

12. Vavova 2014: Confidence and Disagreement

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I. Knowledge and Skepticism

Suppose McGrath's argument that our controversial beliefs are not *knowledge* is sound:

P1 Our controversial moral beliefs are **CONTROVERSIAL**

P2 **CONTROVERSIAL** beliefs are not knowledge.

C Our controversial beliefs are not knowledge.

So what?

P3 If you know that you don't know p , you can't rationally believe p .

P4 We *know* our controversial moral beliefs aren't knowledge.

C2 So we can't rationally maintain our controversial moral beliefs.

How to respond?

They may still be true, and rational or justified.

$K \neg Kp \Rightarrow \neg Bp$, even if $\neg Kp \not\Rightarrow \neg Bp$.

We can follow McGrath's argument.

II. Confidence and Disagreement

Vavova suggests the right way to think about peer disagreement is in terms of *degrees of confidence*.

First pass:

Intuitive Thought (IT): How you ought to revise your opinion in the face of disagreement depends on how rationally confident you are in that opinion; the more confident you are, the less you must revise.

Gets certain cases right:

Hard Math: You and I calculate an 18% tip on a \$37 bill; you think we owe \$44, but then I say I think we owe \$42.

Easy Math: You and I calculate a 20% tip on a \$10 bill; you think we owe \$12, but then I say I think we owe \$120.

IT explains the difference because you're rationally confident the bill is \$12 in Easy Math; not confident it's \$42 in Hard Math.

But Vavova says IT is false. Rational confidence is neither necessary nor sufficient for standing your ground.

Not necessary:

Murky Coin: You're unsure whether this coin will land heads. It's been tossed thousands of times, with the outcomes recorded. You saw 10 of these outcomes, 7 of which landed heads. So you guess heads. Now you learn that I've seen 10 (different) outcomes, and guessed tails.

Like Elga; unlike Feldman, Kelly, and McGrath.

You're not confident, but can maintain your guess.

Not sufficient:

Clear Coin: You and I are both great at math, and both know that the coin lands heads $(27 \times 6 - 8 \times 13)\%$ of the time. You calculate 58% and are confident it'll land heads. Then you find out that I guessed it'll land tails.

You were confident, but should now be unsure.

III. What's going on?

What matters is not how confident you are, but how *surprised* you should be by the disagreement.

- If you should be very surprised (and can't explain it away), then even if you were very confident you should revise.
- If you shouldn't be surprised, then even if you're not very confident, you shouldn't necessarily change your mind.

Clear coin case—you expect me to agree.

Murky coin case—it's no surprise I had a different guess.

⇒ In fact, cases in which you're *less* confident (because the evidence seems murky) are cases where disagreement is more expected, and so less significant.

Upshots for interesting cases:

- If you're very confident in your political opinions, you should be surprised by disagreement and so become less so.
- But as long as you admit that the evidence is murky, you can expect disagreement and so maintain your modest degree of confidence.

What do people think?