the disagreement between Edna and Pedro, Hirsch argues that  $(VD)_H$  is met. However, as  $(VD)_H$  does not amount to a sufficient condition for verbal disputes, this does not show that the opponents engage in a verbal dispute: it is still possible that their beliefs cannot both be accurate such that they disagree substantively as disagreement (PJA) and (DRCC) are met.

Contrary to Hirsch, Chalmers most likely assumes that Edna and Pedro disagree substantively. His views on verbal disputes and substantive disagreements will be presented in the following chapter.

## **Chapter II**

### **Chalmers' Characterisation of Verbal Disputes and Bedrock Disputes**

Chalmers is willing to detect verbal disputes in philosophy. He provides a criterion for verbal disputes and he even develops a method for detecting and resolving them. However, contrary to Hirsch, he considers the disagreement between Edna and Pedro to be substantive. In his view, some ontological disagreements behave like verbal disputes at first sight while being substantive disagreements nonetheless. They are substantive because they involve a bedrock expression – an expression that cannot be stated in more basic terms and that expresses a very basic concept called bedrock concept. In Chalmers' view, bedrock expressions express the same content despite difference in use. Accordingly, Hirsch's considerations of charity do not hold for disagreements involving bedrock expressions.

In this chapter, Chalmers' characterisation of verbal disputes and his method of elimination will be presented, followed by an illustration of his view on bedrock disputes. In the last section, his characterisations of verbal disputes and bedrock disputes will be assessed and it will be investigated whether Edna and Pedro can convincingly be described as engaging in a bedrock dispute.

#### **1. Chalmers' Characterisation of Verbal Disputes**

##### **1.1 Characterisation of Verbal Disputes**

In Chalmers' view, intuitively, a verbal dispute meets the following conditions (Chalmers [2011] p. 515f.): first, the opponents agree on the relevant facts. Second, they disagree about the language used to describe the facts. Third, as soon as the conflict over language is solved, the (apparent) disagreement over non-linguistic facts vanishes (or at least should vanish).

Chalmers presents a paradigmatic case of a verbal dispute that can be found in William James' *Pragmatism* (Chalmers [2011] p. 516):

A man walks rapidly around a tree, while a squirrel moves on the tree trunk. Both face the tree at all times, but the tree trunk stays between them. A group of people are arguing over the question: Does the man go round the squirrel or not? James presents himself as resolving the dispute with the following magisterial speech: "Which party is right depends on what you practically mean by 'going round' the squirrel. If you mean passing from the north of him to the east, then to the south, then to the west, and then to the north of him again, obviously the man does go round him, for he occupies these successive positions. But if on the contrary you mean being first in front of him, then on the right of him then behind him, then on his left, and finally in front again, it is quite as obvious that the man fails to go round him... Make the distinction, and there is no occasion for any farther dispute." (James [1907], 25)

In the squirrel case, all three of Chalmers' intuitive conditions of a verbal dispute are met: the opponents first agree about the relevant facts, i.e. about the position of the squirrel, the trunk and the man. Second, they disagree over the meaning of "going round". Third, the opponents should stop arguing once they realise that they use "going round" with different meanings.

Later, Chalmers characterises *broadly* verbal disputes as the following (Chalmers [2011] p. 522):

(BVD)<sub>CH</sub>

A dispute over S is (broadly) verbal when for some expression T in S, the parties disagree about the meaning of T, and the dispute over S arises wholly in virtue of this disagreement regarding T.

A couple of remarks regarding (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> are in order. First, a few terminological clarifications will be given. In my view, it is not only the notion of a verbal dispute, but also the notion of disagreement, that is in need of clarification. Chalmers makes use of the notion of disagreement for his (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>. Later, he specifies that a disagreement about the meaning of some term involves "differing beliefs (perhaps tacit beliefs) about the meaning of a key term" (Chalmers [2011] p. 522). I will not try to clarify whether Chalmers makes use of a general notion of disagreement and will take "disagree" and "disagreement" in (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> to refer to these differing beliefs regarding the meaning of T. (Later, I will try to specify what

Chalmers could mean with "substantive disagreement", as he makes use of this notion for his distinction between partly and wholly verbal disputes and for his method of elimination (see later.) In addition, in his characterisation of verbal disputes he uses the terms "dispute" and "disagreement". He does not specify whether he uses the terms with the same meaning, but in most places, he seems to use them interchangeably. For instance, he talks about substantive disagreement as well as about substantive disputes. In the following, Chalmers' characterisations of "verbal dispute" (and "bedrock dispute") will be left as they stand. However, if used independently of Chalmers' characterisations, "dispute" and "disagreement" will be used in the manner specified at the beginning of this part of the thesis.

Second, Chalmers emphasises that he does not want to define verbal disputes. Rather, he wants to provide a characterisation that points towards a familiar phenomenon (Chalmers [2011] p. 525). However, this caution is unsatisfying (and out of line with the use to which he puts it) as he uses  $(BVD)_{CH}$  (and his method of elimination, as later discussed) in order to detect verbal disputes in philosophy. For the moment, I will thus take it to be a sufficient condition for verbal disputes.

Third, Chalmers contrasts his characterisation of verbal disputes with other attempts to grasp the notion of a verbal dispute and makes some specification in order to foresee some objections (Chalmers [2011] p. 518ff.). Here, it will only be discussed as to why he talks about *broadly* verbal disputes. *Narrowly* verbal disputes can be characterised in terms of propositions expressed by  $S$  and  $\neg S$ . If the sentences express compatible propositions  $p$  and  $\neg q$  on which the opponents agree, the disagreement is narrowly verbal (Chalmers [2011] p. 519). Chalmers seeks to classify disagreements where someone makes a mistake about the meaning of an expression as verbal dispute as well – even though such disputes are not narrowly verbal. If it is supposed that the meaning of an expression is determined by its use in the wider linguistic community – as is believed by proponents of some use theories of meaning (see, e.g. Burge [1979]) – a person may have a false belief about a certain meaning. Chalmers describes a slightly modified version of the squirrel case to illustrate this point (Chalmers [2011] p. 519): he stipulates that both parties use "go round" according to the same linguistic community. In such a situation the opponents express contradictory propositions with the sentence "The man goes round the squirrel", and its negation: the dispute is not narrowly verbal. Thereby, at least one party makes a mistake about the meaning of "go round". Nevertheless, Chalmers wants to characterise the disagreement as verbal dispute

because the disagreement is grounded in different views about the meaning of "go round", while there is agreement about the relevant first-order facts. This point can be illustrated with the help of propositions: according to Chalmers, there seems to be a verbal dispute if the opponents *take*  $S$  and  $\neg S$  to express the distinct yet compatible propositions  $p$  and  $\neg q$  ( $p$  and  $\neg q$  as speaker meaning, as discussed on p. 119 of this thesis), while further agreeing about these propositions – even though they *in fact* express contradictory propositions ( $p$  and  $\neg p$  as sentence meaning) (no narrowly verbal dispute).

With these elucidations at hand, it can be roughly stated that opponents engage in a verbal dispute  $(BVD)_{CH}$  if they disagree about some sentence,  $S$ , while this disagreement arises wholly because the opponents have different beliefs about the meaning of some term,  $T$ , in  $S$ . Next, Chalmers distinguishes different kinds of verbal disputes meeting  $(BVD)_{CH}$ , as will be illustrated in the next section.

### 1.2 Important vs. Merely Verbal Disputes, Wholly vs. Partly Verbal Disputes

Chalmers emphasises that some verbal disputes  $(BVD)_{CH}$  matter, namely if something important rests on linguistic usage. He provides several examples of *important* verbal disputes  $(BVD)_{CH}$  in philosophy (Chalmers [2011] p. 516): first, in the philosophy of language, words are the primary objects of investigation, hence a disagreement over meaning cannot simply be set a side. Second, in philosophy of mind the use of a word may be evidence about a thinker's concept. Further, Chalmers points out that sometimes the use of a word has serious practical consequences: to decide whether someone hurt a law, the meanings of the relevant terms need to be settled. The meaning of "murder", for instance, is important to decide whether a certain action is considered as murder, hence, the meaning of the term has an impact on the court decision.

Nevertheless, according to Chalmers, words often do not matter (Chalmers [2011] p. 517). In his view, that is the case if speakers are concerned with a first-order domain – not with the use of words – so that nothing crucial rests on the usage of words. If in such a situation opponents engage in a verbal dispute  $(BVD)_{CH}$ , Chalmers calls the dispute *merely* verbal. In his view, the opponents should rather move on to substantive questions regarding the first-order domain. In his opinion, the resolution of merely verbal disputes  $(BVD)_{CH}$  helps to make distinctions and

clarifications. Besides these benefits, merely verbal disputes (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> are pointless – nothing turns on the disputes (Chalmers [2011] p. 525).

Chalmers further distinguishes *wholly* and *partly* verbal disputes (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> (Chalmers [2011] p. 525): a verbal dispute is wholly verbal if an apparent first-order disagreement arises wholly in virtue of a metalinguistic disagreement (i.e. differing beliefs regarding the meaning of some expression, T, that is part of the disputed sentence). A verbal dispute (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> is partly verbal when a first-order disagreement arises partly in virtue of a metalinguistic disagreement and partly in virtue of a substantive non-metalinguistic disagreement. If A and B disagree about S, for instance, and A takes S to mean *p* while B takes it to mean *q*, the dispute is only partly verbal if A and B further disagree substantively about *p* or *q* (or both of them) (Chalmers [2011] p. 526). However, Chalmers does not specify what he takes to be a substantive non-metalinguistic disagreement. A disagreement that is non-metalinguistic is most likely one that does not involve differing beliefs regarding the meaning of some expression (see above). For the moment, I will rely upon an intuitive understanding of the term "substantive disagreement".

Merely wholly or merely partly verbal disputes (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> seem to be the cases of verbal disputes Chalmers wishes to resolve in order for philosophy to make progress. His method for identifying such verbal disputes is presented below.

### 1.3 The Method of Elimination

Chalmers remarks that verbal disputes (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> should evaporate as soon as metalinguistic differences over meaning are resolved (Chalmers [2011] p. 526). However, resolving disagreement over the meaning of a term can be difficult. Chalmers presents the following *method of elimination* with respect to a term, T, in order to identify and resolve verbal disputes (Chalmers [2011] p. 526f.):

#### *Method of Elimination*

First: one bars the use of term T. Second: one tries to find a sentence S' in the newly restricted vocabulary such that the parties disagree nonverbally over S', and such that the disagreement over S' is part of the dispute over S. Third: If there is such an S', the dispute over S is not wholly verbal, or at least there is a substantive dispute in the vicinity. If there is no such S', then the dispute over S is wholly verbal [...].

Stating his method of elimination, Chalmers makes use of the notion of a verbal dispute. He is aware of this circularity and emphasises that it is not his goal to provide a reductive definition of a verbal dispute; neither does he wish to offer a mechanical procedure for determining verbal disputes (Chalmers [2011] p. 529). With the help of clear cases of substantive disagreements and verbal disputes, the method of elimination should rather help in deciding whether unclear cases are verbal disputes. Further, Chalmers talks about nonverbal disagreements and substantive disagreement (or disputes, see terminological remark above). I will try to clarify the meaning of these terms later. For now, I just want to note that the formulation of his method of elimination suggests that verbal disputes are opposed to substantive disputes/disagreements. Further, nonverbal disagreements seem to be substantive disagreements: if the opponents find a nonverbal disagreement about some further sentence  $S'$ , there is a substantive disagreement in the vicinity of the original disagreement.

The main idea of Chalmers' method of elimination can be caught even though the terms above are not specified precisely. In the squirrel case, for instance, the opponents will hardly find a nonverbal disagreement not involving "go round" which is part of the original disagreement. They will probably fail to find a disagreement at all, because they agree on all relevant (non-linguistic) facts. Hence the disagreement is a verbal dispute  $(BVD)_{CH}$ . Chalmers provides an example of a nonverbal disagreement as well (Chalmers [2011] p. 527): suppose two parties disagree over the sentence "O.J. Simpson is a murderer". The opponents want to find out whether their disagreement is a verbal dispute and bar the use of "murderer". They find several sentences  $S'$  – "Simpson slashed his ex-wife's neck with a knife", for instance – that are part of the original disagreement and about which they disagree. Hence, the original disagreement is not wholly verbal; rather, there is a first-order disagreement about the actions Simpson performed. Chalmers points out that the application of the method of elimination may not produce a clear result because the disagreement about a further sentence  $S'$  could also be a verbal dispute (Chalmers [2011] p. 529). In such a situation, the procedure should be iterated.

Further, Chalmers presents a slightly modified version of the method of elimination – *the subscript gambit* – in order to identify verbal disputes  $(BVD)_{CH}$  in philosophy. He considers disagreements in which opponents give different answers to the question "What is  $X$ ?" (Chalmers [2011] p. 532):

*Subscript Gambit*

One says 'X is such-and-such', while the other says 'X is so-and-so'. To apply the subscript gambit, we bar the term X, and introduce two new terms  $X_1$  and  $X_2$  that are stipulated to be equivalent to the two right-hand-sides. We can then ask: do the parties have non-verbal disagreements involving  $X_1$  and  $X_2$ , of a sort such that resolving these disagreements will at least partly resolve the original dispute? If yes, then the original dispute is non-verbal, and the residual disagreement may serve as the focus of a clarified dispute. If no, then this suggests that the original dispute was verbal [...].

Again, Chalmers makes use of the notion of non-verbal disagreement; and again, non-verbal disagreement seems to amount to a substantive disagreement (as in his characterisation of the method of elimination, see above).

Chalmers' subscript gambit can be illustrated with one of his examples – a disagreement over the answer to the question "What is justification?". Chalmers considers a disagreement between an internalist foundationalist and an externalist reliabilist (Chalmers [2011] p. 533): the former holds that a belief is justified iff it is rationally grounded in evidence available to the subject – let's call this justification<sub>1</sub>. On the contrary, the externalist reliabilist holds that a belief is justified iff it is produced by a truth-conducive method – justification<sub>2</sub>. It is possible that the opponents agree that justified<sub>1</sub> beliefs are important in terms of having reasons and subjective norms. Justified<sub>2</sub> beliefs, they also agree, are connected to truth and objective norms. In such a situation the disagreement is likely to be a verbal dispute (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>, as Chalmers notes. That said, he emphasises that the application of the subscript gambit may result in a different outcome depending on the internalist/externalist pair. For different opponents there may be a residual disagreement, for instance about whether justification<sub>1</sub> is what we truly value. Chalmers points out that residual disagreements may be difficult to find (Chalmers [2011] p. 534). In his view, sociological or normative claims expressed through sentences, like " $X_1$  is more important" or " $X_2$  is what people in a certain debate are concerned with", are likely to be subject to substantive disagreements. However, not every substantive residual disagreement renders the original disagreement a substantive *philosophical* disagreement, as will be presented in the following section.

#### 1.4 Possible Rejoinder and Substantive Philosophical Disagreements

Chalmers considers a possible reaction to his diagnosis of verbal disputes (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> in philosophy (Chalmers [2011] p. 535): opponents could emphasise that they disagree about whether X is X<sub>1</sub> or X<sub>2</sub>. The internalist and the externalist, for instance, may disagree about whether justification<sub>1</sub> is really justification. In the opinion of Chalmers, there are two ways to understand this objection (Chalmers [2011] p. 535). First, opponents may disagree about whether justification<sub>1</sub> or justification<sub>2</sub> best fits the use of "justification" in a certain linguistic community. For Chalmers, this question can only be answered by doing sociology, anthropology, linguistics, or experimental philosophy. In his view, nothing in the first-order domain (i.e. epistemology) rests upon these results – as long as the opponents agree on the first-order properties of justification<sub>1</sub> and justification<sub>2</sub>. Second, the parties may disagree about whether justification<sub>1</sub> or justification<sub>2</sub> best mirrors our ordinary concept; that is the concept we use in thought on relevant occasions (Chalmers [2011] p. 535). According to Chalmers, doing psychology or sociology may resolve this issue. If the parties agree on the properties of justification<sub>1</sub> and justification<sub>2</sub>, he states that he does not see why the results of these investigations should be interesting for the first-order domain (i.e. epistemology). In his view, both interpretations of the objection lack an important philosophical disagreement that must be solved – at least for those who are not linguists or philosophers of language. Hence, even if the subscript gambit brings forward a substantive disagreement, this disagreement may not be a substantive *philosophical* disagreement. According to Chalmers, there only remains a substantive philosophical disagreement, if it is a disagreement about the first-order domain – in the disagreement between the internalist and externalist, this would be a disagreement in epistemology. In his view, a disagreement that only concerns the use of language is not a substantive philosophical disagreement in his view. Chalmers emphasises that he does not judge philosophy of language to be unimportant. However, the focus should be placed on the roles that expressions play and should play within language (Chalmers [2011] §§6&7). Thereby, these normative disagreements about how an expression should be used seem to be important. However, they concern the use of language as well. Accordingly, they do not seem to amount to substantive philosophical disagreements about some first-order domain other than philosophy of language.

Further, Chalmers notes that conceptual analysis leads to conceptual pluralism: there are many interesting concepts associated with philosophical terms such as "justification" (Chalmers [2011] p. 540). He considers conceptual analysis to be important. However, he emphasises again that the focus should be placed on the role concepts need to play. If, for instance, it is intended to describe when a person has a reason to believe something, justification<sub>1</sub> is more apt. For a different role – to describe access to true beliefs and objectivity – justification<sub>2</sub> does a better job.

According to Chalmers, quite a few disagreements in philosophy are verbal disputes (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>, such as disagreements about free will, the semantics/pragmatics distinction, and the formulation of physicalism (Chalmers [2011] p. 533f.). In his view, some apparent verbal disputes are nonetheless substantive. His view of so-called bedrock disputes is presented below.

Before moving on, I quickly wish to highlight that Chalmers complains that the verbal dispute (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> between the internalist and the externalist lacks a connection to a substantive philosophical disagreement. This suggests that he is not only searching for a substantive disagreement, but a substantive *philosophical* disagreement underlying the (putative) verbal dispute (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>. Otherwise, Chalmers might refer to the original disagreement as partly non-verbal (or substantive) but non-philosophical. However, he does not clarify the point. I will stick to Chalmers' (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> along with his method of elimination, and call a disagreement verbal dispute only if there is an underlying substantive disagreement. In my view, it matters mainly that the opponents clarify what they disagree about – whether due to the remaining disagreement the original disagreement is called a verbal dispute seems to be a choice of language and this choice must be made clear.

## 2. Chalmers' Characterisation of Bedrock Disputes

### 2.1 Bedrock Disputes

Some disagreements – ontological ones, for instance – behave like verbal disputes: after the method of elimination is applied several times, no disagreement regarding some further sentence S' can be stated. Chalmers claims that in some cases the former disagreements may nonetheless be substantive: they may involve

a bedrock concept – a concept so basic that the disagreement cannot be stated in more basic terms (Chalmers [2011] p. 543). In his view disagreements involving "right", "consciousness", and "exist" are paradigmatic cases of so called bedrock disputes. Accordingly, Chalmers would most likely consider the disagreement between Edna and Pedro to be a bedrock dispute. Chalmers putative views regarding their disagreement will be discussed in the following section. At this place, Chalmers' example of a disagreement between a mereological nihilist and a non-nihilist will be presented (Chalmers [2011] p. 544): a mereological non-nihilist believes that there are composite objects, like an object composed of the pope's nose and the Eiffel Tower, while a mereological nihilist denies the existence of such objects. According to Chalmers, the opponents first disagree about the sentence, "There exist only particles". With the help of the subscript gambit, the disagreement can be reformulated using *there exist*<sub>1</sub> as a quantifier that ranges over simple objects only, while *there exist*<sub>2</sub> ranges over composite objects as well. The opponents might agree that there exist<sub>1</sub> only particles, while there do not exist<sub>2</sub> only particles. However, Chalmers contends that there is a substantive disagreement about whether only particles *exist* and whether existence<sub>1</sub> coincides with *existence* (Chalmers [2011] p. 544). As he explains, this disagreement cannot be further stated if the basic quantifiers are eliminated because the opponents run out of vocabulary. *Existence* or *there exists* is a bedrock concept, and a disagreement about the existential quantifier cannot be stated in more basic terms. According to Chalmers, this result is compatible with his method of elimination: all disagreements close to a bedrock dispute are substantive. He provides the following characterisation of bedrock disputes (Chalmers [2011] p. 545):

*Bedrock Dispute (BD)*

A substantive dispute is bedrock relative to an expression *E* when no underlying dispute can be found by applying the method of elimination to *E*: roughly, when there is no underlying dispute that does not involve *E* or cognates.

Again, a couple of remarks are in order: first, Chalmers does not elucidate whether he takes his characterisation of bedrock disputes to be a necessary or sufficient (or both) condition for a bedrock dispute. It is likely that he would emphasise for an additional time that he does not wish to offer a definition. As the goal of his characterisation seems to be to identify bedrock disputes, I take it to be a suffi-

cient condition for bedrock disputes. Second, Chalmers makes use of the notion of an underlying dispute in order to clarify what a bedrock dispute is. This underlying dispute seems to amount to a substantive disagreement. In looking for an underlying dispute, Chalmers explicitly makes use of the method of elimination and, as seen above, with the method of elimination he endeavoured to identify non-verbal or substantive disagreements. Third, he attempts to elucidate bedrock disputes in explaining the meaning of "underlying". While it is a primitive notion, it meets the following constraints (Chalmers [2011] p. 546): (a) a dispute underlies another if the second dispute arises in virtue of the first. Accordingly, the relation has to be asymmetrical. If dispute A underlies dispute B, then B cannot underlie A as well. (b) "Underlying" has explanatory force: if A underlies B, then A explains B.

Chalmers emphasises that only a few disputes are bedrock (Chalmers [2011] p. 545). The verbal disputes discussed earlier are not bedrock: they are structurally similar to bedrock disputes because there is no remaining disagreement after the method of elimination has been applied. However, as he argues, the opponents agree about all the underlying sentences; an externalist and an internalist, for example, agree about all the sentences as soon as "justification" is replaced by "justification<sub>1</sub>" and "justification<sub>2</sub>". Further, in stating the underlying sentences about which they agree, the opponents do not run out of vocabulary.

Bedrock disputes involve bedrock concepts. However, the notion of bedrock concept is not clear either: how are bedrock expressions identified, how do they obtain their content, and why are disagreements involving them substantive? These questions will be addressed in the following sections.

## **2.2 Bedrock Concepts**

The assumption that certain concepts are ineliminable and bedrock is supported by conceivability arguments and open question arguments, according to Chalmers (Chalmers [2011] p. 552). In his view, conceptual analysis – even if no precise analysis is available – may as well show that certain concepts are ineliminable: if a concept does not appear to be derivative and if frequently appears in the analysis of other concepts, it seems to be bedrock. Further, a disagreement without underlying disagreement according to the method of elimination probably involves a

bedrock concept as well. Chalmers stresses that all these tools are fallible; the characterisation of a concept as bedrock is mostly tentative (and controversial). The discussion now turns to a consideration of how bedrock concepts are individuated. Chalmers remains vague and talks about causal or acquaintance relations between the concepts and the entities they denote (Chalmers [2011] p. 553f.). In his unpublished paper, *Reference Magnets and the Grounds of Intentionality*, he is a little more precise (Chalmers [MS]). In his opinion, bedrock concepts are individuated mainly by theory-external constraints. These are constraints that are not part of the speakers' associated theories (Chalmers [MS] p. 10). Hence, the use or the inferential roles of an expression are not important (or only partly important) in order to determine its content. This idea goes back to David Lewis (Chalmers [MS] p. 1ff, Lewis [1984]) who defends the view that some expressions do not refer wholly by description. Their reference or content is, rather, fixed independently of our cognitive apparatus. Naturalness may, for instance, serve as a theory-external constraint. Thereby, the referent of an expression should be most natural, that is most fundamental in Lewis' view (Chalmers [MS] p. 3f.). The natural referent of our term "gold", for instance, is the chemical element *Au* and not a disjunctive kind of *Au* and fool's gold. *Au* as referent is more natural even though many persons use the term "gold" to refer to both, *Au* and fool's gold, so that the disjunctive kind would fit the use of the expression better.<sup>22</sup>

Regarding bedrock concepts, Chalmers talks of the theory-external constraints of acquaintance and the structural inferential role. In his view, it is reasonable to suppose that some bedrock concepts, like phenomenal concepts, obtain their reference through acquaintance. Thereby, he sketches different ways of thinking about acquaintance (Chalmers [MS] p. 9). Acquaintance is thought of as a relation between subjects and referents that is either taken to be primitive or grounded in some more fundamental external constraint. According to Chalmers, consciousness plays an important role in the second option. He illustrates this thesis by pointing out that acquaintance of the quality redness is probably grounded in having certain conscious experiences, such as perceptual experiences. Thereby, the question is raised about how conscious states are grounded. According to Chalmers, the answer to this question is still open.

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<sup>22</sup> Theodore Sider defends a view that explains the meaning of the existential quantifier in term of naturalness (see particularly [2009], but also Sider [2001], [2004] and [2014]).

Bedrock concepts of logics and mathematics, in contrast, do not obtain their reference through acquaintance, but through a structural inferential role (Chalmers [MS] p. 9f.). Thereby, the concept is not determined through inferential roles to other concepts but through general patterns of inference in which the concepts are involved. Chalmers does not further specify this view. Below, I will endeavour to clarify how this can be understood regarding the disagreement between Edna and Pedro. For now, it is important to bring to mind that bedrock expressions obtain their content mainly through theory-external constraints. This makes it possible for opponents in a disagreement involving bedrock expressions to express the same content, even though they use it differently. This idea will be elucidated in the next section.

### **2.3 Bedrock Expressions express the same Content despite Difference in Use**

Bedrock expressions express the same content even when used differently. Chalmers compares his ideas with an anchored inferentialist view of concepts in order to illustrate the point (Chalmers [2011] p. 553f.). From an inferentialist view, concepts are individuated through inferential relations between the propositions that contain them. An *anchored* inferentialist additionally holds that there are primitive concepts that are individuated non-inferentially through causal or acquaintance relations. The primitive concepts constitute the basis for all other concepts, as non-primitive concepts are partly individuated by their inferential relations to primitive concepts. If opponents use non-primitive expressions differently, they express a different content since their content is individuated through inferential roles to other expressions. However, things look different regarding primitive expressions: as they obtain their content mainly through causal or acquaintance relations, they express the same content, even if they are used to make very different inferences (Chalmers [2011] p. 556).

Chalmers suggests that Hirsch's considerations of charity hold for non-bedrock expressions only (Chalmers [2011] p. 555). In the squirrel example, for instance, Chalmers takes it to be reasonable to suppose that the opponents use "going round" with a different content: the expression obtains its content through inferential connections to other expressions, and the opponents use the expression differently. However, regarding primitive expressions, charity no longer plays a role because, as Chalmers notes, they do not obtain their content through inferential

connections. Accordingly, the linguistic behaviour of the different parties is at most a partial clue to the meaning of primitive expressions. Further, Chalmers states that in the view of an anchored inferentialist it is easier for inferences and assertions involving a primitive expression to be mistaken (Chalmers [2011] p. 555). In a disagreement involving primitive expressions, one party may thus be mistaken.

The anchored inferentialist view and Chalmers' sketch of a theory of concepts are similar in many respects: both suppose primitive or bedrock concepts and non-primitive or non-bedrock concepts. The latter derive their content in part through their relations to primitive or bedrock concepts. In contrast to the anchored inferentialist, Chalmers takes these relations not as inferential but, rather, compositional – i.e. non-primitive concepts are composed of primitive concepts (Chalmers [2011] p. 553f). In his view, his theory of concepts does not require anchored inferentialism, but naturally suggests it.

With his theory at hand, Chalmers is in a position to identify and disentangle verbal disputes. Further, he can classify disagreements that appear to be verbal disputes  $(BDV)_{CH}$  to be substantive bedrock disputes. However, why exactly are bedrock disputes considered substantive? It is now time to speculate on Chalmers' view on substantive disagreements.

## 2.4 Substantive Disagreements

As illustrated above, in order to specify  $(BVD)_{CH}$ , his method of elimination, and his subscript gambit, Chalmers makes use of the notions of disagreement and substantive disagreement/dispute. However, he does not offer any clarification regarding these terms. It is likely that he has left their meaning intentionally unexplained. With an intuitive understanding of the terms at hand, he is not committed to a specific notion of disagreement and substantive disagreement. Accordingly, it is more difficult to refute his position, since he is more flexible to react to potential objections and counterexamples.

As I am not only interested in the notion of a verbal dispute, but also in the notion of disagreement, I will try to catch Chalmers' main idea regarding substantive disagreements. I am unsure as to whether he makes up a difference between disagreements (general disagreements or non-substantive disagreements, for instance)

and substantive disagreements. Therefore, I will only try to clarify his view on substantive disagreements, as he contrasts them with verbal disputes (see above). Chalmers offers several examples of substantive disagreements: one such example is a disagreement about whether Simpson slashed his ex-wife's neck with a knife (Chalmers [2009] p. 526f.). Further, he considers sociological disagreements about how an expression is used, psychological disagreements about what ordinary concept is expressed with a certain expression, and normative disagreements about how an expression should be used as substantive (Chalmers [2011] p. 534f.). However, as presented above, these disagreements are not *philosophical* as they are not about some question in a philosophical first-order domain other than the philosophy of language. In addition, Chalmers considers bedrock disputes and also disputes about which concepts are bedrock to be substantive (Chalmers [2011] p. 545, 552). Why are those disagreements substantive? Chalmers takes much effort to show that bedrock expressions convey the same content. Accordingly, it might be suggested that in his view, substantive disagreements regarding sentences  $S$  and  $\neg S$  require opponents using these sentences with the same content. This seems to hold at least for the kind of substantive disagreement Chalmers takes to be opposed to verbal disputes. He may, however, be ready to accept other kinds of substantive disagreements. I will thus take him to agree to the following necessary condition for substantive disagreements, formulated opposed to his characterisation of verbal disputes. (As the ascribed view on substantive disagreement is quite speculative, I mark it with "\*"):

*Substantive Disagreement (SD)\*<sub>CH</sub>* (opposed to (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>)

A disagreement over  $S$  is substantive only if the parties agree on the meanings of all expressions  $T$  that are part of  $S$ .

If the opponents agree on the meanings of all expressions in  $T$ ,  $S$  seems to express the same content (for different views, see Chalmers' meta-ontological positions illustrated below). The question arises as to whether  $S$  expresses the same content regarding speaker meaning or sentence meaning. For his characterisation of broadly verbal dispute he cares about speaker meaning, accordingly he probably cares about speaker meaning regarding substantive disagreements as well. Further, the formulation of the necessary condition for substantive disagreements with the help of agreement regarding the meanings of the sentence in question supports this suggestion: agreement is most reasonably spelled out with the help

of beliefs. In other words, the beliefs of the opponents regarding the meaning of the terms matter.

Regarding Chalmers' emphasis on the speakers' beliefs about meaning, the question could be posed as to how his considerations regarding bedrock concepts fit into this picture. On one hand, the beliefs of speakers about meaning are important for verbal disputes and substantive disagreement. On the other, bedrock expressions in bedrock disputes obtain their content by theory external constraints and the speakers' beliefs about meaning do not seem important. However, as we will see later, Chalmers would likely contend that it is only possible that opponents engage in a bedrock dispute if they want to express a bedrock concept with their bedrock expression. Thereby, his view about the content of bedrock expression helps to explain how it is possible that opponents in a bedrock dispute express the same content with their bedrock expression despite using it differently. Before moving on to objections against Chalmers' view on verbal disputes and bedrock disputes, his views on metalinguistic disagreements will briefly be discussed.

## 2.5 Metalinguistic Disagreements

Regarding Chalmers' ascribed account of substantive disagreement, I would like to examine metalinguistic or linguistic disagreements: at some point, Chalmers seems to suppose that the content agreed to be expressed by S must not be linguistic or metalinguistic. In his view, the disagreement about S, "Pluto is a planet", is a verbal dispute because the connection of S and the underlying disagreement about S', "Astronomical terms should be used in the way that is most useful for science", is metalinguistic (Chalmers [2011] p. 528). Accordingly, he probably does not take the latter disagreement to be substantive. However, at a different point, he refers to normative metalinguistic questions as substantive (Chalmers [2011] p. 542). He concedes that some terms play a certain role in history, so that some concepts may be more aptly associated with certain terms. In his view, particularly for non-ideal agents, how terms and concepts are connected may prove crucial; since, regarding a certain concept, different questions may be highlighted or different associations or inferences drawn. However, in making these notes, Chalmers may take the disagreement not to be substantive but, rather, to be *important*. As specified above, a verbal dispute may matter because something im-

portant rests on linguistic usage (Chalmers [2011] p. 516). Further, he may also posit that metalinguistic or linguistic disagreements are substantive but not philosophical. As illustrated above, Chalmers considers disagreements to be substantive and philosophical when there is an important philosophical disagreement in the first-order domain that does not concern the use of language (Chalmers [2011] §§5&6). It is probable that Chalmers would not care about whether metalinguistic disagreements are considered important verbal disputes  $(BVD)_{CH}$  or metalinguistic, non-philosophical substantive disagreements. For him, it may only matter that the opponents know that they involve in a normative disagreement about the use of a word. Either way it is possible to retain the characterisation of substantive disagreement above. However, if normative metalinguistic disagreements are taken to be verbal disputes,  $(BVD)_{CH}$  would have to be adapted accordingly.

### **3. Objections to Chalmers' Characterisations of Verbal Disputes and Bedrock Disputes**

#### **3.1 Objections to Chalmers' Characterisation of Verbal Disputes**

Chalmers' account of verbal disputes is not subject to great controversy. It offends some philosophers because a disagreement about their favourite philosophical topic is considered to be a verbal dispute  $(BVD)_{CH}$ , and they provide arguments to show that this is not the case (see e.g. Greco [2013] and Schulte [2014]). Others criticise  $(BVD)_{CH}$  for not being met in all examples one would consider to be a verbal dispute (Jenkins [2014] and Jackson [2014]). Accordingly, they argue that  $(BVD)_{CH}$  is not a necessary condition for verbal disputes. As I am mainly interested in the characterisation of verbal disputes, only the counterexamples against  $(BVD)_{CH}$  will be discussed.

As presented above, Chalmers does not intend to provide a definition of a verbal dispute with  $(BVD)_{CH}$ . In addition, I think it is most reasonable to interpret him as offering a sufficient condition for verbal disputes. However, it is possible to point out the limitations of  $(BVD)_{CH}$ . There are two examples of verbal disputes that Chalmers does not seem to be able to encompass with his characterisation. Carrie S. I. Jenkins considers the following example of a disagreement about the sen-

tence "Scepticism is mistaken" to be a problem for Chalmers (Jenkins [2014] p. 16f.):

- A: "Nobody cares at all about whether a subject can completely rule out the possibility that he is being deceived by an evil demon. Scepticism is mistaken."
- B: "Unless a subject can rule out all not-p possibilities, his position with regard to p is epistemically defective. Scepticism is not mistaken."

According to Jenkins, the disagreement arises in virtue of a disagreement about the meaning of "know". The second party believes that in order to know that p, one has to be in a position to rule out all not-p possibilities while the first party denies such a requirement for knowledge. However, as Jenkins notes, the disputed sentence S, "Scepticism is mistaken", does not contain "know" as expression T; hence, the disagreement is not a verbal dispute (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>. As a reply, Chalmers could point out that the meaning of "scepticism" is connected to the meaning of "knowledge" or the verb "to know". "Scepticism" might be defined as "a position that holds that one cannot have knowledge of the external world", for instance. As the opponents disagree about the meaning of "knowledge", they disagree about the meaning of "scepticism" as well. Hence, "scepticism" is the expression T and it is about its meaning that the parties disagree.

Brendan Balcerak Jackson presents a second example of a verbal dispute that poses a problem for Chalmers (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> (Jackson [2014] p. 38). Kermit and Gonzo are confronted to respond to the following question of a third party: "Is there anywhere nearby where I can buy books on metaphysics?". They answer differently:

- Gonzo: "The bookstore downtown sells books on metaphysics." (S)
- Kermit: "No, that bookstore doesn't have any books on metaphysics." ( $\neg$ S)

As Jackson notes, "metaphysics" is ambiguous: besides denoting the philosophical discipline, the term can be used to describe supernatural phenomena – out of body experiences, for instance. According to Jackson, Gonzo and Kermit have exactly the same beliefs about "metaphysics" – the philosophical meaning – hence they do not disagree about the meaning of the term. However, they make conflicting assumption about how the questioner uses the term. In Jackson's view, the disa-

greement in their conflicting answers is not more genuine as if Gonzo and Kermit would have conflicting beliefs about the meaning of the term. According to Chalmers' (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>, though, the disagreement is not a verbal dispute. However, even if it is admitted that Gonzo and Kermit have the same beliefs about "metaphysics", I am not sure whether Chalmers wishes to consider the disagreement as a verbal dispute. Even though the opponents do not disagree about whether the bookstore sells philosophical books or books on supernatural phenomena, there is a substantive disagreement nearby: they disagree about whether the questioner uses the term with the philosophical meaning. Accordingly, there is an underlying substantive disagreement (but not a substantive *philosophical* disagreement), and with the application of Chalmers' method of elimination this point could be clarified. I thus do not consider the examples of Jenkins and Jackson to amount to a problem for Chalmers' (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>. The discussion will now turn to objections against Chalmers' view on bedrock concepts.

### 3.2 Objections to Chalmers' Characterisation of Bedrock Disputes

Chalmers' view on bedrock disputes is not hotly debated. In order to criticise his view, one would need to know more about his theory of bedrock disputes and bedrock concepts. There is a debate in meta-ontology connected to the question of what kind of content is expressed by ontological existence assertions. The different meta-ontological positions will be sketched below. Further, it will be elucidated how Chalmers might explain that the disagreement between Pedro and Edna is a bedrock dispute. Thereafter, it will be argued that he is only in a position to describe their disagreement as a substantive bedrock dispute if heavyweight realism – a certain meta-ontological position – is presumed.

#### 3.2.1 Meta-ontological Positions

To better understand Chalmers' view on the ontological disagreements between Edna and Pedro, I will first sketch his elaboration of ontological positions within his paper entitled *Ontological Anti-Realism* (Chalmers [2009]). It is his opinion that ontological existence assertions must be distinguished from ordinary existence assertions. In his view, *ordinary* existence assertions are typically made in

the first-order discussion of some subject matter, for instance a mathematician might assert "There are four prime numbers less than ten" in a talk about prime numbers (Chalmers [2009] p. 81). *Ontological* existence assertions like the assertion of "Abstract objects exist", in contrast, are made by philosophers while arguing about what exists. For Chalmers, disagreements involving ordinary existence assertions may be verbal disputes (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>, while disagreements about ontological existence assertions are substantive (Chalmers [2009] p. 90f.). In his view, the structure of such disagreements suggests that "There exists" is used to express the same concept, the bedrock concept of *existence*, and the opponents seem to be involved in a bedrock dispute.<sup>23</sup> The disagreement persists strongly and the opponents are not willing to resolve it with the method of elimination. Chalmers writes that the data on agreement and disagreement are among the best guides to decide whether an expression is used to express a common concept. In his view, in a paradigmatic ontological disagreement opponents at least take themselves to express a common concept and this fact must be explained. Chalmers notes that these data do not prove that "There exists" expresses a bedrock concept. In his view, it is also possible that there is only a meta-concept or pseudo-concept (Chalmers [2009] p. 91f.). Below, I will try to elucidate his ideas about such concepts. Further, he seems to assume that the existential quantifier only expresses a bedrock concept if it is used to describe the fundamental structure of reality. This will become clearer after the presentation of the different meta-ontological positions below.

According to Chalmers, positions within ontology regarding ontological existence assertions can be divided into three groups holding different semantic views: heavyweight realists, lightweight realists, and anti-realists. *Heavyweight realists* hold onto the traditional semantic position and believe that ontological existence assertions have an objective and determinate truth value. The truth value of an assertion is objective and determinate according to Chalmers, if it does not depend on a context of assessment (Chalmers [2009] p. 92, for MacFarlane's definition of the context of assessment, see p. 17f of this thesis). Thereby, the *assertion* (or *asserted* proposition) always retains the same truth value independently from

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<sup>23</sup> In his paper, Chalmers does not use the expression "bedrock". However, his characterisation of primitive concepts suggests that he writes about what he later (Chalmers [2011]) calls bedrock concepts. Further, he speaks of the primitive concept of *absolute existential quantification* (Chalmers [2009] p. 91). I will continue to talk of the bedrock concept of *existence*, having previously introduced it in that way.

whom it is assessed. Further, heavyweight realists hold that "there exists" is used to make a heavyweight quantification; that is, ontological assertions are never trivially true or false. Rather, their truth value depends on substantive philosophical considerations (Chalmers [2009] p. 77f., 96). Chalmers suggests that it is natural to suppose heavyweight quantification if ontology is considered to discover the fundamental structure of reality, and if one believes in a bedrock concept of existence. (As proponents of heavyweight realism, Chalmers mentions Bennett [2009], Dorr [2005], Fine [2009], Horgan and Potric [2006], Sider [2009], and van Inwagen [2009], see Chalmers [2009], p. 97.)

As heavyweight realists, *lightweight realists* judge ontological existence assertions to have an objective and determinate truth value as well. However, in their view, they involve lightweight quantification. Thereby, they hold that ontological existence assertions are trivially true or false (Chalmers [2009] p. 78, 94f.). They may think, for instance, that they amount to conceptual or analytical truths. There are different views of lightweight realism (Chalmers mentions Hirsch [1993], Hale & Wright [2001], [2009] and Eklund [2009], see Chalmers [2009], p. 98). The details of these accounts will not be discussed further, as they are not important for the following considerations. For now, it is mainly important to be aware that there can be different positions regarding ontological disagreements: proponents of a lightweight realist position called *ontological contextualism*, for instance, take ontological existence sentences to express different contents in different contexts of use (Chalmers [2009] p. 98). According to such a view, opponents in an ontological disagreement seem to talk past one another, as they use terms like "there exists" with a different meaning. In a disagreement between a nihilist and universalist about the number of existing objects, for instance, ontological contextualists would take the existential quantifier to express  $exist_U$  and  $exist_N$  respectively. Thereby, the claims of both parties may be true. However, not every lightweight realist must judge disagreements in ontology to be a verbal dispute meeting (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>. One can argue for deflationary truth conditions and posit that in an ontological disagreement, only one party gets it right. Chalmers characterises the lightweight realism of Matti Eklund as *lightweight maximalism* in such a way that it is a conceptual truth about existence that Fs exist if the existence of an F is consistent with certain basic truths (Chalmers [2009] p. 98, Eklund [2009]). Thereby, it seems to be assumed that opponents in an ontological disagreement use "there exists" with the same content while one simply gets things

wrong because the existence of F is denied even though the existence of F is consistent with certain basic truths. The question can be posed as to whether lightweight maximalists take opponents in an ontological disagreement to express a bedrock concept with "there exists". Chalmers does not elucidate this case. However, he always characterises lightweight realists as denying that there is a bedrock concept of *existence* or as stating that the concept is highly defective. Accordingly, using the existential quantifier with the same content does not seem to be a sufficient condition for expressing a bedrock concept. Further, it must be supposed that the existential quantifier is used to (perhaps unsuccessfully) describe the fundamental structure of reality.

Contrary to lightweight realists, *anti-realists* believe in heavyweight quantification. However, they posit that all or at least some ontological existence assertions do not have an objective and determinate truth value (Chalmers [2009] p. 92f.). There are different versions of ontological anti-realism (Chalmers [2009] p. 94): it might be held that ontological existence assertions are not truth-apt (*ontological non-cognitivism*) or that their truth value is assessment sensitive (*ontological relativism*) or indeterminate (*ontological indeterminism*). For Chalmers, a radical anti-realist position is not plausible because it is reasonable to suppose that some ontological existence assertions are always false; for instance, the assertion of the sentence, "There are round squares". Mostly, philosophers are anti-realists regarding specific domains (e.g. anti-realism regarding existence assertions of numbers), while being realists regarding others. (As proponents of anti-realism, Chalmers mentions Carnap [1945], Putnam [1987], Sidelle [2002], and Yablo [2009], see Chalmers [2009], p. 78.) Summing up: heavyweight and lightweight realists agree that ontological existence assertions have an objective and determinate truth value, while heavyweight realists and anti-realists agree about their truth-conditions (Chalmers [2009] p. 99). Chalmers, in his paper, presents a version of anti-realism. However, his position will not be discussed here.

As previously mentioned, he emphasises that "there exists" may only express a meta-concept or pseudo-concept of existence (Chalmers [2009] p. 91f.). Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on these ideas at great length. Regarding a pseudo-concept he notes that it may function like a concept in some respects, while failing to do so in others. It may, for instance, not have a determinate extension so that a sentence with a pseudo concept is not truth-evaluable (Chalmers [2009] p. 102). According to his characterisation of meta-ontological positions, anti-realists

would likely contend that "there exists" only expresses a pseudo-concept, as in their view some ontological existence assertions do not have an objective and determinate truth value. In some parts, Chalmers describes lightweight realists as taking the existential quantifier to also express a pseudo-concept (Chalmers [2009] p. 124). However, they may deny that there is a concept of existence at all. In the latter case, they may have a meta-concept of existence. Regarding a meta-concept, he talks about a concept of the concept of existence (Chalmers [2009] p. 91). Thereby, he might think of a concept as being what some people take to be a concept. While lightweight realists argue against heavyweight realists that there is no bedrock concept of existence, for instance, they must at least possess a meta-concept of the bedrock concept of existence; that is a concept about what heavyweight realists take to be the concept of existence.

The discussion will now turn to the ontological disagreement between Edna and Pedro.

### 3.2.2 Are Pedro and Edna involved in a Bedrock Dispute?

What impact do the considerations above have on the analysis of the disagreement between Edna and Pedro? Let's recall their disagreement:

- Pedro: "In front of us there is a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence." (S)
- Edna: "No, in front of us there is no succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence." ( $\neg$ S)

Regarding the three meta-ontological positions described above, Pedro and Edna both seem to be heavyweight realists: both use "there exists" or "there is" to describe facts about the world. In addition, as long as they continue arguing they seem to suppose that they use "there is" to express the same concept. Further, they do not seem to think that the propositions expressed by S and  $\neg$ S respectively do not have a truth value. Hence, it is reasonable to suppose that they are both heavyweight realists who (at least try to) express the bedrock concept of existence. They simply have different views about what exists in the world.

However, the characterisation of their disagreement remains quite vague. What is the content of the bedrock expression "there exists", and what do the opponents disagree about? In order to specify the content of the existential quantifier, one needs to know what meta-ontological position is correct. First, it will be investigated to what the disagreement would amount to if heavyweight realism were true and if there was a bedrock concept of existence. In such a situation, Chalmers' considerations regarding the content of bedrock expressions come into play: in his view, the concept would probably acquire its content through structural inferential role. Contrary to bedrock concepts that are grounded in acquaintance, the existential quantifier likely does not obtain its content through perceptual experience with the referent. Temporal parts of objects or abstract objects, for instance, do not seem to be perceptually experienced. However, what is the structural inferential role of "there exists"? This is difficult to tell as Chalmers does not further specify to what a structural inferential role amounts. He might think of general patterns of inference involving the existential quantifier. It is probable that Edna and Pedro use general inferences with "there exists" in the same way: they agree under what conditions the existential quantifier is used and how it is used. They only disagree about whether these conditions are met regarding temporal parts of ordinary objects. Hence, the general inference pattern of the existential quantifier is meaning constitutive, while the relation to specific concepts is not. Accordingly, Pedro and Edna use "there is" to express the same content. Further, as argued above, it is supposed that they use the existential quantifier to describe the structure of the world – otherwise, it would not express a bedrock concept in the view of heavyweight realists. In addition, it seems to be assumed that there either exist or do not exist temporal parts of ordinary objects. Hence, if heavyweight realism is true, Edna and Pedro are involved in a bedrock dispute about the structure of the world.

Things look different though if anti-realism or lightweight realism were true. According to anti-realists, Edna and Pedro take themselves to express the bedrock concept of existence while they in fact only express a pseudo-concept thereof. Their assertions do not have an objective and determinate truth value. What is the content of the existential quantifier and what content is expressed by sentences containing the existential quantifier in such a situation? The content of the pseudo-concept remains unclear. It is likely that Chalmers would retain to his view regarding non-defective bedrock concepts, and claim that it obtains its content

through structural inferential role – for instance, regarding clearly false assertions like that made by asserting the sentence "There are round squares". Thereby, it is assumed that some assertions involving the existential quantifier do not to have an objective and determinate truth value. In such situations, speakers make an assertion that either is not truth-apt or has an indeterminate or a relative truth value (depending on the form of anti-realism). The question arises as to what the disagreement between Pedro and Edna amounts, if anti-realism is correct. Chalmers would most likely not describe them as being involved in a bedrock dispute. At least, they do not engage in what I will call *substantive* bedrock dispute, that is, a bedrock dispute involving a non-defective bedrock concept. However, the necessary condition for a substantive disagreement (SD)\*<sub>CH</sub> above is met, as Pedro and Edna agree on the meanings of all terms in S. Yet, (SD)\*<sub>CH</sub> is a necessary condition for a substantive disagreement only. Chalmers may add further necessary conditions for the kind of substantive disagreement he has in mind. He might, for instance, demand that the opponents must succeed in expressing content with an objective and determinate truth value via the sentences in question – otherwise, the disagreement is defective. These considerations are speculative and will not be pursued any further. However, it seems reasonable to suppose that Chalmers would not consider the disagreement between Pedro and Edna as substantive, if Pedro and Edna are taken to express contents that do not have an objective and determinate truth value. If opponents disagree in making such assertions, they seem to make a mistake: they take themselves to disagree about facts – for instance about whether there are temporal parts of physical objects – while there are no facts of this matter. The opponents argue about the truth value of assertions that in fact do not have an objective and determinate truth value and their disagreement seems to be defective. However, it can at least be explained why Pedro and Edna are arguing: since they are both heavyweight realists, they take themselves to express the same bedrock concept while arguing about facts of the world. Unfortunately, their meta-ontological position is wrong. They only express a pseudo-concept while arguing about the truth value of assertions that do not have an objective and determinate truth value.

What if lightweight realism is true? As seen above, there is no bedrock concept of existence in their view. Lightweight realists who argue that disagreements in first order ontology are verbal disputes, take Edna and Pedro as expressing different contents with "there exists" – *there exists<sub>E</sub>* vs. *there exists<sub>P</sub>*. However, it is not

clear whether Chalmers would describe the disagreement as verbal dispute  $(BVD)_{CH}$ : in his view, the speakers' beliefs about the meanings in question matter in order to decide whether a disagreement is a verbal dispute  $(BVD)_{CH}$ . As Pedro and Edna agree about the content expressed by the existential quantifier (even if they may not succeed in expressing this content),  $(BVD)_{CH}$  is not met. However,  $(SD)^*_{CH}$  is met. It is, however, reasonable to suppose that Chalmers would concede that Edna and Pedro fail to express a truth-evaluable content with their sentences. Thereby, it can again be assumed that Chalmers would judge the disagreement between Edna and Pedro to be defective, as they argue about the truth value of assertions that do not have an objective truth value.

As presented above, there are also lightweight realists who do not argue for verbal disputes in first order ontology. According to this view, Edna and Pedro are not involved in a bedrock dispute about the structure of the world. One simply gets the deflationary truth conditions wrong and makes a mistake. There is a disagreement regarding the contents expressed due to the sentence meaning of the sentences uttered. Most likely, Chalmers would take such a disagreement between Edna and Pedro to be defective, even if this second kind of lightweight realism were true: regarding the expressed speaker meaning, the opponents still argue about the truth value of assertions that in fact do not have an objective truth value.

Let's take stock: in order to decide whether the disagreement between Edna and Pedro is a substantive bedrock dispute, the meta-ontological position must be settled. If anti-realism or lightweight realism is true, Chalmers would likely take the disagreement between Edna and Pedro to be defective: the opponents argue about the truth value of assertions that in fact do not have an objective and determinate truth value. Edna and Pedro only engage in a substantive bedrock dispute if heavyweight realism is true. Only in this case they both express the non-defective bedrock concept of existence and they argue about facts. Hence, there is no substantive bedrock dispute about first order ontology without heavyweight realism.

What impact do these considerations have regarding Chalmers' characterisation of bedrock disputes? If he wishes to argue that some disagreements in first-order ontology, like that between Edna and Pedro, are substantive bedrock disputes, he must further argue for heavyweight realism. Otherwise, the disagreement between Edna and Pedro may be a defective bedrock dispute that Chalmers would hardly consider to be substantive. However, if he argues for heavyweight realism, these

considerations carry the argumentative force to show that a disagreement is a bedrock dispute. His method of elimination only does half of the job – as it might identify a defective bedrock dispute.

#### 4. Summary

Chalmers offers a criterion for verbal disputes,  $(BVD)_{CH}$ , which roughly states that opponents engage in a verbal dispute if they disagree about some sentence  $S$ , while this disagreement arises wholly in virtue of the opponents having different beliefs about the meaning of some term  $T$  in  $S$ . In addition, he formulates his method of elimination in order to detect verbal disputes: the opponents are asked to bar the contentious expression  $T$  from their vocabulary, and to find a disputed sentence  $S'$  in the restricted vocabulary that is part of the disagreement about  $S$ . If there is a disputed sentence  $S'$ , the original disagreement is substantive, otherwise, it is considered to be a verbal dispute. Chalmers account of verbal disputes does not face severe problems. Jenkins and Jackson argue that  $(BVD)_{CH}$  is not a necessary condition for verbal disputes. In my view, Chalmers is in a position to reject their challenge (but in this thesis,  $(BVD)_{CH}$  is considered to amount to a sufficient condition for verbal disputes only).

According to Chalmers, some disagreements that are detected by the method of elimination are not verbal disputes but substantive disagreements nonetheless. So-called bedrock disputes are substantive because they involve a bedrock concept – a concept so basic that the disagreement cannot be stated in more basic terms. Bedrock concepts are individuated by theory external constraints, such as acquaintance or structural inferential role. Accordingly, it is possible that opponents in a disagreement involving a bedrock expression express the same content, even though there is a difference in its use. Nevertheless, Chalmers remarks about the individuation of bedrock concepts remain quite vague. However, without a detailed semantic theory for bedrock expressions, it cannot be decided whether Chalmers' account of bedrock disputes is convincing.

Chalmers would most likely consider the disagreement between Edna and Pedro as a bedrock dispute involving the bedrock concept of existence. Thereby, Edna and Pedro are most reasonably described as using the bedrock expression in the

same general patterns of inference, so that it obtains its content by structural inferential role. However, their disagreement only seems to be a substantive bedrock dispute if heavyweight realism as meta-ontological position is true. According to heavyweight realism ontological existence assertions have an objective and determinate truth value, they are not trivially true or false and describe the fundamental structure of reality. If anti-realism or lightweight realism as meta-ontological positions are true, the disagreement between Edna and Pedro seems to be defective, since they are taken to argue about the truth value of assertions that do not have an objective and determinate truth value. Accordingly, if Chalmers wishes to show that Edna and Pedro engage in a substantive bedrock dispute, he must further argue for heavyweight realism.

## Conclusions to Part II

Hirsch offers a characterisation of verbal disputes  $(VD)_H$  and he argues that  $(VD)_H$  is met in the ontological disagreement between Edna and Pedro about whether there exist temporal parts of an object. However, it is challenged whether  $(VD)_H$  amounts to a sufficient condition for verbal disputes opposed to substantive disagreements. Accordingly,  $(VD)_H$  is not a compelling characterisation of verbal disputes and further, it does not show that Edna and Pedro engage in a verbal dispute: they might engage in a substantive disagreement (PJA) or (DRCC), even though  $(VD)_H$  is met.

Chalmers is willing to detect verbal disputes in philosophy and he offers a widely accepted characterisation of verbal disputes  $(BVD)_{CH}$  and a method to identify and resolve them. However, in his view, some disagreements behave similarly to verbal disputes while being substantive nonetheless, since they involve a bedrock concept. Chalmers would likely consider the disagreement between Edna and Pedro to be a substantive bedrock dispute. However, in order to support this claim, he further has to argue for heavyweight realism. Additionally, without a detailed elaboration of the semantic theory for bedrock expressions, it cannot be decided whether Chalmers' characterisation of bedrock disputes is compelling. Accordingly, the question as to whether Edna and Pedro engage in a verbal dispute or a substantive disagreement remains unanswered.

In the following part, the various characterisations of substantive disagreement and verbal dispute presented in this thesis will be compared and assessed and it will be looked for compelling necessary and sufficient conditions. In addition, it will be explained why the various authors judge disagreements about taste and ontological disagreement about the existence of temporal parts differently.

Part III

Comparison & Assessment

# **Chapter I**

## **Comparison and Assessment of the Different Characterisations of Substantive Disagreement and Verbal Dispute**

Heretofore we encountered different characterisations of substantive disagreement and verbal dispute. In the following final part of this thesis the different characterisations will be compared and similarities and differences will be carved out. First, the various accounts of disagreement will be summarised. Most of the authors only present their views regarding either disagreements about taste or ontological disagreements. Their views about the respective disagreement will be recapitulated, but in order to systemise the debate, it will also be speculated on their view about the other kind of disagreement. Thereafter, the different accounts of disagreement will be compared regarding several points of comparison. Third, the different accounts will be assessed regarding these points of comparison, and it will be investigated whether there are compelling necessary or sufficient conditions for substantive disagreements and verbal disputes all authors agree about. Even though some agreement can be found, the various authors analyse disagreements about taste and ontological disagreements differently. At last, an explanation for these differences will be given.

## 1. Summary of Different Characterisations of Substantive Disagreement and Verbal Dispute

### 1.1 MacFarlane

#### 1.1.1 Summary: Substantive Disagreements and Disagreements about Taste

MacFarlane characterises two kinds of disagreements and their subkinds. He would most likely agree that he offers sufficient conditions for substantive disagreements. The discussion will briefly recapitulate MacFarlane's characterisations. The first kind of disagreement concerns the satisfaction of doxastic and non-doxastic attitudes (MacFarlane [2014] p. 121):

*Disagreement (NC)*

A disagrees with B's attitude if B's attitude is noncotenable with A's attitudes, that is if A could not adopt B's attitude (an attitude with the same content and force) without changing her mind.

For the second kind of disagreement the context of use or the context of assessment of the attitudes in question are taken into account. Regarding non-doxastic attitudes, MacFarlane formulates disagreement as *preclusion of joint satisfaction* (PJS) (MacFarlane [2014] p. 123):

*Disagreement (PJS)*

A disagrees with B's attitude if B's attitude precludes the satisfaction of A's attitude(s).

Regarding doxastic attitudes, MacFarlane introduces disagreement as *preclusion of joint accuracy* (PJA) (MacFarlane [2014] p. 126)<sup>24</sup>:

*Disagreement (PJA)*

A disagrees with B's attitude if the accuracy of B's attitude precludes the accuracy of A's attitude.

Disagreement (PJA) must be stated more precisely if disagreements involving assessment sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>R</sub> come into play. The truth of a content expressed by an assessment sensitive sentence may be evaluated with respect to

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<sup>24</sup> Please remember that MacFarlane's naming regarding disagreements considering the accuracy of doxastic attitudes differs from the naming used here. For more details see p. 62ff of this thesis.

some context of assessment different from the context of use. If the context of use additionally serves as context of assessment, then disagreement (PJA) is specified as *preclusion of joint reflexive accuracy*:

*Disagreement (PJRA)*

A disagrees with B's attitude if the accuracy of B's attitude (*as assessed from B's context*) precludes the accuracy of A's attitude (*as assessed from A's context*).

If it is assumed that the context of assessment is fixed to be the same context for A and B's attitude, then disagreement (PJA) can be specified as disagreement *preclusion of joint irreflexive accuracy* (PJIA):

*Disagreement (PJIA)*

A disagrees with B's attitude if the accuracy of B's attitude (*as assessed from any context*) precludes the accuracy of A's attitude (*as assessed from that same context*).

As we have seen in the first part of this thesis, MacFarlane seeks to explain disagreements about taste with the help of doxastic disagreements – otherwise it remains unclear as to why disagreements about taste often contain disagreement markers and propositional anaphora. In his view, in disagreements about taste such as the disagreement between Marta and Kurt there is disagreement (NC) and disagreement (PJIA). First, if Marta and Kurt believe contradictory contents *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious* vs. *Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious* (if "is delicious" is taken to be context sensitive (CS)<sub>NI</sub> or assessment sensitive (CS)<sub>R</sub>), the respective parties cannot adopt the other party's belief without being incoherent. Second, if the believed propositions are evaluated with respect to the same context of assessment (if "is delicious" is taken to be assessment sensitive (CS)<sub>R</sub>), not both beliefs can be accurate. If Marta's standard of taste serves as standard in the context of assessment, only her belief is accurate. The content of Kurt's belief is evaluated as false and Kurt's belief is not accurate (similar considerations hold the other way round). Accordingly, the accuracy of Marta's belief precludes the accuracy of Kurt's (and vice versa).

In MacFarlane's view, relativists offer the most promising explanation for disagreement about taste: in their view, besides disagreement (NC) regarding doxastic attitudes, there is also disagreement (PJIA). Contextualists cannot account for

either of these disagreements. Nonindexicalists can explain the former, but fail to account for the latter, as in their view, the accuracy of a belief about taste depends on the standard of taste operative in the context of use. According to MacFarlane, relativists can additionally explain why opponents in a disagreement about taste not only want to change the other party's belief, but why they want to refute it.

However, as was illustrated in the first part of this thesis, MacFarlane's characterisations of disagreement remain unconvincing, as they face several problems. Considering doxastic attitudes, only disagreement (PJA) is not disputed. There lacks a convincing example of disagreement (PJRA) and some disagreements satisfying disagreement (NC) do not seem to be substantive, as there is no tension between the opponents' views. Disagreement (PJIA), the relativist's core notion of disagreement, is most disputed: first, there is no clash in truth value between expressed propositions, as the opponents agree about the truth value of all expressed propositions evaluated with respect to every circumstance of evaluation. Accordingly, there is no tension between the opponents' claims and it remains unclear what the opponents disagree about. Second, due to relativised accuracy, disagreements about taste seem irrational or silly. Third, disagreement (PJIA) about taste does not seem to be substantive, as in the face of peer disagreement opponents are not ready to revise their judgment. I thus consider him not to offer a convincing analysis of disagreements about taste.

The discussion will now turn to a speculation about MacFarlane's view of verbal disputes.

### 1.1.2 Verbal Disputes

MacFarlane does not talk about verbal disputes. Quite a few philosophers consider verbal disputes to be non-substantive disagreements. However, unlike others, MacFarlane does not distinguish substantive disagreements from non-substantive disagreements. Regarding contextualists who are often accused of describing opponents in a disagreement about taste to engage in a verbal dispute he maintains that there is no disagreement if apparent opponents make compatible claims (MacFarlane [2014] p. 8, [2007] p. 18). If, in order to systematise the debate on disagreement, it is desired to ascribe to MacFarlane a view on verbal dispute, it is possible to extract the following necessary condition for a verbal dispute from his remark (as the ascribed view is quite speculative, it is marked with "\*"):

*Verbal Dispute (VD)\*<sub>MF</sub>*

A disagreement between A and B is a verbal dispute only if the opponents make compatible claims.

Two compatible claims can both be true. However, as truth is relative according to MacFarlane it must be specified what he might mean by "compatible claims". Does it have to be possible that the claims are both true with respect to different contexts of use as circumstance of evaluation? Or can they even be true with respect to the same context as circumstance of evaluation? MacFarlane makes his remark about compatible claims when talking about contextualists about predicates of personal taste who suppose that opponents in a disagreement about taste use the same sentence to express different contents. It will thus be assumed that when talking about compatible claims MacFarlane talks about claims with different contents that can both be true with respect to the same context as circumstance of evaluation. Claims that meet  $(VD)^*_{MF}$  do not meet disagreement (NC) as it is possible for the opponents engaged in a disagreement about such claims to take up the other party's belief (attitude with the same content and same force) without changing their mind.

### 1.1.3 Ontological Disagreements

Is MacFarlane's analysis of disagreements about taste applicable to ontological disagreements? He does not talk about ontological disagreements, nevertheless, sentences with "there exists" might be considered to be assessment sensitive  $(CS)_R$ . Accordingly, the context of assessment is taken to contain a feature for the ontological theory of existence (or similar).<sup>25</sup> If sentences with "there exists" are considered to be assessment sensitive, the same kinds and subkinds of doxastic disagreements offered by MacFarlane hold as in disagreements about taste: first, there is disagreement (NC) regarding doxastic attitudes, as Edna and Pedro are taken to express and believe contradictory propositions when uttering the sentence "In front of us there is a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that

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<sup>25</sup> Sentences with the existential quantifier might as well be considered to be context sensitive  $(CS)_C$  or  $(CS)_{NI}$  or not context sensitive at all. MacFarlane does not offer arguments for either semantic theory regarding predicates of taste. No speculations will be entered into on putative arguments for one of these semantic theories regarding sentences with the existential quantifier, since they would be detached from MacFarlane's actual considerations.

persist for a moment and then go out of existence" and its negation. Accordingly, Edna cannot adopt Pedro's belief without changing her mind (and vice versa). Second, disagreement (PJIA) is also met. If Edna's as well as Pedro's uttered and believed proposition are both evaluated with respect to Edna's context of assessment, not both of their beliefs can be accurate: the content of Edna's belief is evaluated to be true and her belief is accurate while the content of Pedro's belief is evaluated to be false and his belief is inaccurate (similar considerations hold the other way round if Pedro's ontological theory of existence is taken to be operative in the context of assessment).

Is such an analysis of the ontological disagreement between Edna and Pedro convincing? First of all, disagreement (NC) and disagreement (PJIA) encounter the same problems independently of whether they are applied to disagreements about taste or to ontological disagreements. In addition, MacFarlane's motivation for relativism regarding predicates of taste does not seem to hold for the existential quantifier. MacFarlane argues that our use of predicates of taste is guided by the taste principle (TP). In short, it is important to know first-hand how something tastes and if the taste is pleasing, one should call it "tasty". There is no similar subjective access needed for the use of the existential quantifier. In addition, taste seems to vary more than existential theories. Accordingly, objectivist semantics for the existential quantifier is not as problematic as for predicates of personal taste. With objectivism, ontological disagreements can be perfectly explained: first, there is disagreement (NC), as the opponents express and believe contradictory propositions. Thereby, Edna cannot adopt Pedro's belief without changing her mind (and vice versa). In addition, there is disagreement (PJA): Pedro's belief is accurate if in the actual world, in front of Edna and Pedro there is a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence. Edna's belief, however, is accurate if in the actual world, in front of Edna and Pedro there is no succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence. Accordingly, not both of their beliefs can be accurate. If seeking to argue for relativism regarding sentences containing the existential quantifier, it must first be explained why objectivism fails to be an option.

Besides arguing against objectivism in matter of taste, MacFarlane argues for relativism in pointing out that it is a better option than contextualism, because it offers a more convincing explanation for disagreements about taste. However, the ques-

tion could be posed as to why contextualism regarding the existential quantifier would be argued for despite the lack of subjectivity. One may argue for contextualism because opponents in an ontological disagreement are taken to engage in a verbal dispute. If this was the dialectic of the debate, though, relativism regarding the existential quantifier no longer seems to be motivated: either ontological disagreements are argued to be substantive, but in this case relativism is not needed since objectivism does well enough. Or it is argued for verbal disputes in ontology, but then relativism is not needed either, because relativists do not argue for verbal disputes but instead for substantive disagreements.

Summing up, it is possible to apply the relativist analysis of disagreements about taste to ontological disagreements. However, for ontological disagreements, such analysis is much less motivated, as the use of the existential quantifier does not seem to be as subjective as the use of predicates of personal taste.

## 1.2 Sundell and Plunkett

### 1.2.1 Summary: Substantive Disagreements and Disagreements about Taste

Sundell and Plunkett offer a principle for disagreement that allows for substantive disagreements about some pragmatically expressed content – even though the literally expressed contents might be compatible. A quick recall of their principle for disagreement is in order (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 11):

*Disagreement Requires Conflict in Content (DRCC)*

If two subjects A and B disagree with each other, then there are some objects p and q (propositions, plans, etc.) such that A accepts p and B accepts q, and p is such that the demands placed on a subject in virtue of accepting it are rationally incompatible with the demands placed on a subject in virtue of accepting q. (Perhaps, though not necessarily, in virtue of q entailing not-p.)<sup>26</sup>

(DRCC) is best considered to be a sufficient condition for substantive disagreement. According to Sundell and Plunkett, many disagreements involving normative or evaluative terms meet (DRCC) and are best described as metalinguistic

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<sup>26</sup> They do not formulate (DRCC) exclusively for propositions, as they wish to include other theories of meaning that do not take the content of sentence to be propositions (Sundell & Plunkett [2013] p. 9.).

negotiations about the pragmatically communicated content on how a certain term should be used. Even though Sundell and Plunkett do not explicitly discuss disagreements about taste, they would probably analyse them as metalinguistic negotiations. In the disagreement between Marta and Kurt, for instance, "is delicious" can be taken to be context sensitive (CS)<sub>C</sub> and Marta and Kurt can be described as expressing the compatible literal contents that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Marta* and that *Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious for Kurt* while pragmatically conveying the incompatible contents "is delicious" should be used in such a way to include *Château La Lagune 2014* and "is delicious" should not be used in such a way to include *Château La Lagune 2014*. Thereby, such a disagreement about the pragmatically communicated content can be worth having, since something important might rest on the use of "is delicious" – for instance, whether the Bordeaux in question should be offered to guests.

Sundell and Plunkett's analysis of metalinguistic negotiations amounts to an alternative explanation for disagreements about taste that does not rely on a relativist semantics. However, as discussed in the first part of this thesis (p. 46ff), MacFarlane would likely ask Sundell and Plunkett to elaborate in more detail the pragmatic mechanism present in disagreements about taste. Without an elaborated pragmatic mechanism and convincing examples that work analogously, their analysis appears to be ad hoc.

### 1.2.2 Verbal Disputes

Sundell and Plunkett do not explicitly talk about verbal disputes. In an earlier paper, however, in which Sundell's view on substantive disagreements is already implicitly present, he talks about verbal (or terminological) disputes where the speakers literally mean different things by their words (Sundell [2012] p. 744, 757). He does not specify whether this amounts to a necessary or sufficient condition for a verbal dispute (or both). However, in the way he presents the examples of verbal disputes, it seems to be a sufficient condition for verbal disputes. I will thus ascribe to Sundell the following sufficient condition for verbal disputes:

*Verbal Dispute (VD)<sub>S</sub>*

If two subjects A and B disagree about the truth of some sentence S, their disagreement over S is a verbal dispute if the opponents literally mean different things by their words.

In addition, Sundell specifies that some verbal disputes are *merely* verbal disputes. I take him to specify merely verbal disputes among verbal disputes (VD)<sub>S</sub>. He offers the following necessary condition for merely verbal disputes (Sundell [2012] p. 757):

*Merely Verbal Dispute (MVD)<sub>S</sub>*

A verbal dispute is merely verbal only if the opponents employ different measures of the appropriateness of their concepts.

Sundell specifies merely verbal disputes among verbal disputes with the help of considerations regarding disagreements between seventeenth-century English speakers who used the word "fish" to mean *fish and whales* and modern English speakers who uses the word to mean *fish* only (Sundell [2012] p. 748). First, Sundell considers a disagreement between an ancient biologist and a modern biologist about the truth of "Whales are fish". In his view, the disagreement is a verbal dispute (VD)<sub>S</sub>, as they both literally mean different things by "fish". Further, they both express literally true propositions. According to Sundell, the opponents additionally pragmatically advocate different meanings for "fish" in their disagreement, i.e. they argue about which meaning is better (Sundell [2012] p. 755). Thereby, they seem to employ the same measures of the appropriateness of their concepts, as they try to pursue the same goals, the goals of natural science (Sundell [2012] p. 756). Accordingly, the disagreement does not meet (MVD)<sub>S</sub>. In the supposed context of a marine biology classroom the meaning of the modern biologist is clearly better, because it describes the word better: the set of objects of the extension of the modern's word go together more naturally than the set of objects of the ancient's extension of the word, as noted by Sundell (Sundell [2012] p. 755). In his view, the ancient and the modern biologists are involved in a substantive disagreement (Sundell [2012] p. 757).

Second, Sundell considers a disagreement about the same sentence between an ancient and a modern English speaker in a non-scientific context, namely on a whale ship (Sundell [2012] p. 756). In his view, the opponents are still involved in

a verbal dispute (VD)<sub>S</sub> as they literally mean different things with the word "fish". However, the pragmatically communicated disagreement about which meaning is better cannot be easily decided. According to Sundell, the ancient may be better off as the biological distinctions important for the modern meaning of the term are of little use to the sailors. However, the opponents still do not seem to be involved in a merely verbal dispute, since they seem to employ the same measures of appropriateness of their concept, because they pursue more or less the same goals (Sundell [2012] p. 756).

However, things look different if a third disagreement is considered – a disagreement between an ancient sailor and a modern biologist (Sundell [2012] p. 757). Again, their disagreement meets (VD)<sub>S</sub>. In addition, the disagreement seems to be a merely verbal dispute (MVD)<sub>S</sub>: the opponents use the term "fish" with different measures of appropriateness as the modern biologist wants to describe the world according to the goals of natural science while the ancient mariner is interested in whaling and in life on sea. Thereby, neither of their advocated meaning seems to be better.

As presented by Sundell in his examples, merely verbal disputes (MVD)<sub>S</sub> seem to be cases of paradigmatic verbal disputes where opponents do not disagree substantively and where they are described as talking past each other. Disagreements meeting (VD)<sub>S</sub> without meeting (MVD)<sub>S</sub> can be substantive. This is the case in the disagreement between the ancient and the modern biologist and between the ancient and the modern sailor. In the terminology of Sundell and Plunkett's later paper, *Disagreement and the Semantics of Normative and Evaluative Terms*, the disagreements are substantive as they meet (DRCC) regarding some pragmatically communicated content, namely concerning the content whether "fish" should be used to include whales. Mostly, verbal disputes are excluded from being substantive disagreements. However, in Sundell's view, only merely verbal disputes seem to be opposed to substantive disagreements.

### 1.2.3 Ontological Disagreements

Sundell and Plunkett did not intend to explain the substantiveness of ontological disagreements with their characterisation of metalinguistic negotiations. It will nevertheless be examined quickly as to whether their analysis is of any help to explain ontological disagreements. Is it reasonable to take Edna and Pedro to dis-

agree about how "there exists" should be used? Edna and Pedro engage in a disagreement about the truth of the sentence "In front of us there is a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence". If Sundell and Plunkett's analysis is applied to the disagreement, Edna and Pedro might express compatible literal contents with the sentence and its negation. This may be the case at first because the opponents associate different characters with the same sentences (e.g. *In front of the speakers there is a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence* ( $c_{E1/P1}$ ) or *the stick in front of the speakers is different at different times* ( $c_{E2}$ )). Second, the existential quantifier may be context sensitive ( $CS$ )<sub>C</sub> and may express different contents used in the different contexts of use of Edna and Pedro (the associated character of "there exists" might for instance be *there exists regarding the contextually supplied ontological theory of existence* and the "there is" might express different and compatible contents when used in the context of use of an Endurantist (*there is<sub>E</sub>*) or Perdurantist (*there is<sub>P</sub>*)). Regarding Sundell and Plunkett's examples of metalinguistic negotiations, it is also well possible that Edna and Pedro express incompatible contents (e.g. *In front Edna and Pedro there is a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence* and *in front of Edna and Pedro there is no succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick that persist for a moment and then go out of existence*). However, all three different constructions of the example amount only to a metalinguistic negotiation if it is additionally supposed that Edna and Pedro disagree about the pragmatically communicated content of whether "*there exists*" should be used in order to quantify over ordinary objects only. Regarding this pragmatically conveyed disagreement it may be supposed that ontological background assumptions (how certain ontological problems, such as the problem of change can be solved, for instance) motivate the opponents to engage in the disagreement. Is the metalinguistic negotiation worth having? It might be argued that it is the case, either because something important rests on the use of the term "there exists" (e.g. how the problem of change can be solved, if this is considered to be important) or because one meaning is objectively better because either ordinary objects or temporal parts of ordinary objects constitute the more natural domain of reference for the existential quantifier (however, it may be difficult to tell which meaning is more natural).

Is such an analysis of the disagreement plausible? It is possible that some disagreements in ontology work in the way proposed, and opponents may even express their metalinguistic negotiation about how "there exists" should be used as a canonical variant of the original disagreement. However, MacFarlane's worry regarding the analysis of disagreements about taste as metalinguistic negotiations holds for ontological disagreements analysed as metalinguistic negotiations as well: why should ontological disagreements about whether temporal parts exist be analysed as disagreements about some pragmatically communicated content? As long as there are no clear examples of analogous disagreements involving implicatures or presuppositions, the analysis is not very well motivated.

### 1.3 Hirsch

#### 1.3.1 Summary: Verbal Disputes and Ontological Disagreements

Hirsch defends a notion of verbal dispute that allows him to assess some disagreements in ontology – such as the disagreement between Pedro and Edna about whether there exist temporal parts – as verbal disputes. The discussion will look back on his account of verbal dispute (Hirsch [2009] p. 239):

(VD)<sub>H</sub> A dispute is verbal if, given the correct view of linguistic interpretation, each party will agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language.

Most likely, (VD)<sub>H</sub> amounts to a sufficient criterion for a verbal dispute. Roughly, each party will agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language if each party finds an interpretation for the other party's sentences such that the respective parties believe the expressed propositions. Further, Hirsch spells out correct linguistic interpretation with *charity to perception* and *charity to understanding* so that in terms of widely accepted perceptual sentences and simple a priori knowable and conceptual sentences speakers are almost always be interpreted as speaking truly.

As discussed in the second part of this thesis, Hirsch considers ontological disagreements, such as the disagreement between Edna and Pedro about whether temporal parts exist, as verbal disputes (VD)<sub>H</sub>. Edna might interpret Pedro speaking P-English such that his sentence expresses a proposition she believes (*The stick in*

*front of Edna and Pedro is different at different times* ( $p_{E2}$ ). Similarly, Pedro might interpret Edna as speaking E-English so that the negation of his sentence expresses a proposition he believes (*There does not exist (in a restricted sense) a succession of highly visible temporal parts of a stick in front of Edna and Pedro that persist for a moment and then go out of existence.* ( $\neg p_{P2}$ )). Further, according to Hirsch, in the respective interpretations, charity to perception and charity to understanding are also respected.

However, as presented in the second part of this thesis, Hirsch's characterisation of verbal disputes faces the following problem: correct interpretation is underdetermined by charity to understanding and charity to perception. An interpretation along the considerations of charity may not respect the original beliefs of the speakers. Thereby, it is possible that  $(VD)_H$  is met, even though the opponents originally expressed incompatible beliefs and propositions. If it is further assumed that a disagreement between opponents who hold beliefs that cannot both be accurate is substantive and non-verbal, then  $(VD)_H$  is not a sufficient condition for verbal disputes. Accordingly, he did not show successfully that Edna and Pedro engage in a verbal dispute.

Hirsch's  $(VD)_H$  might best be interpreted as an epistemic criterion that serves the opponents as a guide to find out whether they engage in a verbal dispute. However, even as an epistemic criterion  $(VD)_H$  seems to be more successful if there is a further condition added: the opponents should agree with the new interpretation put on their sentences.

### 1.3.2 Substantive Disagreements

Hirsch scarcely talks about substantive disagreements. However, in some papers he opposes verbal disputes to substantive disagreements or substantive questions (see e.g. Hirsch [2005], [2007] and [2013]). However, he does not characterise to what a substantive disagreement amounts to. Since in his view, verbal disputes are not substantive disagreements, he could be ascribed as having the view that being a verbal dispute is a sufficient condition for not-being a substantive disagreement. With contraposition, the negation of Hirsch's characterisation of verbal disputes ( $\neg(VD)_H$ ) amounts to a necessary condition for substantive disagreements. This is, of course, a speculation on Hirsch's view; he does not talk about necessary or sufficient conditions for substantive or non-substantive disagreements.

### 1.3.3 Disagreements about Taste

Is Hirsch's characterisation of verbal disputes applicable to disagreements about taste? The answer to this question seems to depend upon how the original disagreement and the new interpreted disagreement are conceived. First, it is supposed that the opponents originally interpret each other as making objective judgments about taste. How could the original disagreement be newly interpreted? At first sight, the opponents do not even need to be interpreted as speaking different languages, as long as the character for "is delicious" allows the term to express different contents in different contexts. This would be the case if the expression was taken to be context sensitive (CS)<sub>C</sub>, so that the character were *is delicious for the contextually relevant person* (or similar). In addition, Marta and Kurt need to suppose that they use the sentence "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious" with respect to different contexts of use so that Marta expresses the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Marta* while Kurt expresses the proposition that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Kurt*. Thereby, both propositions are true as Marta and Kurt's taste is different. However, the alternative language does not meet Hirsch's requirements: the interpreters should believe the propositions expressed in the new interpreted language. However, they are objectivists about taste and do not believe relativised taste judgments. Accordingly, (VD)<sub>H</sub> does not seem to be applicable to a disagreement about taste as conceived by objectivists.

The original disagreements about taste may secondly be described in a contextualist way. Accordingly, the opponents are not described to express literally incompatible contents. They might, though, be assumed to disagree about some pragmatically communicated content, for instance, as suggested by Sundell and Plunkett. (It may also be assumed that there is no further disagreement about some pragmatically expressed content. However, it then remains unclear as to why the opponents argue in the first place.) According to a contextualist interpretation of the original disagreement, Hirsch's (VD)<sub>H</sub> does not need to be applied to the disagreement, as the opponents are already taken to express compatible contents. However, according to such an interpretation of the disagreement, the opponents seem to be accused of making a mistake in disagreeing about the sentence "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious" and its negation in the first place. They should rather formulate their disagreement regarding some other sentence like "'Is delicious" should be used in such a way as to include Château La Lagune 2014". One

may wonder whether Hirsch would consider this latter disagreement to be a verbal dispute, but this question will not be pursued further.

Third, the discussion will now turn to the other two kinds of context sensitivity  $(CS)_{NI}$  and  $(CS)_R$ . As a result of how Hirsch presents his view on language, he is not open to other kinds of context sensitivity than Kaplan's  $(CS)_C$ . Still, it may be questioned as to whether  $(VD)_H$  is applicable to disagreements about taste interpreted along nonindexicalists or relativists. It always seems to be possible to reinterpret such a disagreement with context sensitive expressions  $(CS)_{NI}$  or  $(CS)_R$  in a way that the expression in question is context sensitive  $(CS)_C$  so that no disagreement remains. The question is whether such a new interpretation respects the original beliefs of the interpreters and whether it is required by charity to understanding and charity to perception. If the opponents are taken to be nonindexicalists or relativists, they would agree with the contents expressed along the new contextualist interpretation of the sentences. Marta and Kurt, for instance, would agree with the contents of their newly interpreted disagreement, namely that *Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Marta* and that *Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious for Kurt*. In addition, according to a contextualist reading of the disagreement, the opponents do not seem to make mistakes regarding simple perceptual or a priori knowable sentences like "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious" or "Blackberry flavouring constitutes deliciousness in a wine" (it is probable that contextualists assume that "deliciousness" is context sensitive  $(CS)_C$  as well).

Summing up, it remains open whether Hirsch would judge the disagreement between Marta and Kurt as verbal dispute meeting  $(VD)_H$ . The answer to this question depends on how the original disagreement is conceived. Regarding an objectivist and contextualist interpretation of the original disagreement, there are doubts whether Hirsch's  $(VD)_H$  can be applied successfully. However,  $(VD)_H$  seems to be met regarding a nonindexicalist and relativist reading of the original disagreement – Hirsch would though not interpret the disagreement in such ways, as he only seems to allow for context sensitivity  $(CS)_C$ .

## 1.4 Chalmers

### 1.4.1 Summary: Verbal Disputes, Substantive Disagreements, and Ontological Disagreements

David Chalmers offers a characterisation of verbal disputes that was taken to amount to a sufficient condition for verbal disputes and his (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> is now restated (Chalmers [2009] p. 522):

(BVD)<sub>CH</sub>     A dispute over S is (broadly) verbal when for some expression T in S, the parties disagree about the meaning of T, and the dispute over S arises wholly in virtue of this disagreement regarding T.

Chalmers' characterisation can be illustrated with opponents disagreeing about, "The man goes around the squirrel". They have different beliefs regarding the meaning of the term "go round" (the first party believes that it means *passing something from the north, to the east, to the south, to the west and then to the north again* while the second party believes that it means *being in front of something, then to its right, behind it, to its left and then being in front of it again*). Further, they agree that the man in question passed from the north of the squirrel to the east, to the south, to the west, and to the north again, while denying that he moved from the front of the squirrel to its right, its back, to its left, and in front of it again. Their disagreement is a verbal dispute (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> because their disagreement over S arises wholly in virtue of the disagreement regarding the meaning of the term "go round".

As we have seen in the second part of this thesis, Chalmers also offers the following method of elimination in order to identify and resolve verbal disputes (Chalmers [2011] p. 526f.):

#### *Method of Elimination*

First: one bars the use of term T. Second: one tries to find a sentence S' in the newly restricted vocabulary such that the parties disagree nonverbally over S', and such that the disagreement over S' is part of the dispute over S. Third: If there is such an S', the dispute over S is not wholly verbal, or at least there is a substantive dispute in the vicinity. If there is no such S', then the dispute over S is wholly verbal [...].

Chalmers does not offer a general definition of substantive disagreements. In his view, verbal disputes seem to be opposed to substantive disagreement, as he contrasts the two different kinds of disagreement at several points. Further, he takes bedrock disputes to be substantive disagreements. His characterisation of bedrock disputes is recalled here (Chalmers [2011] p. 545):

*Bedrock Dispute (BD)*

A substantive dispute is bedrock relative to an expression E when no underlying dispute can be found by applying the method of elimination to E: roughly, when there is no underlying dispute that does not involve E or cognates.

As presented in the second part of this thesis, bedrock expressions express the same content, even if used differently. This is because they get their content through theory-external constraints such as acquaintance or structural inferential role. Accordingly, it is possible that opponents in a disagreement express the same meaning with a bedrock expression, even though they use it differently. As Chalmers takes so much effort in showing that bedrock expressions express the same content, I ascribed him the following necessary condition for substantive disagreement:

*Substantive Disagreement (SD)\*<sub>CH</sub> (opposed to (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>)*

A disagreement over S is substantive only if the parties agree on the meanings of all expressions T that are part of S.

As discussed in the second part of this thesis, Chalmers takes ontological disagreements such as that between Edna and Pedro to be a bedrock dispute, as their disagreement cannot be stated in more basic terms. Thereby, Edna and Pedro are most reasonably described as using the bedrock expression in the same general patterns of inference such that the bedrock expression seems to obtain its content by structural inferential role. However, their disagreement only seems to be a substantive bedrock dispute if heavyweight realism as meta-ontological position is true. Heavyweight realists believe that ontological existence assertions have an objective and determinate truth value, are never trivially true/false, and are used to describe the fundamental structure of reality. In contrast, according to other meta-ontological positions such as lightweight realism and anti-realism, the disagreement between Edna and Pedro seems to be defective; the opponents are described

as arguing about the truth value of assertions that do not have an objective and determinate truth value. Chalmers is thus only in a position to hold that Edna and Pedro engage in a substantive bedrock dispute if he further argues for heavy-weight realism. In addition, it can only be decided whether his account of bedrock dispute is convincing, if he elaborates in more detail the semantic theory of bedrock expressions. His account of verbal disputes, however, is not highly disputed.

#### 1.4.2 Disagreements about Taste

In the following it will quickly be tested whether Chalmers' considerations regarding verbal disputes or bedrock disputes help to explain disagreements about taste. Chalmers does not explicitly discuss disagreements about taste. He does, however, consider the disagreement between an academic and a basketball player about the sentence "Michael Jordan is tall" to be a verbal dispute (Chalmers [2011] p. 523). In his view, "is tall" is context sensitive and expresses different contents, namely *tall-for-an-academic* and *tall-for-a-basketball-player*. The disagreement is a verbal dispute (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> because the opponents have different beliefs about the meaning of "is tall". Chalmers' description of the example is sketchy, but is compatible with the view that "is tall" is context sensitive (CS)<sub>C</sub>: the opponents associate the same character with "is tall" (something like *is tall for the contextually supplied threshold*) while they take it to express different contents due to different contexts of use. Assuming context sensitivity (CS)<sub>C</sub> for predicates of personal taste disagreements about taste would similarly be analysed as disagreements meeting (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>. In order to support such an analysis it must be argued for (CS)<sub>C</sub> for predicates of personal taste in the first place; however, as we have seen, it is an open question whether predicates of personal taste are context sensitive (CS)<sub>C</sub>. Chalmers does not discuss examples with context sensitive terms meeting (CS)<sub>NI</sub> or (CS)<sub>R</sub>. In a disagreement about taste with context sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>NI</sub> or (CS)<sub>R</sub>, the opponents do not have different beliefs about the character or content of the sentences in question. Rather, they evaluate the expressed content with respect to different contexts of use or contexts of assessment as circumstance of evaluation. Are beliefs about a context of use or context of assessment beliefs about the meaning of a sentence or of one of its terms? In (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>, Chalmers intentionally leaves the notion of meaning unspecified (Chalmers [2011] p. 523). It is likely that he does not become more precise in order for (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> to be com-

patible with different theories of meaning. However, it remains unclear as to whether he would consider different beliefs about the context of use or context of assessment to be part of the meaning of the sentence (or of one of its terms). It is even unclear whether nonindexicalists and relativists would consider the context of use or the context of assessment as circumstance of evaluation to be part of the meaning of some sentence (or term). If this is the case, then disagreements about taste with context sensitive expressions  $(CS)_{NI}$  and  $(CS)_R$  are verbal disputes  $(BVD)_{CH}$ .

In order to ascertain whether disagreements about taste are considered to be verbal disputes  $(BVD)_{CH}$ , it might as well be left open whether predicates of taste are context sensitive in one of the ways specified and Chalmers' method of elimination may be applied to the disagreements in question. Regarding the disagreement between Marta and Kurt, is there disagreement in a restricted vocabulary (without "is delicious") about some further sentence  $S'$  that is part of the original disagreement about  $S$ ? There seem to be disagreements regarding sentences with different predicates of personal taste, like "Château La Lagune 2014 is tasty". Are these new disagreements substantive disagreements or verbal disputes  $(BVD)_{CH}$ ? It is difficult to tell. At a minimum, the search for some underlying disagreement about some further  $S'$  without predicate of personal taste seems to remain unsuccessful; there do not seem to be disagreements about sentences with other sensory expressions, like "Château La Lagune 2014 smells like blackberry" (at least this is the case if Marta and Kurt are assumed to possess more or less the same sensory apparatus on the same level of education, see p. 24ff of this thesis). Neither do there appear to be underlying disagreements about sentences concerning the ingredients of the wine in question such as "Château La Lagune 2014 contains blackberry flavouring". Maybe the subscript gambit – a modified version of the method of elimination (Chalmers [2011] p. 532, see p. 134 of this thesis) – might help to decide the case: according to the subscript gambit, "is delicious" must be replaced by new terms such as "is delicious for Marta" and "is delicious for Kurt", for instance. Do disagreements occur with these newly introduced terms? This does not seem to be the case. It is at any rate reasonable to suppose that Marta and Kurt agree about the truth of sentences with explicitly relativised predicates of personal taste, like "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Marta" or "Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious for Kurt". Accordingly, at least Chalmers' subscript gambit suggests that Marta and Kurt engage in a verbal dispute  $(BVD)_{CH}$ .

However, "is delicious" might as well be considered to be a bedrock expression. One may try to defend such a view and claim that "is delicious" expresses a bedrock concept that obtains its content through acquaintance (similar to "is conscious"). Accordingly, disagreements about taste would be considered to be substantive disagreements. However, Chalmers' considerations regarding bedrock concepts do not support such a view. "Is delicious" does not seem to be a very basic or ineliminable expression. At least, conceivability arguments, open question arguments, and conceptual analysis do not seem to support this view. Further, predicates of taste like "is tasty" or "is pleasing" and sensory expressions like "smells like blackberry" or "smells like cherry" seem to underlie "is delicious". Probably, the underlying bedrock expression is "is conscious".

Summing up, Chalmers would most likely consider disagreements about taste such as the disagreement between Marta and Kurt to be verbal disputes (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>. The subscript gambit suggests such an analysis of the disagreement in question and Chalmers' considerations regarding bedrock expressions do not seem to hold for "is delicious".

## **2. Comparison of the Different Characterisations of Substantive Disagreement and Verbal Dispute**

In the following sections the different views on substantive disagreement and verbal dispute will be compared. First, it will be investigated what kind of things (sentences, beliefs, propositions, ...) are taken to be involved in substantive disagreements or verbal disputes. In addition, the investigation will focus on whether the different accounts of substantive disagreements or verbal disputes might concern pragmatically communicated contents and whether the disagreements in question must be articulated linguistically. Second, I will endeavour to find out whether the different accounts of substantive disagreement and verbal dispute – or at least the views of the respective authors – are compatible regarding the relation of the contents in question. Third, the various authors will be compared regarding their views of disagreements containing context sensitive expressions. Finally, a brief mention will address how the different authors handle disagreements regarding metalinguistic contents. (The last two points concern substantive disagree-

ments and verbal disputes at once and will be discussed in section 2.1 of this chapter only.) The different points of comparison result from distinguished features of a specific account of substantive disagreement or verbal dispute. It turned out that an investigation as to whether other accounts of substantive disagreement or verbal dispute are able to account for these features as well helps to carve out their differences and similarities.

## **2.1 Substantive Disagreements**

### **2.1.1 Kind of Things involved in Substantive Disagreements**

Sundell and Plunkett emphasise that it is an advantage of their account of substantive disagreements that it concerns the propositional content of *attitudes*. They wish to allow for substantive disagreements regarding content communicated through both, pragmatic and semantic mechanism, and the content of attitudes can be communicated through both. Regarding doxastic attitudes, the content of the attitudes in question are propositions. Sundell and Plunkett emphasise that there may be disagreement even though the opponents do not engage in a conversation; accordingly, a substantive disagreement does not have to be articulated linguistically.

Do the other accounts of substantive disagreement concern the content of attitudes as well? Regarding his different notions of substantive disagreement, MacFarlane also talks about the opponents' attitudes. It is his view that disagreements about taste should involve doxastic attitudes, whose contents he considers to be propositions. In addition, MacFarlane does not require that substantive disagreements concern some linguistically articulated sentences and he allows for propositions (of the attitudes in question) to also be communicated pragmatically. Accordingly, Sundell and Plunkett and MacFarlane hold similar views regarding the kind of things involved in substantive disagreements. However, MacFarlane presents his example of disagreement about taste as an example involving opponents disagreeing about some sentence. Further, he illustrates his semantic theory of relativism with the help of sentences and expressed propositions. Thereby, he seems to presuppose that in the cases he is discussing, speakers succeed in expressing the proposition they believe. Accordingly, at least in his example of disagreement about taste the opponents seem to disagree about the literally expressed contents.

Chalmers' ascribed  $(SD)^*_{CH}$  is formulated with regard to sentences only. Accordingly, it is only applicable to linguistically exchanged disagreements.  $(SD)^*_{CH}$  construed as a necessary condition for substantive disagreements (as presented above) is too strict for Sundell and Plunkett and MacFarlane, as their sufficient conditions for substantive disagreements may be applied to disagreements without linguistic exchange. However, as already mentioned, Chalmers may be happy to accept further kinds of substantive disagreements, such as substantive disagreements that are not linguistically articulated. In addition, he would probably agree that substantive disagreement is a relation that concerns attitudes, as he most likely assumes that usually (honest) speakers use sentences to express contents they believe. In addition, as previously discussed regarding  $(BVD)_{CH}$ , Chalmers does not care about the meanings of the terms in question but about the speakers' beliefs about the meanings (sentence meaning vs. speaker meaning, see p. 130f. of this thesis). In the same vein, he would probably take  $(SD)^*_{CH}$  to be met if the opponents agree about the speaker meanings of all terms in question, even though they might in fact express different sentence meanings. Thereby, it seems possible that beliefs about meaning might concern some pragmatically conveyed content. Accordingly, Chalmers' *views* regarding the kind of things involved in substantive disagreement seem to be compatible with those of MacFarlane and Sundell and Plunkett about substantive disagreements.

Chalmers' characterises bedrock disputes with regard to sentences as well. However, his account of bedrock dispute is not intended to amount to a necessary or sufficient condition (or both) for substantive disagreements. Rather, it seems to be a characterisation of specific cases of substantive disagreement. As noted above, Chalmers would probably agree that speakers use sentences to express their beliefs. As he emphasises that bedrock expressions express the same content despite difference in use, he would likely take opponents disagreeing about the truth of some sentence with a bedrock expression as disagreeing about the truth of its literally expressed content (at least, as long as the opponents want to use the bedrock expression to express a bedrock concept and as long as the bedrock expression does not express a meta or a pseudo concept). This view is compatible with MacFarlane and Sundell and Plunkett's views on substantive disagreements, as the latter allow for substantive disagreements that are articulated by means of sentences – once they are taken to express the speakers' beliefs. In addition, they allow for disagreements regarding pragmatically and literally conveyed contents.

Hirsch hardly ever talks about substantive disagreements and the speculation on  $\neg(\text{VD})_H$  as necessary condition for substantive disagreements is a negative characterisation and not very informative. At this point, and below, his views about substantive disagreements will not be subject to further conjecture.

### 2.1.2 Relation of the Contents in Substantive Disagreements

In comparison to the other accounts of substantive disagreements, MacFarlane elaborates in greater detail on the relation of the contents in question. Regarding disagreement (NC), MacFarlane contends that opponents cannot adopt the other party's attitude without changing their mind. It is likely that considerations of rationality tell whether the content of some attitude can be adopted without change of mind. In his other characterisations of disagreement, accuracy is the key to disagreement: the attitudes of the opponents cannot both be accurate – that is, the propositions as contents of the attitudes cannot both be true with respect to the circumstance of evaluation that matters.

It will now be investigated how the relation of the contents in question is (maybe implicitly) elaborated in the other accounts of substantive disagreements. For disagreement (DRCC), Sundell and Plunkett require that the demands placed on a subject in virtue of accepting the proposition  $p$ , and those placed on a subject in virtue of accepting  $q$  are rationally incompatible (Sundell & Plunkett [2014] p. 11). The question can be posed as to what demands are placed on a subject in virtue of accepting some propositions  $p$  and  $q$  and when these demands are rationally incompatible. Regarding the first point, a believer must probably hold the proposition in question to be true with respect to a circumstance of evaluation (and this circumstance of evaluation must be specified). The demands placed on a subject in virtue of accepting  $p$  and  $q$  are likely to be rationally incompatible if the subject believes propositions that cannot both be true with respect to the specified circumstances of evaluation. Specified in this way, (DRCC) seems to be compatible with MacFarlane's disagreement (PJA) and (PJIA). Consider the compatible and centred contents *someone is eating a sandwich*, believed at 2pm in the actual world, and *nobody was eating a sandwich an hour ago*, believed at 3pm in the actual world (example of MacFarlane [2014] p. 125): the propositions cannot both be true at the mentioned times, accordingly, the demand placed on a subject in virtue of accepting them are rationally incompatible. Further, if *Château La Lagune*

*2014 is delicious* and *Château La Lagune 2014 is not delicious* are both evaluated with respect to the same context of assessment, the demands placed on a subject in virtue of accepting the two propositions are not rationally compatible either, as the expressed propositions cannot both be true with respect to the same context of assessment. In a similar vein, disagreement (PJRA) might be compatible with (DRCC) (however, as was discussed above, there lacks a convincing example of a disagreement meeting (PJRA)). Sundell and Plunkett do not discuss relativist and nonindexicalist positions and they might reject MacFarlane's characterisations of disagreement. Yet, all that is claimed here is that as long as (DRCC) is formulated so openly, it seems to be compatible with most of MacFarlane's characterisations of disagreement.<sup>27</sup> In order to prevent such compatibility, Sundell and Plunkett would have to formulate disagreement (DRCC) more specifically.

Regarding Chalmers' bedrock disputes and the ascribed (SD)\*<sub>CH</sub>, the relation of the involved contents is not specified. With regard to bedrock disputes, Chalmers would likely take opponents to disagree about the literally and pragmatically expressed content of some sentence (at least if it is supposed that the bedrock concept is not defective and that the opponents want to use the bedrock expression to express a bedrock concept). If their disagreement was formulated with a sentence *S* and its negation  $\neg S$ , Chalmers would most likely take the opponents to express contradictory contents. Chalmers may require contradictory contents for (SD)\*<sub>CH</sub> as well. Such a requirement would be compatible with MacFarlane and Sundell and Plunkett's views: in all their characterisations of substantive disagreement, the contents of the attitudes in question may be (but do not have to be) contradictory (if contradictory contents are specified as contents that cannot both be true evaluated with respect to the same context as circumstance of evaluation). However, Chalmers may not agree that disagreements (PJA), (PJIA), and (PJRA) (or disagreement (DRCC) interpreted as disagreements (PJA), (PJIA) or (PJRA)) are substantive disagreements. As discussed above, he would probably take disagreements about taste containing expressions that are context sensitive (CS)<sub>NI</sub> and (CS)<sub>R</sub> to be verbal disputes (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>.

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<sup>27</sup> (DRCC) does not seem to be compatible with disagreement (NC), as the opponents are asked to adopt the other party's attitudes and thereby, the circumstance of evaluation may change. It seems more reasonable to interpret (DRCC) in a way that the circumstances of evaluation remain as specified when describing the disagreement in question.

### 2.1.3 Substantive Disagreements and Context Sensitive Expressions

It further distinguishes MacFarlane's accounts of substantive disagreements that he allows for substantive disagreements involving different kinds of context sensitive terms. If not mentioned otherwise, when talking about disagreements with context sensitive expressions I talk about disagreements analogous to disagreements about taste, i.e. in disagreements with context sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>C</sub>, the opponents use the expression in a different context of use; in disagreements with context sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>NI</sub>, the opponents evaluate the expressed proposition with respect to different circumstances of evaluation; and in disagreements with assessment sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>R</sub>, the expressed proposition is assessed in the same or in different contexts of assessment. Disagreements involving context sensitive terms (CS)<sub>R</sub> may be disagreements (PJIA), (PJRA) and (NC), while disagreements with context sensitive terms (CS)<sub>NI</sub> may be disagreements (NC). In MacFarlane's view, disagreements with context sensitive terms (CS)<sub>C</sub> mostly do not amount to substantive disagreements. As mentioned, he notes that contextualists with regard to predicates of personal taste fail to account for disagreement about taste because they describe the opponents as making compatible claims. In addition, he seems to deny that in disagreements about taste there is substantive disagreement about some pragmatically communicated content. He only concedes that there is disagreement (NC) regarding nondoxastic attitudes.

How do the other authors handle disagreements with context sensitive terms? Sundell and Plunkett clearly allow for substantive disagreements involving sentences with context sensitive terms (CS)<sub>C</sub>. In their view, such disagreements may be substantive because of some pragmatically communicated contents meeting disagreement (DRCC) (at least regarding disagreements involving evaluative or normative terms). However, according to Sundell, the original disagreements are verbal disputes as well, as they meet (VD)<sub>S</sub>. In his view, verbal disputes may be substantive. Regarding context sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>NI</sub> or (CS)<sub>R</sub>, Sundell and Plunkett do not take a stance. If my considerations above are correct and their principle of disagreement (DRCC) is interpreted openly enough, it is compatible with MacFarlane's disagreements (PJA), (PJRA) and (PJIA). Contrary to disagreements with context sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>C</sub>, disagreement (PJA), (PJRA) and (PJIA) do not meet (VD)<sub>S</sub>.

As discussed above, Chalmers would most likely consider disagreements about taste with context sensitive term  $(CS)_C$ ,  $(CS)_{NI}$ , or  $(CS)_R$  to be verbal disputes  $(BVD)_{CH}$  because he takes opponents to have different beliefs about the meaning of a certain term. Even the method of elimination could not identify a substantive disagreement nearby. If these considerations generalise, disagreements with context sensitive expressions do not seem to be substantive disagreements. At most, they may be partly substantive, namely if a substantive disagreement – a disagreement meeting  $(SD)^*_{CH}$  or a disagreement specifically characterised as bed-rock dispute – underlies the original disagreement.

Regarding this point of comparison, Hirsch's view about verbal disputes may also be considered: as previously discussed, if predicates of personal taste are considered to be context sensitive  $(CS)_C$ , it remains unclear whether Hirsch is in a position to interpret disagreements about taste as meeting  $(VD)_H$ . However, if disagreements about taste are interpreted to contain context sensitive expressions  $(CS)_{NI}$  or  $(CS)_R$ ,  $(VD)_H$  seems to be met. If the considerations regarding disagreements about taste generalise,  $(VD)_H$  is applicable to disagreements involving context sensitive expressions  $(CS)_{NI}$  or  $(CS)_R$ . However, Hirsch only seems to allow for  $(CS)_C$ .

#### **2.1.4 Substantive Disagreements and Metalinguistic Contents**

There is an additional difference mainly between the views of Chalmers and Sundell and Plunkett that is worth a mention: metalinguistic disagreements are judged differently. According to Sundell and Plunkett, normative metalinguistic disagreements about how a certain term should be used are substantive, as they meet  $(DRCC)$ . However, Chalmers does not seem to consider metalinguistic disagreements to be substantive disagreements (see p. 143 of this thesis). Contrary to Chalmers and Sundell and Plunkett, MacFarlane and Hirsch do not discuss metalinguistic disagreements. However, they do not seem to impose any restrictions regarding the topic of the sentences or propositions that are part of a disagreement.

Summing up, the different views on substantive disagreements are not that different. In particular, MacFarlane and Sundell and Plunkett agree on almost all points of comparison: in their views, substantive disagreements concern attitudes that do

not have to be expressed with a linguistically articulated sentence and that might be expressed pragmatically. Further, the attitudes of substantive disagreements may be similarly related – at least, Sundell and Plunkett's (DRCC) is formulated openly enough to be compatible with MacFarlane's (PJA), (PJIA) and (PJRA). The only main difference between MacFarlane and Sundell and Plunkett seems to concern disagreements with context sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>C</sub>: according to Sundell and Plunkett, there is disagreement about some pragmatically communicated content while MacFarlane would rather judge such disagreements to be verbal disputes meeting (VD)\*<sub>MF</sub>. Thereby, Sundell would probably agree that the disagreements in question are verbal disputes, as they meet (VD)<sub>S</sub>.

Chalmers' ascribed account of substantive disagreements (SD)\*<sub>CH</sub> and bedrock disputes cannot so easily be related to MacFarlane's and Sundell and Plunkett's accounts of substantive disagreements since it can only be speculated upon his views regarding most points of comparison. The main difference is that Chalmers requires substantive disagreements to be formulated linguistically. Accordingly, (SD)\*<sub>CH</sub> formulated as a necessary condition for substantive disagreement is too strict for MacFarlane and Sundell and Plunkett's accounts of disagreements. The two further differences are only speculative, as Chalmers does not take a clear stand on these issues. First, contrary to MacFarlane, Chalmers would likely judge disagreements with context sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>NI</sub> and (CS)<sub>R</sub> to be verbal disputes (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>. Second, contrary to Sundell and Plunkett, Chalmers would probably exclude metalinguistic disagreements from being substantive disagreements.

## 2.2 Verbal Disputes

### 2.2.1 Kind of Things involved in Verbal Disputes

First, Hirsch's and Chalmers' accounts of verbal disputes will be discussed, since they are more sophisticated than those of MacFarlane and Sundell and Plunkett. For Hirsch, there are sentences involved in a verbal dispute. In (VD)<sub>H</sub>, he talks of languages; in his view, a language is individuated by an interpretation while an interpretation assigns a character to each sentence. Accordingly, he takes a verbal dispute to be linguistically articulated. Further, Hirsch does not explicitly talk about attitudes and their contents. He does, however, seem to presuppose that atti-

tudes are involved in a verbal dispute  $(VD)_H$ : in his view, the opponents need to find an interpretation for the other party's language so that they can express all the propositions they believe while asserting sentences of the other party's language only. He thus cares about the beliefs of the respective parties. Thereby, these beliefs may also be about some pragmatically communicated content, because the beliefs of the speakers or interpreters about the meanings of the terms in question seem to be important. The speakers or interpreters assign to a sentence (and its terms) a character, and due to this character it expresses a certain proposition in a context of use. This proposition may amount to the pragmatically conveyed content of the sentence in question, as according to its literal meaning, the sentence might express a different proposition. As according to  $(VD)_H$ , the opponents assign different characters to the sentences in question, they hold different, maybe tacit beliefs about the meaning of the sentences (or of its terms) – as required by Chalmers'  $(BVD)_{CH}$  (see below).

Chalmers' characterisation of verbal disputes is formulated with regard to sentences – accordingly, in his view, a verbal dispute is articulated linguistically as well. He does not say anything about attitudes and their contents. Similar to his views about substantive disagreements, he would probably agree that there are attitudes involved in verbal disputes. However, he talks about beliefs related to a verbal dispute: the opponents hold different (maybe tacit) beliefs about the meaning of some term  $T$  in  $S$ . As Chalmers cares about the speakers' beliefs regarding the meanings of some term in question, and since these beliefs may concern pragmatically conveyed contents, he seems to allow for pragmatically communicated contents involved in verbal disputes.

MacFarlane's ascribed  $(VD)^*_{MF}$  is formulated regarding claims. He does not specify whether claims must be linguistically articulated. That said, it is reasonable to think of a claim as the content of a sentence uttered with assertive force. In addition, it is reasonable to suppose that the opponents believe the uttered proposition in question so that  $(VD)^*_{MF}$  concerns attitudes. Further,  $(VD)^*_{MF}$  does not require that the claims in question amount to the literally expressed contents. As seen above, MacFarlane seems to allow for contents that are pragmatically conveyed. In  $(VD)^*_{MF}$  it is not specified as to whether the opponents have different beliefs about the meanings of the disputed sentences. Regarding disagreements about taste with context sensitive expressions  $(CS)_C$  (which MacFarlane would likely consider to be verbal disputes  $(VD)^*_{MF}$ ), this seems to be the case. If the content

expressed by a sentence is taken to be (part of) its meaning, the opponents use the sentences in question with a different meaning. If the opponents are taken to be competent speakers, it can be assumed that they have different (maybe tacit) beliefs about the meanings of the terms in question.

Sundell's ascribed sufficient condition  $(VD)_S$  for verbal disputes requires that the disagreement is also linguistically communicated, as it refers to some sentence about which the opponents disagree. Further, Sundell assumes that speakers express propositions with sentences and he would likely agree that propositions are the contents of mental attitudes like beliefs. As  $(VD)_S$  explicitly refers to the literal meaning of the sentence in question, it seems to be Sundell's view that there are no verbal disputes regarding some pragmatically communicated contents. However, Sundell clearly allows for speakers to pragmatically communicate contents with their sentences. He may characterise verbal disputes regarding literally expressed contents, since he wants to allow for verbal disputes to be substantive (for further discussion of this point, see below). Furthermore,  $(VD)_S$  does not explicitly talk about the opponent's beliefs about meanings. However, as Sundell assumes that in verbal disputes opponents pragmatically disagree about what meaning of a term in question is better, it is reasonable to suppose that they also maintain different (maybe tacit) beliefs about the meaning of that term in the disputed sentence.

### 2.2.2 Relation of the Contents in Verbal Disputes

How are the contents in verbal disputes related? In Hirsch's  $(VD)_H$  agreement is required: it is demanded that each party will agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language. Thereby, a party seems to agree that the other party speaks the truth in the own language if she believes the proposition she assumes to be expressed by the opponent's newly interpreted sentence. It is important to remember that according to  $(VD)_H$  it is possible that one party to the verbal dispute agrees with the newly interpreted sentences of the opponent, while the latter might not accept the interpretation placed upon the own sentences – and vice versa (see p. 111ff of this thesis). Accordingly, for a verbal dispute  $(VD)_H$  it only matters whether the opponents agree to what they take the other party's newly interpreted sentence to express. It does not matter whether they agree to what the other party actually believes and tries to express with some sentence. Thereby, Hirsch does

not specify how the contents of the respective parties' beliefs expressed in the original and in the newly interpreted language must be related. If it is assumed that the believers are rational, Hirsch would likely agree that the contents of the beliefs have to be rationally compatible.

In Chalmers' (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> it is not specified as to how the contents of the opponents' beliefs must be related. However, he talks of agreement regarding *narrowly* verbal disputes: opponents engage in a narrowly verbal dispute if they use S and  $\neg$ S to express compatible propositions  $p$  and  $\neg q$  with a truth value about which they agree (Chalmers [2011] p. 519). Let's recall that Chalmers talks about *broadly* verbal disputes as he assumes some disagreements where someone makes a mistake about the meaning of an expression to be a verbal dispute as well – even though the disputed sentence might express the same proposition for both parties. If seeking to characterise broadly verbal disputes similarly to narrowly verbal disputes with the help of propositions, the speaker meanings of the sentences in question determine the communicated propositions in question:

(BVD)<sub>Prop</sub>

A dispute over S is broadly verbal when regarding what the speaker wanted to convey by S, S expresses different propositions  $p$  and  $q$  for the two parties, so that one party asserts  $p$  and the other party denies  $q$ , and the parties agree on the truth of  $p$  and  $\neg q$ .

Accordingly, if Chalmers' (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> is similarly reformulated to his account of narrowly verbal disputes, agreement between the different parties is required. (Contrary to Hirsch's view on agreement regarding verbal disputes, both parties must agree about the truth of the same contents.) (BVD)<sub>Prop</sub> requires agreement regarding the truth of the conveyed propositions, but does not specify whether they must be related in a certain way. If it is assumed that the different parties are rational, it is reasonable to suppose that the propositions in question must be rationally compatible.

MacFarlane's (VD)<sub>MF</sub>\* specifies that the claims expressed in a verbal dispute must be compatible (i.e. they can both be true with respect to the same context as circumstance of evaluation, see above). As discussed above, it is reasonable to suppose that Chalmers and Hirsch take the contents in question to be rationally compatible. However, their sufficient conditions for verbal disputes (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> and (VD)<sub>H</sub> may be met, even though the opponents' claims are not rationally compati-

ble – because the opponents are irrational, for instance. Accordingly, if MacFarlane requires compatibility of the claims in question as necessary condition for verbal disputes (as was suggested),  $(VD)^*_{MF}$  seems to be too strict for Chalmers' and Hirsch's accounts of verbal disputes. In addition, MacFarlane does not talk about agreement regarding verbal disputes. However,  $(VD)^*_{MF}$  does not exclude disagreements with opponents agreeing about the truth of the claims in question from being verbal disputes.

Sundell's ascribed  $(VD)_S$  also does not require that the literally expressed contents are related in a certain way and it allows for verbal disputes involving incompatible contents. Accordingly,  $(VD)^*_{MF}$  as a necessary condition for verbal disputes is too strict for  $(VD)_S$  as well. Consider, for instance, the following disagreement between a biologist, A, and someone, B, who is totally untutored in biology:

- A: "Dogs are mammals"  
 B: "No, dogs are no mammals"

It is supposed that A uses "mammals" with its usual meaning while B uses the term with the meaning we usually associate with "vertebrates". Accordingly, A literally expresses the proposition that *dogs are mammals* while B literally expresses the proposition that *dogs are not vertebrates*. According to  $(VD)_S$  the dispute is verbal, although the opponents express incompatible contents. Further, contrary to Hirsch's account of verbal dispute and Chalmers' ascribed account of verbal disputes  $(BVD)_{PROP}$ , there is no agreement required in  $(VD)_S$ . Even though  $(VD)_S$  is compatible with the view that some verbal disputes involve agreement, disagreements without agreement may also be judged to be verbal disputes  $(VD)_S$ . This would again be the case in the disagreement described above: A believes that dogs are mammals while she does not believe that dogs are not vertebrates. B, in contrast, believes that dogs are not mammals while also believing that dogs are not vertebrates. Accordingly, the opponents do not agree about the contents of their beliefs.

### 2.2.3 Verbal Disputes as Substantive Disagreements

In Sundell's view, speakers engaging in a verbal dispute meeting  $(VD)_S$  may further disagree substantively about some pragmatically communicated content regarding how a certain word should be used (as long as they do not employ differ-

ent measures of the appropriateness of their concepts). In contrast, according to Hirsch and Chalmers verbal disputes are opposed to substantive disagreements. MacFarlane does not take a clear stand on this issue. However, his necessary condition for verbal disputes  $(VD)_{MF}^*$  was extracted from a passage in which he claims that there is no (substantive) disagreement, so he would likely oppose verbal disputes to substantive disagreements as well.

In order to better understand this difference between Sundell's view and those of the other authors, it might be helpful to again remember Chalmers' distinction between wholly verbal disputes and partly verbal disputes: regarding wholly verbal disputes, there is no substantive disagreement connected to the verbal dispute. Accordingly, a wholly verbal dispute is opposed to substantive disagreements. Partly verbal disputes, in contrast, are related to some substantive disagreement. At least, Chalmers and Hirsch seem to offer accounts of wholly verbal disputes and it is probable that MacFarlane's ascribed  $(VD)_{MF}$  specifies wholly verbal disputes as well. In contrast, Sundell's  $(VD)_S$  seems to include wholly and partly verbal disputes. Accordingly, Sundell's account of verbal disputes is broader. (Sundell's account of merely verbal dispute  $(MVD)_S$  might be considered to identify cases of wholly verbal disputes, as the disagreement about the pragmatically conveyed content does not seem to be substantive, see above.)

To sum up, regarding verbal disputes, all authors agree that there is some linguistically articulated disagreement and they most likely assume that the opponents hold different, maybe tacit, beliefs about the meaning of some term in question. Further, there is much agreement between the views of Hirsch and Chalmers regarding verbal disputes. In particular, contrary to Sundell, both seem to require that there is some agreement between the opponents, even though Chalmers does not explicitly say so. However, Chalmers would require agreement between the actual beliefs of the opponents while Hirsch, due to the one-sidedness of his  $(VD)_H$ , only requires agreement between the respective beliefs of the parties and the beliefs the different parties ascribe to one other.

Besides this consensus, two main disparities between the different accounts of verbal disputes can be highlighted: First, MacFarlane's ascribed  $(VD)_{MF}^*$  requires that the contents in question be compatible. As  $(VD)_{MF}^*$  is formulated as a necessary condition for verbal disputes, it is too strict for all of the other accounts of verbal disputes. Hirsch and Chalmers would probably take rational opponents

engaged in a verbal dispute to believe compatible contents but Sundell obviously allows for verbal disputes with incompatible contents. Second, Sundell's ascribed (VD)<sub>S</sub> is the only account of verbal disputes that might not concern pragmatically communicated contents. However, he is the only author discussed in this thesis who does not oppose verbal disputes to substantive disagreements. As discussed above, his goal is likely to characterise wholly and partly verbal disputes, while the other authors seek to offer an account for wholly verbal disputes only.

### **3. Assessment of the Different Characterisations of Substantive Disagreement and Verbal Dispute**

In the following sections a brief comment will be offered on the different points of comparison regarding substantive disagreements and verbal disputes, along with an explanation as to whether and why a certain position is favoured. In addition, necessary or sufficient conditions for verbal disputes and substantive disagreement about which all authors agree about and such that avoid the problems discussed in this thesis will be offered.

#### **3.1 Substantive Disagreements**

First, in my view, Sundell and Plunkett and MacFarlane are correct to characterise substantive disagreements regarding attitudes. Thereby, the content of these attitudes may be communicated pragmatically. In addition, it does not seem to be required that substantive disagreements are formulated and exchanged linguistically, even though they often are. As we have seen above, Chalmers does not offer an argument against this position. His ascribed account of substantive disagreement (SD)\*<sub>CH</sub> is formulated regarding sentences as it was developed in contrast to his account of bedrock disputes. He may be happy to allow for other kinds of substantive disagreements that do not have to be linguistically articulated and he would most likely agree that substantive disagreement could concern some pragmatically communicated content.

Second, regarding the relation of the contents involved in substantive disagreement, disagreement (PJA) applied to disagreement without assessment sensitive

expressions (CS)<sub>R</sub> seems to be the only specification that is not contentious. As seen above, Sundell and Plunkett's disagreement (DRCC) seems to allow for most of MacFarlane's different kinds and subkinds of disagreements. However, argued in the first part of this thesis, disagreement (NC), disagreement (PJIA), and disagreement (PJRA) are disputed. In addition, Chalmers would most likely not agree that disagreements with context sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>NI</sub> and (CS)<sub>R</sub> meeting (PJRA) and (PJIA) are substantive disagreements.

Regarding the third point of comparison, the views about whether disagreements with context sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>C</sub>, (CS)<sub>NI</sub>, and (CS)<sub>R</sub> are substantive disagreements or verbal disputes diverge and it is not promising that agreement will be reached.

Regarding substantive disagreements with metalinguistic content, Chalmers and Sundell and Plunkett's views seem to differ. However, it seems to be a question of choice as to whether metalinguistic disagreements are called substantive disagreements or not, and in presenting a characterisation of substantive disagreement this point should be made clear: to exclude metalinguistic disagreements from being substantive, it is possible to introduce a restriction on the content of substantive disagreements. In the following, no such restriction will be formulated.

So far, the authors agree that substantive disagreements involve literally or pragmatically communicated contents, and with regard to disagreements without assessment sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>R</sub>, they seem to agree on a relation of the contents in question specified such as in disagreement (PJA).<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, all authors discussed in this thesis would most likely accept the following sufficient condition for substantive disagreement (I characterise (SD) as sufficient condition, as the authors may want to allow for other characterisations of substantive disagreements as well):

- (SD) Regarding disagreements without assessment sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>R</sub>, A disagrees substantively with B if the (literally or pragmatically communicated) content of B's attitude and the (literally or pragmatically communicated) content of A's attitude cannot both be true with respect to the circumstance of evaluation specified in the context of use.

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<sup>28</sup> (PJA) excludes disagreements with context sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>C</sub> and (CS)<sub>NI</sub> analogous to disagreements about taste.

I consider (SD) amounting to a compelling sufficient condition for substantive disagreement without assessment sensitive expressions. Up to the present, no compelling account of substantive disagreement that does allow for disagreements with assessment sensitive expressions has been offered. As recapitulated above, especially MacFarlane's disagreement (PJIA) but also disagreement (PJRA) are not convincing. If some author puts forward a compelling account of disagreement with assessment sensitive expressions, I am happy to allow for a further sufficient condition for substantive disagreement.

### 3.2 Verbal Disputes

First, I join the authors discussed in this thesis that in a verbal dispute, opponents have different beliefs about the meaning of a disputed sentence (or about the meanings of its terms). Accordingly, there must be some linguistically articulated sentence about which the opponents disagree. Thereby, beliefs about the speaker meaning of the term in question matter and a verbal dispute might concern some pragmatically communicated content – at least as long as one seeks to characterise wholly verbal disputes. Sundell, the only author who's ascribed characterisation of verbal disputes (VD)<sub>S</sub> is explicitly restricted to the literally expressed contents, seems to characterise partly verbal disputes.

Second, how are the contents involved in a verbal dispute connected? Hirsch, and also Chalmers (at least implicitly), require that there be some agreement regarding verbal disputes. This idea strikes me as plausible. Thereby, agreement regarding the contents actually believed by the opponents, and which they take to be expressed by the sentences in question, seems to be important; not merely agreement regarding the beliefs and contents the opponents' ascribe to one another as required by Hirsch. (As argued in the second part of this thesis, Hirsch's (VD)<sub>H</sub> does not seem to amount to a sufficient condition for verbal disputes as it does not respect the opponents' original beliefs.) Agreement regarding verbal disputes seems to be important if it is desired to characterise wholly verbal disputes as opposed to substantive disagreements, since agreement and substantive disagreement are closely connected: at least regarding full beliefs, it does not seem to be possible that two persons agree about some content *p* while they disagree substantively about *p*. Intuitively characterised, agreement between two persons regarding some full doxastic content *p* seems to require that they agree about the truth value of *p*

with respect to the relevant context as circumstance of evaluation. If it is assumed that opponents either do or do not believe a certain content, agreement and disagreement seem to be opposed. Thereby, (substantive) agreement seems to imply the lack of substantive disagreement and substantive disagreement seems to imply the lack of (substantive) agreement.

In Sundell's (VD)<sub>S</sub>, agreement is not important. This seems to be the case because he does not offer an account of wholly verbal disputes that is opposed to substantive disagreements. MacFarlane also does not require agreement in his ascribed (VD)\*<sub>MF</sub>. However, MacFarlane's remarks about verbal disputes are very sketchy and he does not mean to offer a comprehensive account. He requires that the contents in question be compatible. As seen above, this requirement seems to be too strict for the accounts of Chalmers and Hirsch regarding verbal disputes, and it is also too strict in my view. Opponents may engage in a verbal dispute even though they do not express compatible contents. Consider again opponents disagreeing about the truth of the sentence "Dogs are mammals" (S). Person A associates the usual meaning with "mammals" while B uses the term with the meaning "vertebrates" usually is taken to express. If the example is changed slightly, there is also agreement between the opponents such that they engage in a wholly verbal dispute even though they believe and agree about incompatible contents: This is the case if A and B are supposed to both be irrational so that they believe and agree that *dogs are mammals* and that *dogs are not vertebrates*.

To take stock, all authors seem to agree that verbal disputes concern some linguistically articulated sentences about which the opponents hold different beliefs regarding its meaning (or the meaning of one of its terms). This requirement may be considered to amount to a generally accepted necessary condition for verbal disputes ((VD) is not formulated as sufficient condition as it would not be narrow enough to identify verbal disputes):

- (VD) A and B engage in a verbal dispute only if their dispute is about the truth of some linguistically articulated sentence the opponents hold different beliefs about its meaning (or about the meaning of one of its terms).

In addition, regarding *wholly* verbal disputes, the authors would most likely agree that the different beliefs about the meaning of the sentence in question (or about the meaning of one of its terms) do not have to be about its literal meaning; ac-

Accordingly, verbal disputes may concern literally or pragmatically conveyed contents. Further, as argued above, it is compelling to suppose that there is agreement regarding the contents that the opponents believe and take to be expressed by the sentences in question. These requirements can be added to a sufficient condition for wholly verbal disputes (the star indicates that it is questionable as to whether all authors would agree to this condition; (VD)\* is formulated as sufficient condition, as the authors may want to allow for other characterisations of verbal disputes as well):

- (VD)\* A and B engage in a wholly verbal dispute if (i) their dispute is about the truth of some linguistically articulated sentence, (ii) the opponents hold different beliefs about the meaning of the sentence in question (or about the meaning of one of its terms), (iii) the opponents agree about the truth value of the (literally or pragmatically conveyed) content the other party believes and takes to be expressed by the sentence in question.

Some authors would likely not accept (VD)\*. However, the reasons for such rejections are not compelling. Hirsch might accept (VD)\* while arguing for a sufficient condition for verbal disputes that is less strict, since he only cares about the contents and beliefs ascribed by the opponents to one another. However, as argued in the second part of this thesis this view is not convincing, as the opponents' original beliefs may not be respected. Sundell takes verbal disputes to concern literally expressed contents and does not demand agreement. However, as argued above, he does not provide an account of *wholly* verbal disputes. MacFarlane's ascribed (VD)\*<sub>MF</sub> demands that in verbal disputes, opponents make compatible claims. Yet, as argued above, this requirement is too strict. In this thesis, (VD)\* will thus be considered a sufficient condition for wholly verbal disputes. (VD)\* is similar to Chalmers' (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>; it though explicitly talks about literally and pragmatically expressed contents, and (substantive) agreement opposed to (substantive) disagreement ensures that the dispute is wholly verbal. Accordingly, (VD)\* is more narrow but also more precise than (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> and it contains the insights regarding verbal disputes discussed in this thesis.

The discussion will now turn to an explanation as to why the various authors analyse disagreements about taste and ontological disagreements differently.

#### **4. Comparison of the different Analyses of Disagreements about Taste and Ontological Disagreements**

Up to now the different accounts of substantive disagreements and verbal disputes have been compared. Some views are quite similar while others are more distinct or even incompatible. Still, there is agreement among the various authors regarding (SD) and (VD). However, even authors who hold similar views about substantive disagreements or verbal disputes analyse disagreements about taste or ontological disagreements differently. Accordingly, it is not only their views on substantive disagreements or verbal disputes, but also other factors that lead to the different analyses. In the following sections I will attempt to carve out these factors.

##### **4.1. Different Analyses of Disagreements about Taste**

The analyses of disagreement about taste mainly seem to be unlike because the authors make different assumptions about the disagreement in question – not because they offer different characterisations of substantive disagreements or verbal disputes. MacFarlane assumes that there is substantive disagreement (NC) and (PJIA) about the literal content. Thereby, the latter disagreement is only possible if it is further assumed that predicates of personal taste are assessment sensitive (CS)<sub>R</sub>. In order for a disagreement to meet (PJIA) it must be assumed that an asserted proposition can be evaluated with respect to different contexts of assessment as circumstance of evaluation. Sundell and Plunkett and Chalmers would most likely consider predicates of personal taste to be context sensitive (CS)<sub>C</sub>. Accordingly, their view on context sensitivity excludes disagreements about taste to meet (PJIA). Now, the question can be posed as to who is right; are predicates of taste context sensitive (CS)<sub>C</sub> or (CS)<sub>R</sub>? MacFarlane argues for (CS)<sub>R</sub> in construing dialogues with predicates of personal taste that he takes to be representative for the ordinary use of predicates of taste. Then, he maintains that the linguistic behaviour of the speakers can best be explained if predicates of personal taste are assumed to be context sensitive (CS)<sub>R</sub>. However, the ordinary use at most discloses the semantic view of the speakers (if they have any). It does not justify them. MacFarlane may emphasise that he only wishes to find the best semantic theory for the ordinary use of predicates of taste and that he simply wants to discover

what opponents take themselves to disagree about. If this was the case, he should make it explicit and formulate his thesis more cautiously. At least, it seems possible that speakers take themselves to engage in a certain kind of disagreement while this is in fact not the case.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, if MacFarlane assumes that speakers make use of a certain semantic theory in order to characterise their disagreement, he should further put forward arguments for the semantic theory in question. Otherwise, the analysis of the disagreement may not be correct. However, Sundell and Plunkett and Chalmers also do not put forward arguments for (CS)<sub>C</sub> (or against (CS)<sub>R</sub>).

Sundell and Plunkett likely further assume that in disagreements about taste there is (DRCC) about some pragmatically conveyed content (see above). MacFarlane denies that there is disagreement about pragmatically communicated content and Chalmers would likely support MacFarlane in this view – at least, it was assumed that there is no underlying substantive disagreement detected by the method of elimination. Again, the question can be posed as to who is right. Sundell and Plunkett do not directly argue for (CS)<sub>C</sub> or for (DRCC) about some pragmatically communicated content. At any rate, they do not show that their analysis is more convincing than other analyses that also assume that the disagreement in question is substantive, nor do they elaborate on the supposed pragmatic mechanism in detail. Rather, they seem to offer a possible way to understand disagreements involving normative and evaluative terms. Furthermore, MacFarlane and Chalmers also do not put forward decisive arguments that there is no disagreement about the suggested pragmatically communicated content.

In Chalmers' ascribed view, disagreements about taste are most likely verbal disputes (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>: the method of elimination cannot identify an underlying substantive disagreement and the subscript gambit suggests that there are sentences such as "Château La Lagune 2014 is delicious for Marta", the truth of which the opponents agree on. In addition, it is reasonable to suppose that he would consider

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<sup>29</sup> To illustrate this point, recall Chalmers' examples of meta-ontological positions regarding ontological disagreements (see p. 146ff of this thesis): let's assume that the opponents in a disagreement about an ontological existence assertion are heavyweight realists. Accordingly, they take themselves to argue about the truth value of the asserted propositions in question. However, let's also assume that anti-realism is true so that the ontological existence assertions do not have an objective and determinate truth value. In such a situation, the opponents' ordinary use of the existential quantifier (in an ontological context) suggests that the different parties engage in a disagreement about the truth values of the assertions. However, the assertions in question do not in fact have an objective and determinate truth value and their disagreement seems to be defective.

predicates of personal taste not to be bedrock concepts but context sensitive  $(CS)_C$ . In response, Sundell and Plunkett would most likely claim that there is an underlying substantive disagreement about some pragmatically conveyed content. MacFarlane would hold on to  $(CS)_R$  regarding predicates of personal taste but may be indifferent regarding the application of Chalmers' method of elimination. (He does not seem to care whether there is an underlying substantive disagreement. For him, it is only important that it can be explained as to why ordinary speakers disagree about unrelativised taste judgments and he acknowledges that such disagreements may seem silly.) Again, it may be wondered who is right. As previously discussed, the authors do not offer convincing arguments for their preferred view on the context sensitivity for predicates of personal taste. Regarding Chalmers' method of elimination and an underlying substantive disagreement (about some pragmatically communicated content), there seem to be different assumptions or intuitions about the disagreement in question at play. The result is that it is difficult to decide who is right, as the authors do not argue for their views in greater detail.

#### 4.2 Different Analyses of Ontological Disagreements

Attention will now turn to why the various authors judge ontological disagreements differently. In Hirsch's view, Edna and Pedro engage in a verbal dispute, as  $(VD)_H$  is met. Thereby, he seems to suppose that in the original disagreement the opponents believe in or use the term according to an objectivist semantics – even though they may interpret it differently. At least, Hirsch does not seem to allow for context sensitive expressions  $(CS)_R$ ,  $(CS)_{NI}$  and if the existential quantifier were considered to be context sensitive  $(CS)_C$ , it remains unclear why the opponents engage in a disagreement at all. In Chalmers' opinion, the existential quantifier is also not context sensitive but a bedrock expression that acquires its content through structural inferential role. Thereby, Edna and Pedro engage in a bedrock dispute. According to MacFarlane's supposed analysis of ontological disagreements, the existential quantifier is assessment sensitive  $(CS)_R$  and there is doxastic disagreement (NC) and (PJIA). Considering Sundell and Plunkett's ascribed analysis of ontological disagreements, they would assume  $(CS)_C$  for the existential quantifier and substantive disagreement (DRCC) about the pragmatically communicated content regarding how the existential quantifier should be used.

To put it in a nutshell, the various authors mainly disagree about two points. First, each maintains a different view about the semantics of the existential quantifier. MacFarlane is described to assume  $(CS)_R$ , Sundell and Plunkett suppose  $(CS)_C$  while Hirsch and Chalmers both assume an objectivist semantics. However, contrary to Hirsch, Chalmers assumes that the existential quantifier is a bedrock expression so that considerations of charity are at most partly a clue to its content. None of these semantic views are compatible. In addition, most of their analyses of the disagreement in question are only possible if the respective semantic view is assumed: no disagreement (PJIA) without  $(CS)_R$  and no bedrock dispute without bedrock expression. Regarding Hirsch's restricted view on context sensitivity, it also seems to hold that  $(VD)_H$  is only possible if an objectivist semantics is assumed in the original disagreement. Again, it may be wondered who is right. Hirsch does not put forward arguments as to why Edna and Pedro make use of an objectivist semantics for the existential quantifier. Nor does he argue for  $(VD)_H$ . Rather, he simply offers his criterion for verbal disputes and only argues why it is met in the disagreement between Edna and Pedro. Chalmers assumes that open question arguments and conceptual analysis suggest that the existential quantifier is a bedrock expression. However, he only offers a sketch of a theory for bedrock expressions and also does not argue for it. Neither does he argue for his account of bedrock disputes. As seen above, MacFarlane does not offer straightforward arguments for  $(CS)_R$  and it is questionable as to whether his considerations regarding  $(CS)_R$  for predicates of personal taste also hold for the existential quantifier. Similarly, as argued above, Sundell and Plunkett do not offer arguments for  $(CS)_C$ .

The second main difference between the various authors concerns substantive disagreement about some pragmatically communicated content. All authors except Sundell and Plunkett likely deny that there is a pragmatically conveyed disagreement between Edna and Pedro. Chalmers method of elimination does not identify any substantive disagreement and Hirsch would probably take such a pragmatically conveyed disagreement to be a verbal dispute  $(VD)_H$  as well – otherwise, the opponents would not agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language. MacFarlane would likely ask Sundell and Plunkett to elaborate on the assumed pragmatic mechanism in more detail. However, the above-mentioned authors also do not offer detailed arguments against pragmatically conveyed disagreements.

Summing up, the various authors also analyse disagreements about taste and ontological disagreements differently because of different semantic assumptions and considerations concerning underlying disagreements about (pragmatically) conveyed contents.

## 5. Summary / Conclusions to Part III

The various authors offer different characterisations of substantive disagreements and verbal disputes and they also analyse disagreements about taste and ontological disagreements differently. However, the different characterisations of substantive disagreements are not that different. Chalmers and Hirsch mainly seem to disagree with MacFarlane (and Sundell and Plunkett) that disagreements with context sensitive expressions  $(CS)_{NI}$  and  $(CS)_R$  are not substantive disagreements but verbal disputes  $(BVD)_{CH}$  or  $(VD)_H$ . Nevertheless, all authors would most likely agree on  $(SD)$  which I consider to be a compelling sufficient condition for substantive disagreement without assessment sensitive expressions  $(CS)_R$ .

Regarding verbal disputes, the authors only agree that there is some linguistically articulated sentence involved the opponents hold different (maybe tacit) beliefs about its meaning (see  $(VD)$ ). Hirsch and Chalmers both additionally require agreement between the opponents. Sundell does not require agreement among the apparent opponents and contrary to the all other authors, does not allow for verbal disputes regarding pragmatically communicated contents. However, these different views arise mainly because he does not seek to characterise *wholly* verbal disputes. MacFarlane ascribed  $(VD)_{MF}^*$  demands for incompatible claims and is too strict for the other authors. In my view, it is reasonable to require agreement and to allow for pragmatically communicated contents in verbal disputes, accordingly, I consider  $(VD)^*$  to be compelling as sufficient condition for wholly verbal disputes.

Although there is much agreement regarding substantive disagreements and some agreement regarding verbal dispute, the various authors judge disagreements about taste and ontological disagreements differently. The different analyses also arise due to the different semantic assumptions and considerations concerning underlying disagreements. In order to decide which characterisation of the disa-

greement in question is most convincing for disagreements about taste and ontological disagreements, and whether (SD), (VD) or (VD)\* holds, it must be decided which assumptions are accepted. However, the various authors offer at most scarce arguments for their assumptions.

This chapter offers a sufficient condition (SD) for substantive disagreements and a necessary condition (VD) for verbal disputes that are widely accepted and it speculates on a more contentious sufficient condition for verbal disputes (VD)\*. It though remains undecided whether disagreements about taste and ontological disagreements about the existence of temporal parts are verbal disputes or substantive disagreements specified in this way. To get an answer to this question, arguments for the semantic assumptions and considerations regarding underlying disagreements must be found and weighed up against one another.

## Conclusions

Disagreements about taste and ontological disagreements about whether there exist temporal parts cannot obviously be judged to be substantive disagreements or verbal disputes. In the debates around these two disagreements, different characterisations of substantive disagreement and verbal dispute are offered. This thesis examined the different characterisations and identified widely accepted necessary or sufficient conditions for substantive disagreements or verbal disputes. In the process, as secondary goal, it was investigated whether disagreements about taste and ontological disagreements can convincingly be judged to be substantive disagreements or verbal disputes.

As discussed in the first part of this thesis, MacFarlane, a main proponent of relativism about taste, only offers one convincing characterisation of disagreement, namely disagreement (PJA) for disagreements without assessment sensitive expressions. (PJA) states that A disagrees with B's attitude if the accuracy of B's attitude precludes the accuracy of A's attitude. Unfortunately, disagreement (PJIA) – the relativist core notion for disagreements about taste – remains unconvincing. First, there is no clash in truth values between the expressed propositions as the opponents agree about the truth values of the propositions evaluated with respect to every circumstance of evaluation. Accordingly, the tension between the opponents' claims is missing and it remains unclear what the opponents disagree about. Second, relative accuracy turns disagreements about taste into silly or pointless conflicts. Third, disagreement (PJIA) is not substantive, as in the face of peer disagreement opponents are not ready to suspend judgment. Without a convincing characterisation of disagreement about taste that distinguishes relativism compared to other semantic theories, relativism as a whole semantic theory is challenged. However, as has been shown, the other positions considering disagreements about taste mentioned in this thesis also face serious problems. It seems as one must choose which deficiencies are the lesser of the evils.

In the second part of this thesis, Hirsch's characterisation of verbal disputes was elucidated. (VD)<sub>H</sub> roughly states that opponents engage in a verbal dispute if each

party agrees that the other party speaks the truth in its own, correctly interpreted language. Thereby, the speaker's linguistic behaviour and considerations of charity are the keys to correct interpretation: a speaker should be interpreted as using an expression as reasonable and as faultless as possible. However, Hirsch's view on correct interpretation is questioned, as the opponents' original beliefs may not be respected. Thereby, it is possible that  $(VD)_H$  is met, even though the opponents originally expressed beliefs cannot both be accurate, i.e. MacFarlane's undisputed (PJA) is met. As disagreement (PJA) is supposed to be substantive and non-verbal,  $(VD)_H$  fails to be a sufficient condition for verbal disputes. Since Hirsch argues that the ontological disagreement about the existence of temporal parts is a verbal dispute because  $(VD)_H$  is fulfilled, he also fails to show that it is a verbal dispute.

In contrast to Hirsch, Chalmers wishes to show that ontological disagreements, such as the disagreement between Edna and Pedro, are substantive disagreements named bedrock disputes. Bedrock disputes involve a bedrock concept, a concept so basic that it cannot be stated in more basic terms. As bedrock concepts are individuated by theory external constraints, such as acquaintance or structural inferential role, the opponents may express the same content with a bedrock expression despite difference in use. (This contrasts with Hirsch's view on correct interpretation.) However, in order to show that Edna and Pedro engage in a bedrock dispute, Chalmers must argue for heavyweight realism, a certain meta-ontological position. Otherwise, it is possible that the opponents engage in a defective bedrock dispute about the truth of assertions that do not have an objective and determinate truth value. Additionally, without a detailed elaboration of the semantic theory for bedrock expressions, it remains undecided whether Chalmers' characterisation of bedrock disputes is compelling. Chalmers does, however, offer a widely accepted characterisation of verbal disputes  $(BVD)_{CH}$ . Roughly, it states that opponents engage in a verbal dispute if they disagree about some sentence  $S$ , while this disagreement arises wholly in virtue of the opponents having different beliefs about the meaning of some term  $T$  in  $S$ .

In the third part of this thesis, the different characterisations of substantive disagreement and verbal dispute were compared and assessed. It was shown that all authors would likely agree on (SD) as sufficient condition for substantive disagreements without assessment sensitive expressions. (SD) is very similar to MacFarlane's (PJA), but it explicitly allows for substantive disagreements regard-

ing pragmatically communicated contents. In relation to substantive disagreements, the authors mainly disagree about whether disagreements with context sensitive-expressions  $(CS)_{NI}$ , and  $(CS)_R$  (similar to disagreements about taste) amount to substantive disagreements, but such disagreements are excluded by (SD). Regarding verbal disputes, all authors would likely agree that these involve a linguistically articulated sentence about which the opponents hold different (maybe tacit) beliefs about its meaning ((VD) as necessary condition for verbal disputes). In addition, it was argued that (VD)\* is a compelling sufficient condition for wholly verbal disputes. In contrast to (VD), (VD)\* might not be accepted by all authors as it further requires agreement about the truth value of the content the other party believes and takes to be expressed by the sentence in question. (VD)\* is similar to Chalmers'  $(BVD)_{CH}$ , but since it is formulated more precisely, it is more narrow.

Although there is much agreement among the authors regarding the characterisation of substantive disagreement and verbal disputes, they analyse disagreements about taste and ontological disagreements differently. In the third part of this thesis, an explanation for these different analyses was given: the various authors hold different views about the semantics of the terms in question and about whether or not there are underlying disagreements. However, they scarcely argue for their views. Unless it is decided which assumptions hold, it remains unclear which characterisation of the disagreement in question suits best and whether (SD), (VD), and (VD)\* are fulfilled.

This thesis succeeded in finding widely accepted conditions for substantive disagreements and verbal disputes (SD), (VD), and (VD)\*. It remains an open question, however, whether disagreements about taste and ontological disagreements about the existence of temporal parts are verbal disputes or substantive disagreements. Searching for and assessing arguments for the respective semantic views and assumptions about underlying disagreements is work that still has to be done.

## Appendix

### Forms of Context Sensitivity and Truth in Context

$(CS)_C$       *Context Sensitivity<sub>C</sub> (Contextualism)*

A sentence  $s$  is context sensitive iff the proposition it expresses due to its character varies with contexts of use (i.e. its character is context sensitive).

$(CS)_{NI}$       *Context Sensitivity<sub>NI</sub> (Nonindexicalism)*

A sentence  $s$  is context sensitive, iff (i) due to its character it expresses the same proposition in different contexts of use and (ii) the proposition yields different truth values when evaluated with respect to these different contexts of use as circumstance of evaluation.

$(CS)_R$       *Context Sensitivity<sub>R</sub> (Relativism)*

A sentence  $s$  is context sensitive, iff (i) due to its character it expresses the same proposition in different contexts of use (ii) the proposition yields different truth values as evaluated with respect to different contexts of assessment as circumstance of evaluation.

$(TC)_C$       *Truth in Context<sub>C</sub> (Contextualism)*

If  $c$  is a context, then an occurrence of  $s$  in  $c$  is true iff the proposition expressed by  $s$  in this context is true when evaluated with respect to the circumstance of the context.

$(TC)_R$       *Truth in Context of Use and Context of Assessment<sub>R</sub> (Relativism)*

If  $c_1$  is a context of use and  $c_2$  is a context of assessment, then an occurrence of  $s$  as used in  $c_1$  and as assessed in  $c_2$  is true iff the proposition expressed by  $s$  as used in  $c_1$  is true as used in  $c_1$  and assessed in  $c_2$ .

### Characterisations of (Substantive) Disagreement and Verbal Dispute

- (BD) *Bedrock Dispute (Chalmers)*  
 A substantive dispute is bedrock relative to an expression  $E$  when no underlying dispute can be found by applying the method of elimination to  $E$ : roughly, when there is no underlying dispute that does not involve  $E$  or cognates.
- (BVD)<sub>CH</sub> *Broadly Verbal Dispute<sub>CH</sub> (Chalmers)*  
 A dispute over  $S$  is (broadly) verbal when for some expression  $T$  in  $S$ , the parties disagree about the meaning of  $T$ , and the dispute over  $S$  arises wholly in virtue of this disagreement regarding  $T$ .
- (BVD)<sub>Prop</sub> *Broadly Verbal Dispute<sub>Prop</sub> (formulated with propositions, Chalmers)*  
 A dispute over  $S$  is broadly verbal when regarding what the speaker wanted to convey by  $S$ ,  $S$  expresses different propositions  $p$  and  $q$  for the two parties, so that one party asserts  $p$  and the other party denies  $q$ , and the parties agree on the truth of  $p$  and  $\neg q$ .
- (CD) *Second-Pass Definition of a Canonical Dispute (Sundell & Plunkett)*  
 A dispute consisting in Speaker A's utterance of  $e$  and Speaker B's utterance of  $f$  is canonical just in case there are two objects  $p$  and  $q$  (propositions, plans, etc.) such that Speaker A's utterance of  $e$  literally expresses  $p$  and Speaker B's utterance of  $f$  literally expresses  $q$ , and  $q$  is fundamentally in conflict with  $p$  in the manner appropriate to objects of that type. (By  $p$  entailing not- $q$  in the case of propositions; by the satisfaction of  $p$  precluding the satisfaction of  $q$  in the case of desires; by  $p$ 's implementation precluding  $q$ 's implementation in the case of plans, etc.)
- (DP) *Disagreeing Persons (Franc en)*  
 There is a circumstance of evaluation,  $C1$ , such that each person holds some proposition to be true at  $C1$ , and the two propositions cannot both be true at the same circumstance of evaluation.
- (DRCC) *Disagreement Requires Conflict in Content (Sundell & Plunkett)*  
 If two subjects  $A$  and  $B$  disagree with each other, then there are some objects  $p$  and  $q$  (propositions, plans, etc.) such that  $A$  accepts  $p$  and  $B$

accepts q, and p is such that the demands placed on a subject in virtue of accepting it are rationally incompatible with the demands placed on a subject in virtue of accepting q. (Perhaps, though not necessarily, in virtue of q entailing not-p.)

- (MVD)<sub>S</sub> *Merely Verbal Disputes* (Sundell)  
 A verbal dispute is merely verbal only if the opponents employ different measures of the appropriateness of their concepts.
- (NC) *Noncotenability of Attitudes* (MacFarlane)  
 A disagrees with B's attitude if B's attitude is noncotenable with A's attitudes, that is if A could not adopt B's attitude (an attitude with the same content and force) without changing her mind – that is, without dropping one of her current attitudes.
- (PJA) *Preclusion of Joint Accuracy* (MacFarlane)  
 A disagrees with B's attitude if the accuracy of B's attitude precludes the accuracy of A's attitude.
- (PJIA) *Preclusion of Joint Irreflexive Accuracy* (MacFarlane)  
 A disagrees with B's attitude if the accuracy of B's attitude (*as assessed from any context*) precludes the accuracy of A's attitude (*as assessed from that same context*).
- (PJRA) *Preclusion of Joint Reflexive Accuracy* (MacFarlane)  
 A disagrees with B's attitude if the accuracy of B's attitude (*as assessed from B's context of use*) precludes the accuracy of A's attitude (*as assessed from A's context of use*).
- (PJS) *Preclusion of Joint Satisfaction* (MacFarlane)  
 A disagrees with B's attitude if B's attitude precludes the satisfaction of A's attitude(s).
- (SD) *Substantive Disagreement* (*suggestion of this thesis*)  
 Regarding disagreements without assessment sensitive expressions (CS)<sub>R</sub>, A disagrees substantively with B if the (literally or pragmatically communicated) content of B's attitude and the (literally or pragmatically communicated) content of A's attitude cannot both be true

with respect to the circumstance of evaluation specified in the context of use.

- (SD)\*<sub>CH</sub> *Substantive Disagreement*<sub>CH</sub> (opposed to (BVD)<sub>CH</sub>) (Chalmers)  
 A disagreement over S is substantive only if the parties agree on the meanings of all expressions T that are part of S.
- (VD) *Verbal Dispute* (suggestion of this thesis)  
 A and B engage in a verbal dispute only if their dispute is about the truth of some linguistically articulated sentence the opponents hold different beliefs about its meaning (or about the meaning of one of its terms).
- (VD)\* *Verbal Dispute\** (suggestion of this thesis)  
 A and B engage in a wholly verbal dispute if (i) their dispute is about the truth of some linguistically articulated sentence, (ii) the opponents hold different beliefs about the meaning of the sentence in question (or about the meaning of one of its terms), (iii) the opponents agree about the truth value of the (literally or pragmatically conveyed) content the other party believes and takes to be expressed by the sentence in question.
- (VD)\*<sub>MF</sub> *Verbal Dispute\**<sub>MF</sub> (MacFarlane)  
 A disagreement between A and B is a verbal dispute only if the opponents make compatible claims.
- (VD)<sub>H</sub> *Verbal Dispute*<sub>H</sub> (Hirsch)  
 A disagreement is a verbal dispute if, given the correct view of linguistic interpretation, each party will agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language.
- (VD)<sub>S</sub> *Verbal Dispute*<sub>S</sub> (Sundell)  
 If two subjects A and B disagree about the truth of some sentence S, their disagreement over S is a verbal dispute if the opponents literally mean different things by their words.

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