



Background Beliefs

Teacher 's Guide to Student Handout #2: **Types of Disagreement**

Instructions: Identify the kinds of agreement or disagreement – whether they're based on fact or values – exhibited by the following pairs.

1. Disagreement about value. The two sayings express differing attitudes regarding the relative value of advance planning.
2. Disagreement about matters of fact. One saying expresses the factual belief that being apart will result in people falling more deeply in love. The other expresses a factual belief that absence will cause people to forget about one another. There is a disagreement about what will in fact result from an extended absence.
3. Disagreement about matters of fact. Ecclesiastes is making the factual claim that the best athlete will not always win a contest. Jimmy the Greek (an infamous bookie) is claiming that, in fact, the best athlete usually will win the contest.
4. Disagreement about value. Sumner and Mussolini disagree about the benefits of war. Mussolini thinks that war is a good thing; Sumner thinks war is awful.
5. Disagreement about matters of fact. Giuliani claims to have been responsible for 23 different tax cuts. Vallone, however, claims that Giuliani did not in fact initiate some of the tax cuts for which he claims credit. The dispute can be resolved by looking back at historical records and at news reports.
6. Disagreement about value. Garfield and Moore are arguing about the importance of education. One claims that it is essential to the protection of freedom, while the other thinks it destroys the soul. It is also possible to argue that the two disagree factually. That is, it may well be an empirical question whether education actually makes people less happy.
7. Both. Smith is offering a factual assertion (namely, that all atheists are debauched and vile), while La Mettrie is making a value claim (namely, that the world will never improve until belief in God disappears). Presumably, La Mettrie would disagree with Smith's factual claim, while Smith would disagree with La Mettrie's value claim.
8. Both. Here we have two different teams claiming to be national champions in college football in the same year. Most straightforwardly, the disagreement is about a matter of fact. After all, the winner of the national championship in college football seems to be a straightforward factual question. However, in 2003, there were dual national champions. The Associated Press, which has traditionally awarded a national championship trophy, declared USC to be the national champion. However, the Bowl Championship Series, an entity created by various college

football conferences for the purpose of awarding a unified national championship, awarded the title to LSU. So the apparent factual disagreement can also be characterized as a value disagreement about which team is the “real” national champion.

9. Disagreement about values. President Grant and Pope Leo disagree about whether people have an inherent right to rebel against the government.

10. Disagreement about values. Jefferson and Thoreau agree that the U.S. is flawed, but disagree about whether the U.S. is still worthy of veneration. Thoreau believes that the flaws are such that good men can only disassociate themselves from the U.S., while Jefferson believes that, despite the flaws, the U.S. is the best government available.

11. Disagreement about matters of fact. Clinton and Petraeus cannot possibly both be correct. Either the number of civilian casualties increased or it decreased. Determining which figure is correct is a matter of consulting records.

12. Disagreement about values. Kristol and Vonnegut agree that the world was once a very different place with very different values. But while Kristol thinks that those values were better (and the world correspondingly also a better place), Vonnegut thinks that those values were much worse than the current set.