

## 9. Kelly 2005: Right Reasons

Kevin Dorst  
kevindorst@pitt.edu

PHIL 1460  
February 16, 2021

---

### 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?