

12. Christensen 2015: Conciliationism and Public Disagreements

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I. Independence-Based Conciliationism

Music Contest: Bill and I disagree about whether Kirsten's performance was better than Aksel's. Then I discover he's their father.

Mental Math: You and I always tip 20%, and do mental math to figure out how much to pay. Usually we agree, but when we don't we've each been right half the time. I become confident we owe \$43. But then you tell me you think we owe \$45.

IBC: When you disagree with someone, you should assess their epistemic credentials in a way that's independent of the reasoning that's been called into dispute.

→ If you have *dispute-independent* reason to think they're reliable, you should moderate your confidence.

Christensen wants to know: moving away from these simplified, two-person disagreements, what does IBC entail about how *real-world, public disagreements* should affect our opinions?

Christensen: it depends on the case!

Worry (Elga's "spinelessness" objection): must we give up our beliefs?

II. Shared-Background Disagreements (Philosophy)

Start with public disagreements on which the disputants share most of their background assumptions.

→ Christensen uses academic philosophy as his example.

Christensen thinks IBC should lead to *a lot* of conciliation here.

Three reasons:

- We have positive, dispute-independent reason to think our opponents are epistemically on a par with us.
- The breadth of disagreement gives us reason to doubt our methods' reliability.
- We have little basis to downgrade the other side more than our own.

How far does this extend? Maybe also to intra-party political disagreements? Or intra-denomination religious ones?

Because (1) we share lots of background, and (2) the disagreements are *cross-cutting*.

In 1v1 case, we know more about how our opinion was formed than theirs. But in 10v10 case, we know very little about the 9 who agree with us.

Upshot: For disagreements amongst parties that share a lot of background, IBC should lead us to lose our confidence.

Q1: Does this seem right?

Q2: [Keep in mind:] How broad to reasons (a)–(c) apply?

Christensen focuses on academic philosophy. But does this generalize?

III. Deep Disagreements (Evolution)

Christensen focuses on two public-discourse case studies.

The first is a *deep* disagreement: human evolution.

At first seems easy IBC to let evolutionists downgrade creationists: look to experts!

Problem: Who the experts are is *also* in dispute. Biologists vs. The Bible. So shouldn't IBC force us to set these considerations aside?

Christensen: IBC says we need *positive* dispute-independent reason to treat others as equals in order for our belief to be threatened.

Mere *lack* of dispute-independent reason to favor ourselves doesn't threaten.

Q: Is this convincing?

IV. Middling Disagreements (Economics)

Expert economists disagree over whether *W* is true:

W: Raising the minimum wage will benefit poor Americans.

Does this mean lay-people like us should conciliate?

Think of Nguyen, Cognitive Islands; McGrath on unique-green experts.

Christensen isn't sure, but thinks we can avoid doing so.

For topics like this, it's easy to tell a **debunking story** about the beliefs of the experts you disagree with: a story that explains why they'd have those beliefs, regardless of whether they're true.

- Against conservative economists: "They're incentivized to preserve the status quo, which benefits them. Self-serving bias."
- Against liberal economists: "They just want/need to fit into the liberal norms of academia. Selection effect."

Q: Is this convincing?