

Diversity and Disagreement

We all have beliefs about certain topics. Sometimes we agree on these topics and sometimes we don't. This difference of beliefs among individuals and groups is a very much talked about topic in epistemology. Thus certain notions about various phenomenon have been observed when it comes to how similar or different people are in terms of their beliefs and how individuals and groups come to conclusions about these beliefs. This paper will focus primarily on how people differ on beliefs and associated behavior of groups that disagree. We will look at how the idea of disagreement and diversity is related and beneficial to the growth of a group. Before we can begin however, we need to have a small discussion on what diversity and disagreement are.

Diversity can mean many things, but in this context we want to focus on cognitive diversity. Cognitive diversity is the concept of the cognitive differences between individuals in a group. People are cognitively different from each other if they each have varying degrees of competency in cognitive aspects (Anderson). This doesn't mean that some people have to be really intelligent, and others have to be of lower intelligence, although that would also be considered diverse. It could just mean a difference in beliefs, mental skills, or outlooks. A group consisting of a biologist and a chemist is more diverse than one of only chemists, supposing they are all of the same intelligence level. That is not to say that diversity is about ability, or skill set, but it can also include approach. A Humean and a non-Humean will approach metaphysics questions quite differently from each other, even if they are in the same field of study. Additionally, people can agree and still be diverse. Suppose Person A believes in the legalization of cannabis because it would help lower the stress placed on the prison system. Whereas Person B also believes in the legalization of cannabis because they just want easier access to it. Diversity can exist among agreement.

Disagreement on the other hand is slightly different than diversity. While cognitive diversity focuses on the difference of beliefs, regardless if they are similar or dissimilar, disagreement focuses more on the oppositions of beliefs (Christenson). That is, diversity is a property of a group, whereas disagreement is a phenomenon. This is related to the idea of dissent. While disagreement can refer to two individuals having opposing beliefs, dissent occurs more in the group setting. Dissent is the opposition, or even the rejection of a belief from a group (Anderson). So while person A and Person B may disagree about the effec-

tiveness of vaccines, Person A dissents from the Group B, if Person A is and Anti-Vaxxer. Whether it be disagreement or dissent, the concept of opposition beliefs is what makes this part interesting. Disagreement about opinions are pretty straightforward, such as if blue is prettier than green. Disagreement on more complicated issues, like if the death penalty is ethical is slightly different. This is because disagreement on these issues seem to imply or be dependent on this idea of an objective truth (Cohen). That is, there is this shared conception, or metaphysical concept of truth, and what is correct and incorrect. So when there is disagreement or dissent, that means that differing, yet completely logical, beliefs exist and can be justified (in most cases).

This idea of beliefs differing is the basis for Anderson's discussion on epistemology and democracy. In particular, our voting ability or our ability to come to a consensus, whether it be a jury vote, or just overall problem solving and coming to a solution. Anderson talks about three models of democracy which use disagreement and/or diversity to help come to a decision. One model is this idea that diversity trumps ability (the DTA model). In the DTA model, if we have a difficult problem to solve, and we have a large group of diverse problem solvers of moderate ability, this large diverse group will perform better than a smaller group of best problem solvers. That is to say, that large groups of non-experts out-perform small groups of experts. An important part of this model is that the problem is supposed to be complex and as such, a wide range of solutions could be constructed. One of the reasons Anderson says the larger diverse group performs better is because we need dissent, or diversity to self correct. She claims that groups that are diverse, have this self correcting ability that non-diverse groups do not. This is because diverse groups do not adhere to a fallible system.

There is this idea of fallibilism when it comes to decision making, or other judgements about epistemology. When making a decision, some people can fail to recognize what they do not know which can be harmful in forming a solution to a problem. Anderson believes that small groups of experts can fail to know what they don't know whereas this is almost impossible with large diverse groups. This is why there is a self correcting process among diverse groups because there are two major parts of correcting a problem. There is the first part of recognizing a problem, and then the second part of fixing it. It is important to point out the role that diversity and disagreement have in this process. Groups that are disagree, have a differing of believe when it comes to a particular matter. This disagreement can point out which parts of a solution may be incorrect, or not effective. Then the diverse aspect of the members can come up with a solution to the problem (Anderson). This new solution could be incorrect, but idea of a large diverse group is that someone will probably disagree with the solution and the process starts again. In a non diverse group, there is not much disagreement that occurs so it is easier to overlook small problems which may arise.

Thus, disagreement and diversity play off each other to better solve a problem. This is in contrast to ideas like polarization or situations where disagreement and diversity can hurt the group.

While in Anderson's DTA case where people are working together to solve a problem, there will be times when people will need to come to a consensus and express their beliefs about judgements which will oppose each other. An example of this would be something like voting where the vote is used to express preferences (Rawls). When expressing preferences, diverse groups need not to necessarily converge on one solution like Anderson's DTA example. In this case, there can be disagreement and diversity, but have no majority, like in a cyclic majority (Cohen). One such example is Arrow's impossibility theorem. Arrow's theorem is an example of three voters who have three options and they rank their options such that individually, transitivity about preferences hold. Yet, when aggregating their combined preferences, no option is more preferred than the others. Thus, it would seem that voting has to be more than just the aggregation of private information or private preference.

In voting about preferences, if we suppose that voting is supposed to express a person's belief about what is good, there needs to be this shared conception of good (Rawls). That despite the diversity of people in controversial topics like a religion or what is proper, there is this metaphysical idea of good, or what is reasonable. Yet in the case of a circular majority, if voting was to represent people's beliefs about good, then we either do not have a shared idea of good, or a shared notion of good is not enough. Thus, we need to either appeal to some other shared notion, that despite diversity, we don't have disagreement on, or an objective good, that despite diversity, or disagreement, there is a good that exists independent judgement (Rawls).

John Rawls prefers to take the former notion, as he believes that there can be a pluralistic notion of what is good. In fact, any reasonable society must allow a diverse sense of what good can be. Instead, Rawls believes we should have a shared conception of justice, or at the very least, what is fair. This is demonstrated through Rawls's Original Position situation which demonstrates that despite a diverse group, and varying conceptions of the good, there is a shared and similar conception of fairness. While Rawls uses this argument in terms of a social contract, it can also be used to demonstrate that while diversity and disagreement are independent of each other, yet they are related. That is, we can agree and have similar thoughts about a topic, in this case a shared conception of justice, and yet be diverse in how we interpret that notion. I believe in this case, we can think of diversity in terms of justification of a belief, and disagreement is centered around the judgement of a belief. That is to say we can agree or disagree on a topic, yet be diverse in why we agree

or disagree. We can agree on a shared notion of justice, but be diverse on what makes something just, just like we can disagree on a shared notion of good, but be similar in our reason why.

References

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