

Elga 2007, The Problem of Peer Disagreement

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I. Setup

How to respond to peer disagreement?

Restaurant tip case.

You take me to be your "peer" about p if, prior to forming an opinion about it, you think that conditional on us disagreeing, we are equally likely to be right.

Focus on factual claims. Eg *Deterrent* = the death penalty had a deterrent effect on crime in Texas in the 1980s.

II. The Equal Weight View

EWV (initial): When you disagree with someone you take to be a peer, you should give their assessment equal weight to your own.

→ A form of 'conciliationism'.

80% vs. 20% → 50%.

90% vs. 50% → 70%.

Objection: *Spinelessness*. No more controversial opinions!

Alternatives:

- The *extra* weight view: give somewhat more weight to your assessment.
- Right Reasons: the rational person should stick to their guns.

III. Detour: Reliabilism and bootstrapping

What justifies us in believing our eyes?

- *A priori* warrant?
- **Reliabilism:** if the mechanism is reliable, it justifies beliefs.

a priori = knowable absent evidence

In fact reliable regardless of whether we know it is. Externalist theory.

Reliabilism has lots of good features.

But leads to **bootstrapping**: can get evidence that a mechanism is reliable *by relying on that very mechanism*.

IV. The argument: denying EWV leads to bootstrapping

Horse race / perceptual case. Repeatedly disagreeing with peer could lead you to conclude your perception is much more reliable than them!

Both RR and extra weight view.

Likewise in evidence / peer disagreement case.

Thoughts?

V. Refining and Defending the EWV

What if you get extra information along the way? (Weather gets hot.)

Conditional on the circumstances of judgment.

What if form opinion long before even meet your peer?

"Bracketing off". What's opinion of Joe *bracketing off* what Jim said about him?

EWV (refined): "Upon finding out that an advisor disagrees, your probability that you are right should equal your prior conditional probability that you would be right. Prior to what? Prior to your thinking through the disputed issue, and finding out what the advisor thinks of it. Conditional on what? On whatever you have learned about the circumstances of the disagreement." (490)

Reply to spinelessness: most real-world cases of deep disagreement aren't cases where you should take the other person to be your peer.

E.g. Ann and Beth, disagree on abortion.

Discuss!