

Evidence and the Epistemology of Disagreement

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Evidence

Question

Suppose you and I take different doxastic attitudes to a single body of evidence. Does it follow from this that (at least) one of us is less than maximally rational?

- The view that it does is *uniqueness*.
- The view that it doesn't is *permissivism*.

The Epistemology of Disagreement

Question

Suppose that you and I are epistemic peers with regard to a particular matter. You find out that I disagree with you on the matter. Are you, in virtue of this, rationally obliged to become less confident in your initial belief?

- The view that you are is *conciliationism*.
- The view that you aren't is *steadfastness*.

Connections

- Conciliationism might seem to imply uniqueness.
- Put another way, permissivism might seem to imply steadfastness.

If there's a possibility of both of us being maximally rational, then why should the fact that you disagree with me give me any reason to think that I'm less than maximally rational?

The Questions

- (1) Does a commitment to permissivism bring with it a commitment to a steadfast theory?
- (2) Should we ground a commitment to a steadfast theory in a commitment to permissivism?

The Answers

No and no.

- You could believe in the truth of permissivism and rationally deny a steadfast theory.
- Steadfast theories grounded in a commitment to permissivism face two problems that steadfast theorists in general level against defenders of conciliationist theories.

A Thought About Implication

$(\forall p), (\forall q)$, if $(p \rightarrow q)$ then it *ought* to be the case that
 $(\forall S)((BSp) \rightarrow \neg(BS\neg q))$

- (If p implies q , then anyone who believes that p oughtn't to also believe that q is false).
- The sense of implication here is the same as the sense of implication involved in the claim that permissivism implies steadfastness.

An Argument for Permissivism

- Kelly observes that uniqueness is a very strong statement.
- We only need there to be *one* case of permissive evidence for uniqueness to be false.
- And this becomes highly plausible when we consider agents with very *fine-grained* doxastic states.

Fine-Grainedness

- I'm a *coarse-grained* epistemic agent.
- I can make sense of believing some things, not believing other things and being more confident about some of the things I believe than others.
- I **don't** have a definite notion of being 0.2734568 confident (rather than 0.2734567 confident) in something.

Permissivism Without Steadfastness

- This seems to yield no reason to be steadfast in theories of disagreement.
- It appeals to creatures that are explicitly *unlike* us.
- The result is that it is not clear that this argument for permissivism has anything to say about disagreements amongst agents like us.

Another Objection

- Suppose you thought that there was only *one case* (or very few cases) of permissive evidence.
- This would be a way of endorsing permissivism that wouldn't license steadfastness.
- If you and I disagree, then it probably *isn't* the case that our disagreement has anything to do with permissive evidence.

Permissivism and Steadfastness

If steadfastness is to be grounded in permissivism, it needs to be that it leads the disagreeing parties to reasonably think that their disagreement is to be explained in terms of permissive evidence.

The Subject of Theories of Disagreement

- The reason that Kelly's argument didn't motivate steadfastness was because it had to do with agents *unlike* us.
- This only works if theories of disagreement are supposed to be about us.
- The reason for thinking that steadfast theories should endorse this is because it is a premise in an argument against conciliatory views.

Scepticism

- One objection to conciliatory theories emerges from the fact that we disagree about a lot.
- And according to conciliatory theories, this should cause us to be less confident in our beliefs.
- So we're unable to maintain our beliefs about very much.

Scepticism and Steadfastness

- Does a steadfast theory grounded in permissivism fare any better?
- Where evidence is permissive between ϕ and ψ , it supports the disjunction $(\phi \vee \psi)$.
- And where the disagreement is between my belief that ϕ and your belief that $\neg\phi$, it becomes hard to see how the permissive evidence is really evidence of anything.

Thinking Probabilistically...

- Assuming evidence has *something* to do with probability of *some* sort, permissive evidence makes two propositions more plausible than the others.
- But assuming probabilities can't exceed 1, it can't support either proposition to greater than 0.5.
- And if your evidence for your belief doesn't make it more probable than 0.5, then it's hard to see how this isn't a sceptical conclusion.

Another Steadfast Argument

- Conciliatory views call for their own rejection.
- One of the things that we disagree about is what we should do in the face of disagreement.
- And by conciliatory lights, we should therefore be less confident that conciliatory views are correct.

Does Steadfastness Do Any Better?

- This looks like a specific application of the sceptical worry for conciliatory views.
- And the response against steadfast theories grounded in permissivism follows the same lines.
- The idea is, ultimately, that they end up admitting their own theory is grounded on evidence that offers no more than a 0.5 probability.

Summary

- I suggested that there's not a straightforward implication from permissivism to steadfastness (though that's not to say you can't ground a steadfast theory in permissivism).
- And I suggested that if you *do* ground a steadfast theory in permissivism, then the resulting theory faces two of the problems that steadfast theories usually raise against conciliatory theories.