

## Belief and disagreement: What to believe when we disagree?

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### 1. The problem of peer disagreement

- Starting point
  - You believe something.
  - You discover someone disagrees with you.
- Question
  - Insofar as you are trying to know the truth and avoid error, how should you react to that discovery? Is the rational/reasonable reaction to *abandon* or to *retain* your belief?
- Answer sometimes obvious (easy cases)
  - Disagreement with epistemic inferior (Australia example): Keep it
  - Disagreement with epistemic superior (Bernie example): Abandon it
- Hard cases:
  - Disagreement with an epistemic *peer* or *equal*
    - Equal access to evidence
    - Equal cognitive ability
  - Jury example
- The peer disagreement problem:
  - *When you learn that an epistemic peer disagrees with you on a question, should you abandon your belief on that question? Or can it be rational to keep it?*
- Two main views
  - **Conciliationism**: You should abandon it
  - **Steadfastness**: You may keep it

### 2. Why it is a puzzle

- Conciliationism and Steadfastness both face serious problems
- Problem with Steadfastness: No reason to suppose your peer made the mistake
  - i. You disagree, so there must be an error somewhere
  - ii. You are peers, so for all you know, equally likely to have made the mistake.
  - iii. No reason to assume it is the other (or you) who went wrong.
  - iv. So, you should both suspend your belief and be agnostic.
- Problem with Conciliationism: Skepticism and self-undermining
  - i. Many of your important beliefs are about controversial issues (science, politics, ethics, health, religion, economics, philosophy).
  - ii. On many (if not all) of those questions, there are equally smart and well-informed people who disagree with you.
  - iii. So, according to Conciliationism, you should abandon those beliefs.
  - iv. This includes belief in Conciliationism!

### 3. A middle ground solution?

- Jennifer Lackey's (2010a, 2010b) *Justificationism*
- Neither Conciliationism, nor Steadfastness
- Sometimes conciliate, sometimes remain steadfast
- Key factor: *how strongly justified* you are in your initial belief
  - Strongly justified (low chance of being wrong) → stick to your guns.
  - Not strongly justified (high chance of being wrong) → suspend belief

### 4. Recap exercise:

- Go to **www.menti.com**
- Use the code 92 20 83

### 5. Questions (can write them in chat)

### 6. Conclusion: beyond the pursuit of truth? Epistemology vs. ethics

- Truth and error avoidance: not our only concern when we disagree
- Also practical, ethical, social concerns, independent of truth and evidence
- Should you always prioritize concern for truth in deciding whether to remain steadfast?
- Or should you sometimes risk error to benefit/respect the other person/yourself?

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