

Peer-Disagreement Discussion Questions

Conor Mayo-Wilson

Clarifying the Theses

1. What do Feldman and Kelly mean by “epistemic peers”? Provide three examples from the articles, and one from your own experience, in which it appears that epistemic peers might realistically have identical evidence.
2. What is the “equal weight view” (EWV)? To answer this question, you should answer the following questions:
 - (a) Kelly contrasts a model in which “the propositional attitude of belief is treated as an all-or-nothing matter” with a model in which belief is treated as a “matter of degree.” Explain the two models. Which model is employed by Feldman? By Kelly? What arguments does Kelly offer for modeling as he does?
 - (b) What does “splitting the difference” mean in the model in which belief is treated as a “matter of degree”? What does it mean in the model in which belief is “an all-or-nothing matter”?
 - (c) Provide two examples from the readings and one example of your own that are intended to motivate EWV.
 - (d) It is Sunday morning, and you have not yet looked outside. You believe the proposition “It didn’t rain last night” ($\neg R$) and you also believe that “If it didn’t rain last night, then the grass in the yard is not wet” ($\neg R \rightarrow \neg W$). So you also believe “The grass in the yard is not wet” ($\neg W$). Your friend, who spent the night in your home and has not looked outside today, informs you that he doesn’t want to fetch the paper without his shoes because he believes W “The grass in the yard is wet.” What does “suspend[ing] judgment” in W entail? In particular, according to EWV, should you believe $\neg R$ and/or $\neg R \rightarrow \neg W$? Explain.
 - (e) You and your friend are taking the same math class. Each Wednesday evening, you do your homework separately, and then you

compare your answers on Thursday morning before class. This week, you calculated an answer of $\frac{\pi}{13}$ to the first question on your homework. However, knowing that you sometimes make mistakes, so you are only 90% confident in your answer. On Thursday morning, you meet with your friend who says that he is likewise 90% confident that $\frac{\pi}{13}$ is the answer to the first question on the homework. According to EWV, should both of you keep your .9 credence in $\frac{\pi}{13}$? Why or why not?

3. What does Feldman's "uniqueness thesis" (UT) assert?
 - (a) How do your answers to questions 1-3 above affect your interpretation of UT?
 - (b) In our previous class, we discussed Bayesianism, which is the thesis that an individual's degrees of beliefs are representable by probabilities and that they ought to be updated by conditionalization. Does UT require that two individuals' "prior" probabilities be identical? What about the conditional probabilities $P(\cdot|E)$?
4. According to Feldman, what is the relationship between EWV and UT? What about for Kelly?

Clarifying the Arguments

White: "Epistemic Permissiveness"

1. What is White's example (on pages 447-448) involving pills intended to show? Reconstruct the argument by explicitly stating the premises, conclusions, and intermediate steps of the argument.
2. Explain the permissivist's response to White's argument in Section 3. Which premises and/or inference of White's argument, as you have reconstructed it, is targeted by the permissivist.
3. Explain White's argument that, if permissivism were true, the one could receive confirming evidence for a hypothesis and yet fail to alter one's degrees of belief at all.

Feldman: "Reasonable Religious Disagreements"

1. Explain what Feldman means by "different starting points" and why, according to Feldman, they cannot justify disagreement.

2. Explain what Feldman might mean by “private evidence” and why the existence of such evidence might, on first glance, justify disagreement. Explain Feldman’s arguments that “private evidence” can do no such thing.

Kelly: “Peers Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence”

1. What is the difference between “psychological” and “non-psychological” evidence according to Kelly?
2. What is the total-evidence view?
3. Explain the “Litmus paper” objection. In particular, explain how the distinction between “psychological” and “non-psychological” is supposed to help Kelly argue for the claim that, upon learning a peer disagrees with you, you are not required to suspend judgment in a proposition (or change your credence).
4. Is it possible for two individuals to have identical “psychological” and “non-psychological” evidence according to Kelly? Why or why not?
5. If it is possible for individuals to have identical “psychological” and “non-psychological” evidence for a proposition, then what does the total weight view entail about their beliefs? Can they disagree? Why or why not?