

9. Kelly 2005: Right Reasons

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I. Peer Disagreement

Maybe (some) public disagreements have reasonable causes. How should we react if so?

Clarifications:

- Normative question; not a descriptive one.
- Fact of the matter about whether F .
- *Disagree* = one of us believes F , the other disbelieves it.
- We are *peers* (wrt F) if both
 - (i) we are each equally familiar with the evidence and arguments for and against it, and
 - (ii) we both are similarly endowed with epistemic virtues.

Say F = \$1400 stimulus checks are financially feasible.

Share evidence

Recall Feldman: we *can't* "agree to disagree". (Kelly agrees.)

We can't conclude that the other side is equally rational *in their belief about F*.

Part of the explanation is the **uniqueness thesis**: a given body of evidence E warrants at most one of believing, disbelieving or suspending judgment on P .

Again, Kelly (implicitly) agrees.

What *should* we do?

Conciliationism: In response to peer disagreement, the rational thing to do is to suspend judgment.

Feldman
Keep in mind variants, like "become less confident".

Right Reasons: In response to peer disagreement, the rational thing to do is for the one who initially was rational should maintain their belief.

Kelly

The other party should give theirs up.

II. Against symmetry

The main argument for conciliationism is the *symmetry* of the situation: since we're peers, I can't think that I'm in a better position than you! (Think of how a third party would react.)

Side note: Kelly would *also* think this is crucial in Feldman's "evidence of evidence is evidence" argument.

Being peers means only that things were *antecedently* symmetric.

We both get total evidence E . Suppose E supports F .

Recall uniqueness...

- You believe F , I disbelieve it.
- We find out we disagree, so our total evidence becomes (1)–(3):
 - (1) E ; and
 - (2) you believed F on the basis of E ; and
 - (3) I disbelieved F on the basis of E .

So your belief is rational, mine's not.

Two arguments for Right Reasons:

- a) It's not clear that (3) is evidence against F .
- b) Even if it is, all it should do is cancel out (2)! E still supports F .

I wouldn't list it as a reason in explaining why I disbelieve F ; why should you?

Upshot: The rational reaction to peer disagreement depends on who was *in fact* rational to begin with.

Discuss!

III. Bonus: actual vs. possible disagreement

Surely the existence of *actual* disagreements can be the crux of the issue.

Silencing opposition doesn't destroy the rational case for their position.

But of course disagreement is always *possible*.

So what determines how much it should affect our beliefs? Kelly: the *rationality* of the possible disagreement.

- Case (i): everyone divided over F
- Case (ii): Same arguments/evidence, but the opposition to F is silenced.
- Case (iii): Same arguments/evidence as case (i), but by random chance everyone believes F .

Surely what it's rational for a new student to believe about F doesn't vary between cases!

Thoughts?