

Giulia Bistagnino

EPISTEMOLOGY OF DISAGREEMENT: MAPPING THE DEBATE

workingpaper

 Centro Einaudi

N6 2011 ISSN 2036-1246



Laboratorio di Politica Comparata
e Filosofia Pubblica

GIULIA BISTAGNINO

**EPISTEMOLOGY OF DISAGREEMENT:
MAPPING THE DEBATE**

Centro Einaudi • Laboratorio di Politica Comparata e Filosofia Pubblica
con il sostegno della Compagnia di San Paolo

Working Paper-LPF n. 6 • 2011

© 2011 Giulia Bistagnino e LPF • Centro Einaudi

Giulia Bistagnino è dottoranda presso la Graduate School in Social and Political Sciences dell'Università degli Studi di Milano. Dopo essersi laureata in Filosofia, ha conseguito il Master of Letters in Philosophy presso la University of St. Andrews. Ha lavorato al CeSEP, il Centro Studi di Etica Pubblica dell'Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele, ed è stata junior visiting scholar presso la University of Oxford e la Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I suoi interessi di ricerca riguardano principalmente il problema del disaccordo e della giustificazione di principi morali e politici, le questioni normative connesse alla gestione dei conflitti e dei valori nell'ambito politico, i rapporti tra meta-etica e filosofia politica. Tra le sue pubblicazioni, *Let's Play Democracy! Developing multicultural education and the case study of young immigrants in Italian schools* («Notizie di Politeia», 2010, n. 99, pp. 44-61).

e-mail: giulia.bistagnino@unimi.it

Il **Laboratorio di Politica Comparata e Filosofia Pubblica** promuove attività di studio, documentazione e dibattito sulle principali trasformazioni della sfera politica nelle democrazie contemporanee, adottando sia una prospettiva descrittivo-esplicativa che una prospettiva normativa, e mirando in tal modo a creare collegamenti significativi fra le due.

L'attività del Laboratorio, sostenuta dalla Compagnia di San Paolo, si concentra in particolare sul rapporto fra le scelte di policy e le cornici valoriali all'interno delle quali tali decisioni sono, o dovrebbero essere, effettuate.

L'idea alla base di questo approccio è che sia non solo desiderabile ma istituzionalmente possibile muovere verso forme di politica «civile», informate a quel «pluralismo ragionevole» che Rawls ha indicato come tratto caratterizzante del liberalismo politico. Identificare i contorni di questa nuova «politica civile» è particolarmente urgente e importante per il sistema politico italiano, che appare ancora scarsamente preparato ad affrontare le sfide emergenti in molti settori di policy, dalla riforma del welfare al governo dell'immigrazione, dai criteri di selezione nella scuola e nella pubblica amministrazione alla definizione di regole per le questioni eticamente sensibili.

LPF • Centro Einaudi
Via Ponza 4 • 10121 Torino
telefono +39 011 5591611 • fax +39 011 5591691
e-mail: segreteria@centroeinaudi.it
www.centroeinaudi.it

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EPISTEMOLOGY OF DISAGREEMENT: MAPPING THE DEBATE	5
Introduction	5
1. The significance of disagreement	6
2. Some preliminary remarks	8
3. Epistemology of disagreement	12
3.1. Conciliatory views	13
3.2. Steadfast perspective	20
Conclusions	26
References	27

KEYWORDS

disagreement, peers, epistemology, evidence, defeaters

ABSTRACT

**EPISTEMOLOGY OF DISAGREEMENT:
MAPPING THE DEBATE**

What should you do when you find out that someone firmly disagrees with you on some claim P? How much should your confidence in your beliefs be shaken when you learn that others, perhaps so-called “epistemic peers” who seem to be as qualified as you are to assess some piece of evidence, hold beliefs contrary to yours? How should you react and update your beliefs (or degrees of) about a certain proposition when you discover that someone else—who is reliable as you are on such matter—disagrees with you? Generally, how your beliefs should be affected by knowing the opinions of others? The cluster of questions stated above refers to an issue which has not attracted much serious attention in mainstream philosophy until recently, namely the puzzle of “peer disagreement”. There are several different answers to these questions now in the literature, and the aim of this article is to characterize them and describe the different motivations that aim philosophers to defend contrasting responses to the problem of “peer disagreement”.

EPISTEMOLOGY OF DISAGREEMENT: MAPPING THE DEBATE

INTRODUCTION

This paper intends to tackle the problem of epistemological disagreement and show its implications not only for philosophical and scientific disputes, but also for those never-ending discussions concerning normative, political and moral matters. In this sense, the paper does not specifically address those scientific and moral disputes. Rather, it focuses precisely on the concept of disagreement and its relevance and significance at the epistemological level. The idea of the paper is to provide a framework of understanding to capture the meaning of the epistemological debate about disagreement and to characterize the main positions within it. Section one is mostly devoted to the idea and significance of disagreement itself and what is usually referred to as *peer disagreement*. In section two, problems of epistemic self-trust, namely one's reliability in assessing a belief, evidence, the sources of justification for beliefs-forming, and objectivity, as an epistemological *desideratum*, are briefly considered. Such discussions are meant to be preliminary, they clarify the terms upon which the debate about peer disagreement is structured. In section three, the current debate about the epistemology of disagreement is to be spelled out in details. The different positions within both *conciliatory* and *steadfast* perspectives are presented and critically discussed. The focus of the debate is entirely normative and the different responses to the question of how we *should* revise our beliefs given disagreement among peers are going to be clarified and elucidated. Finally, I will draw some conclusions about the relevance of the phenomenon of disagreement.

The main aim of the paper is to engage with the relevant literature in the field of epistemology about a particular and focused question. Indeed, the question does not concern the general issue of what you should believe regarding a certain proposition, given your overall evidence. Rather, the question is specific and concerns what epistemic reason is given to you by the disagreement. However, this does not mean that the goal of the paper is only descriptive in character. On the contrary, an argument about the importance and relevance of disagreement as a phenomenon to be dealt with is going to be put forward. In this sense, the intent of the paper is primarily, but not merely, to reconstruct the various and different positions within the debate, and also to point out the crucial problems and questions which characterize it.

1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PEER DISAGREEMENT

To understand the problem of reasonable epistemic disagreement, let us start with a simple question: is reasonable disagreement ever possible? Imagine two individuals, let us call them Fred and George, who share the same evidence and seem capable in the same way of understanding and drawing sound conclusions from that evidence. May it be possible for them to assess the shared evidence in different ways? Can one claim what the other denies, granted they both proceed reasonably enough in their reasoning?

A first, crucial point to understand the issue at hand is to clarify that epistemic disagreements concern beliefs and not action. In a practical situation it might be possible to hold, with justified reasons, that there is no preferable choice between an action P and an action not-P. It may well be the case that, when it comes to action, someone might not have sufficient reason to prefer one course of action over another. Contradictory choices may well be justified and equally favourable. For example, an agent stuck in a moral dilemma regards herself as being required to do two (or more) contradictory actions at the same time. She can perform those very actions, but she cannot do them at the same time, and thus it is not possible for her to perform all of the actions she is morally obliged to. For these reasons, an agent facing a moral dilemma is committed to moral failure for, no matter what she does, she always does something wrong. However, regardless her blameworthiness, both actions are justified and hence she is theoretically justified to aim towards both those contradictory practical outcomes.¹

On the contrary, when it comes to epistemic disagreement, it is unreasonable to believe a proposition and its negation to be both equally justified. There is no freedom to believe both claims because contradiction is irrational. I cannot believe I am in Oxford and also that I am not in Oxford at the same time. In an epistemic sense, to proceed reasonably, an individual cannot believe a proposition P to be true and also the opposite claim not-P. Thus, if Fred believes that P whereas George believes that not-P, and they are both reasonable, they both need a balance of reason favouring their respective, opposite claims. So, the question is whether two individuals, exposed to the same evidence, can still disagree and hold competing, opposite claim.

On a first reasoning, it seems this cannot be the case, that if they share all their evidence, than they cannot be pulled towards different directions because the evidence itself cannot be pointing to different directions. Either Fred or George is to be mistaken, one of them must not be holding a substantial positive reason for his claim. This seems to imply that, given that Fred and George are both rational, the

¹ A case of moral dilemma may arise when telling the truth (which is required as a moral principle) involves moral wrongdoing by breaking a promise to someone else to remain silent. Another case might be returning a weapon one has borrowed which may predictably lead to serious injuries to some innocent persons.

minute they discuss their claims and explain how they draw such conclusions from the common evidence, the one not holding the positive reason will not only recognize the other to be right, but also consider his claim as true. However, it might be the case that Fred and George discuss their evidence, and yet they are not persuaded of the truth of the other's claim. To make some examples, consider (1) the extent to which Japan's determinacy to keep fighting after the dropping of the bomb to Hiroshima played a role in Harry Truman's decision to drop the second bomb to Nagasaki; (2) the moral admissibility of employing a weapon such as that of the atomic bomb in any kind of military action; (3) what factors and what amount of scientific evidence should be used to base a particular public policy in a given context. People hold very different beliefs about each of the three issues stated above and they seem to disagree reasonably about them, in a similar way as Fred and George did about P.

Moreover, what is interesting about the three examples mentioned above is that they are not only harshly debated and disputed among normal educated and intelligent persons. They are also the focus of disagreement among those persons considered experts in the particular subject-matters, among those individuals who are justifiably considered most likely to understand the issue correctly and to form sound beliefs about it. The problem of reasonable disagreement arises precisely when two persons, who have been exposed to the same evidence and are to be considered reliable and accountable, disagree about the truth of a certain proposition or, more generally, a theory. Thus, a reasonable disagreement occurs when intelligent people with access to the relevant available information come to incompatible conclusions.

As Richard Feldman describes them, it is possible to outline two different stages reasonable disagreements are structured in (Feldman 2006). One stage is called "isolation" and it refers to the moment in which Fred and George have examined similar bodies of evidence and, after careful and deep analysis, Fred comes to believe that P, while George comes to believe that not-P.

The other stage is called "full-disclosure" and it refers to the moment Fred and George have discussed the issue they formed incompatible beliefs about in deep details and have confronted each other's claim. By the time "full disclosure" is reached, both Fred and George have come to know the other's reasons and arguments.

Given the two-stage description of a reasonable disagreement, few sets of questions can be outlined. The first one concerns the reasonable attitudes Fred and George can have in isolation. Basically, the question here is about the very possibility of arriving at different conclusions from the same body of evidence. This is a question arising from the perspective of disagreement itself and it is descriptive in character: is it possible for a disagreement to arise among peers? Is it possible to have a genuine disagreement? The second set of questions concerns disagreement

in full disclosure and is cast upon the reasonable attitudes Fred and George may have the minute they are forced to relate to the fact that the other takes the same evidence to support an opposite conclusion. In this case, the point of view is within the individual perspective and refers to whether it is reasonable in a disagreement to maintain one's belief. Can both Fred and George maintain their respective beliefs after they discover those to be incompatible? This concern starts from their own points of view and is related to their own beliefs and reasonableness. The third set of questions is directly related to the second and concerns whether Fred and George can grant credibility to both their own and the other's beliefs. Suppose that Fred and George can actually maintain their belief to be reasonable despite their disagreement, can they also think the other's belief to be as such? This last question is set on the possibility of a "mutually recognized reasonable disagreement" (Feldman 2006).

It is important to note that, if the first set of questions aims simply at providing a picture of the conditions which make a dispute into a reasonable disagreement, the second and third sets of questions are normative in character. Indeed, they are not questions about how things are, but, on the contrary, investigate what peers *should* do when find themselves stuck in a disagreement, how they should react to their different interpretation of the same evidence. The debate of peer disagreement is a normative debate, it concerns how peers should react to disagreement and how they should change their beliefs accordingly. To put it with Kelly, "the question at issue, then, is whether known disagreement with those who are one's epistemic peers [...] must inevitably undermining the rationality of maintaining one's own view." (Kelly 2005, 175). The point here is whether known disagreement with those who are known to be epistemic peers should undermine the rationality of one's belief.

It is important to note that the problem is not with disagreement in general. It might well be the case that I am disagreeing with someone, but I am incompetent on the issue at dispute, I am actually mistaken, and for these reasons my reaction to the evidence is flawed. In this case, disagreement is not even an issue for the real problem is constituted by my mistaken assessment of the evidence. However, not all disagreements need to be of this sort and since examples of reasonable disagreement are available, the real question is whether disagreement with a known epistemic peer rationally requires one to lower the level of confidence in her relevant belief.

2. SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Before engaging directly with the different responses to the questions of confidence in the case of disagreement, some preliminary remarks are necessary. Indeed, it is still unclear what it takes for two individuals, Fred and George, to be

epistemic peers. Following Lackey (2008), suppose Fred and George hold different beliefs with respect to the question whether it is the case that P. They are epistemic peers in an idealized sense (about the question of whether P is the case) if the following conditions are met:

- 1) **evidential equality:** Fred and George are equally familiar with the evidence and arguments that bear on the question whether P is the case.
- 2) **cognitive equality:** Fred and George are equally epistemic virtuous in their assessment of the evidence and arguments that bear on the question whether P is the case.
- 3) **situation of full disclosure:** Fred and George have knowingly share with one another all of their evidence and arguments relative to the question whether P is the case given their prior reciprocal conviction of peerhood.

Conditions of evidential and cognitive equalities qualify for peerhood among individuals whereas condition 3, namely the situation of full disclosure, is required for them to be actually engaged in a disagreement. In this sense, Fred and George are epistemic peers when: they take themselves and the other to have the same, relevant epistemic virtues; they think to be both reliable with regard to the subject under discussion in the sense that they think to be equals with respect to their familiarity to the evidence and arguments which bear on the question at stake; prior to discussing the topic upon which they disagree, one's credence that the other will be right equals the credence that he himself will be right. It is important to note that what the mentioned epistemic virtues actually consist of is not relevant. Two individuals are peers if they are as likely to get things right. Whether this is because they are acute, intelligent, rational, fair minded, imaginative, and so on is not relevant here. What is relevant is that they take each other to be as likely to get things right.

As Kelly notes, "it is a familiar fact that, outside of a purely mathematical context the standards which must be met in order for two things to count as equal along some dimensions are highly context-sensitive." (Kelly 2005, 175, fn 11). Similarly, epistemic peers are to be considered epistemic equals with regard to a certain issue or subject matter. However, whether two individuals actually count as epistemic peers depends on how liberal the standards for peerhood are in a given context. Indeed, the boundaries of expertise and, in turn, those of peerhood, are set by the debate itself. This implies that contextual standards are those which can actually make a difference into a genuine difference. To make an example, differences in opinions and standards employed in debates about a social policy are different from those concerning a particular theory of molecular biology. Of course, if standards of peerhood are too demanding, it might be that two individuals can never qualify as peers. Perhaps, there is always a sort of difference in intelligence, thoughtfulness, familiarity to the relevant issues which impede individuals to qualify as peers. However, it seems that setting standards too high is counterproductive to discussions and improvement. Moreover, setting standards of intelligence and

thoughtfulness seems, given the controversial nature of what it means for a person to be intelligent and thoughtful, to require sufficiently liberal standards to allow individuals to qualify as equals along the relevant questions.

There is a line of thought which defends the claim that in “real-life disagreements” the problem is precisely that of the existence of actual peer disagreements. In short, the conditions of peerhood for disagreement simply do not apply to real situations and, thus, its epistemic significance is of no importance or relevance to the status of current cherished beliefs (King 2011). However, even if it was the case that peer disagreements are not those we face in the real world at the moment, it might be possible that they will constitute a reality in the future. Moreover, the mere fact of non actuality does not imply in itself the irrelevance of the issue and indifference about questions concerning how to relate to one’s beliefs in a broad sense. Even if there are no actual peer disagreements, its logical possibility requires reflection.

With respect to peers, on being one or being believed to be one, three distinctions are to be made to prevent ambiguities from rising. First, there are disagreements with those who actually *are* peers. Second, there are disagreements with those who are *taken to be* peers. Third, there are disagreements with those who are *justifiably taken to be* peers (Frances 2010). The kind of circumstances which represent the focus of the debate are of the third kind. Although what is a justification for taking one as a peer is not a much debated point within the discussion, some questions about justification of trust and the extent of such trust have been outlined in addressing questions of reliability (Foley 2001, Enoch 2010). A significant and important source of justification for one’s reliability on some topic is her “track record”, that is how often she understood things right and reasoned rationally within her perspective. It is important to stress that getting things right is not the same as agreeing on something. In this sense, one’s track record is not based on how often one agreed on issues of a given subject matter with those considered reliable. Rather, a track record is concerned with shared understanding and proof of competence gained in one’s scientific, philosophical, and social communities. To accord epistemic trust to someone whose reasoning is unknown or incomprehensible seems indeed problematic (Kelly 2005).

This, of course, in turn implies at least a necessary moderate self-trust in understanding a matter in the right manner. To have knowledge in general, including knowledge acquired through others’ opinions and through our own past opinions, we need to be able to trust ourselves. In this sense, self-trust is a precondition for knowledge (Foley 2005). Indispensable trust in cognitive capacities, combined with the similarity between one’s capacities and the capacities of others, ground reasons to take disagreement as an opportunity for revision. However, such revision may be denied by information that the other part at disagreement has a history of errors, lacks important evidence, is poorly trained, or cognitively less effective (Foley 2001). In general, trust is an attitude individuals may hold towards

people who hopefully will be trustworthy. Trustworthiness is a property, not an attitude, and, epistemologically speaking, trust bears on the issue of when trust is warranted, justified (Baker 1987, Webb 1992). In the case of trusting someone else, contemporary philosophers provide a list of common “justifiers” for trust, namely “facts or states of affairs that determine the justification status of [trust]” (Goldman 1999, 274) which are to be taken into account to make a rational choice when to decide to trust. Such factors include: the social role of the trustee; the domain in which the trust occurs; an “agent-specific” factor that concerns how good a truster the agent tends to be (Jones 1996).

Another point in need of clarification for the discussion of epistemic disagreement is that concerning the concept of evidence. From a philosophical point of view, what is to count as evidence is crucial for both epistemology and philosophy of science. Russell and Quine tended to think of evidence as sense data, mental items of one’s present consciousness, basically a stimulation of one’s sensory receptors. On contemporary accounts, evidence is usually intended as the totality of propositions that one knows (Williamson 2000), or as represented by the thoughts that one is having at a given time (Conee and Feldman 2004). However, the crucial point about evidence does not lie in the psychological status of our knowledge. Rather, what is really important, from an epistemological point of view, is that the concept of evidence is inseparable from that of justification. Evidence simply implies justification. Evidence, whatever that might be, is the kind of thing which can make a difference to what one is justified in believing, or what it is reasonable for one to believe. In this sense, evidence stands for having a reason to believe something as true. Evidence is what confers justification to a proposition or a theory. Of course, since some evidence may be defeated by some further evidence (Pollock 1986), what is relevant is how well one’s total evidence supports a proposition or a theory. In this sense, evidence is sensitive not only to one interpretation of certain facts, but also on the possible accounts which can explain those very facts. Indeed, the confidence which grants one justification to believe a certain hypothesis depends not only on the relevant data she has been exposed to, but also on the space of alternatives which she is aware of. How strongly a given collection of data supports a hypothesis is not fully determined simply by matching the data with the hypothesis. Rather, an important role in justification is provided by comparisons with competing theories. In this sense, justification depends also upon whether there are other plausible competing hypothesis available.

Given such an account of evidence, the question of epistemic disagreement becomes crucial. If the evidence one holds to justify a belief is to be compared with other beliefs, then the issue of how to react when someone is disagreeing with others (providing a different belief consistent with the relevant evidence and information available) is fundamental. This is particularly important considering the “principle of charity” (Davidson 1984) which constitutes a norm for belief attribution. Given that it is characteristic of rational thinkers to respect their evi-

dence, in attributing belief to another person, one should, all else being equal, attribute to that person the belief that P just in case it would be reasonable for her to believe that P considering her total evidence. In this sense, one is justified in drawing an inference about what another believes on the basis of one's knowledge and judgement of the other's epistemic situation. This is why epistemic disagreement is so puzzling: if I know your epistemic situation and regard it as equal to mine, I should ascribe to you the same belief that I hold. However, in discussing with you I find out that you have come to understand a different, incompatible conclusion. So, should I retain the confidence in my belief? Should I retain confidence in your capacity to understand, to be reasonable and rational?

A final preliminary remark is to be devoted to objectivity. It is natural to suppose that the concept of evidence is essentially linked with the cognitive *desideratum* of achieving objectivity for propositions and theories. In this sense, individuals are to be guided by objectivity to the extent that they follow evidence in deciding what is the case and what ought to be done, as opposed to ideological dogma, prejudices, or sources of authority different from justified reasons. Given this line of reasoning, it seems natural to suppose that individuals' views will tend to converge over time: as shared evidence increases, consensus is to become overriding with respect to formerly disputed questions. On a logical-positivist account, objective inquiry is driven by evidence which permits to achieve inter subjective agreement among different inquirers (Feigl 1953). So, on this traditional picture, a central feature of evidence is to function as a sort of neutral arbiter among rival theories and proponents of those very theories. The underline thought of this view is the idea that whatever disagreements might exist at the level of the theory, if those who disagree are objective, the persistence of disagreement is going to be only temporary. At some point, some evidence will be brought about to settle the disagreement and resolve the dispute in some way or the other. But is resolution of disagreement always a matter of further evidence to be discovered? Or is it more complicated than this? Is there a difference in subject matters on the basis of which evidence and disagreement should be conceived differently? When defending a belief with justified reasons and we find ourselves reasonably disagreeing about a certain matter, shall we just bracket that dispute? Or is it reasonable to hold on our hypothesis? What should we do when we disagree?

3. THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF DISAGREEMENT

As seen in the previous paragraph, the core question which lies under the fact of peer disagreement is: how should my belief (about not only my hypothesis, but also the reliability of my opponents) be effected by the knowledge that others hold contrary beliefs? Most of the debate in epistemology tackling this issue avoids complicated real-world considerations, such as those of the numbers of people holding different views and the extent to which their views are reached inde-

pendently. Basically, philosophy avoids those problems disagreements in real life are actually characterized by. On the contrary, the discussion has been focusing on simplified two-persons cases with the idea that studying an artificial, simple interaction might provide insights which could be extended to more difficult and complicated cases.

The different positions in the debate on epistemic disagreement are divided in two main groups. The division is sensible to the classical tension in philosophy between scepticism and dogmatism. On one end of the spectrum, there are those positions called *conciliatory* (Christiansen 2007 and 2009, Elga 2007) or *conformist* (Lackey 2008). Roughly put, conciliatory positions on disagreement tend to favour a more sceptical point of view on belief and argue for the idea that disagreement often requires one to, at least, diminish confidence in her belief. Conciliatory positions are in some sense concessive and risks to concede too much to disagreement in embracing an excessive degree of scepticism. On the other end of the spectrum, there are those positions which are referred to as *steadfast* (Christiansen 2009), *non-conformist* (Lackey 2008) and embrace a sort of *live-and-let-live* attitude (Elga 2007, Christiansen 2007). Steadfast views, generally speaking, hold that one can continue to rationally believe the truth of some proposition despite knowing that some epistemic peers explicitly believes the opposite. In short, on this account, there is no reason springing from the disagreement apt to change one's belief. It is clear that steadfast positions risk to present a circular argument by a sort of dogmatic refusal to take epistemic peers seriously. This risk seems due to a "stubborn attitude" (Feldman 2006) in "sticking to one's guns" (Frances 2011).

In what follows, different versions of conciliatory and steadfast positions are considered and evaluated. For the sake of the discussion, it is important to stress that the problem of peer disagreement is placed within the broader issue of epistemic imperfection. That of peer disagreement is a problem concerned with the requirements posed by human fallibility and the necessity to take it into account. Indeed, both conciliators and steadfast supporters hold that if it was possible for individuals to access some special point of view, a sort of god's eye on evidence, by which it would be possible to infallibly know not only what the evidence supports, but also to infallibly know to be infallible, disagreement would be irrelevant, in an epistemic sense. (Christiansen 2007, Kelly 2010).

3.1. *Conciliatory views*

The "equal weight view" on disagreement relies on the natural idea that the persistence of disagreement among peers should undermine their confidence in their views. The intuition at play in this argument is famously formulated by Sidgwick with respect to moral disagreement:

the denial by another of a proposition that I have affirmed has a tendency to impair my confidence in its validity [...] and it will be easily seen that the absence of such disagreement must remain an indispensable negative condition of the certainty of our

beliefs. [...] reflective comparison between the two judgements necessarily reduces me [...] to a state of neutrality (Sidgwick 1981, 342).

Supporters of the “equal weight view” begin with a sceptical commitment concerning human epistemic possibility. The condition which characterizes human capacity to construct sound and true beliefs and theories is that of epistemic imperfection. Not only the evidence upon which beliefs are based is limited, but also individuals’ capacity to respond to evidence is not always perfect. Thus, imperfect responses and incomplete evidence require rational individuals to take into account the condition they are in. In this scenario, disagreement is seen as an opportunity for self-improvement and better understanding by confronting one’s belief with those of others who are equally competent, intelligent, and so on. Given such opportunity, proponents of the “equal weight view” argue that in the face of disagreement one should “change [one’s] degree of confidence significantly.” (Christiansen 2007, 189). To put it in the form of a principle:

Upon finding out that an advisor disagrees, your probability that you’re 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. (Elga 2007, 490)

It is important to point out that proponents of the “equal weight view” usually assume the “uniqueness thesis” (Feldman 2007) which argues that, for any given state of evidence, there is a unique degree of belief warranted. The uniqueness thesis, *contra* epistemic permissiveness (White 2005), represents the claim that, according to a given evidence, there is a unique degree of belief that is maximally rational.

The line of argument for the “equal weight view” is very simple and revolves around the following question: in a disagreement, I think that my peer has misjudged the evidence in proposing a conflicting view because I know I have been accurate and I am able to understand all the relevant matters on the topic at dispute. But then, why should this difference in beliefs provide evidence that my peer is the only one likely to be mistaken? If I can be mistaken in the same way, given that I know the other to be very accurate and to understand all the relevant matters as I do, may it be the case that I am the mistaken one? The core of the “equal weight view” is a consideration of symmetry between peers. In other words, the fact that my belief is mine does not constitute *per se a reason to retain my belief, that would simply be unreasonable*. Peers and their beliefs are to be juxtaposed and considered symmetrically.

It is crucial to understand that this commitment to symmetry does not deny the importance of the so-called “first person standpoint”. On the contrary, “equal weight view” defenders hold the first person standpoint to secure and support symmetry. It is precisely from the first person standpoint that I consider the possibility of being mistaken throughout the process of considering a specific topic.

Such possibility is considered in advance, before finding oneself stuck in a disagreement. The idea is to hold strongly on the distinction between *thinking to be right* and actually *being right*. Thinking I am right with justified reasons cannot license me to think that some other is more likely to be mistaken. “The explanation in terms of my friend’s mistake is no more reasonable than the explanation in terms of my mistake.” (Christensen 2007, 198).

In this sense, the “equal weight view” supports two normative principles with respect to disagreement. First, it defends a principle of impartiality which claims that explanations of disagreement should be assessed in a way independent from the reasoning which provides a peer justification for holding her disputed belief. This first principle is understood as valid in force of the fact that being highly confident on some belief, formed by a highly reliable form of reasoning, turns into the thought that an equally informed person, who is reliable in her thinking in a similar manner, has the same probability to get things right. The second principle prescribes that, as long as two peers have reasons to think that the explanation of disagreement in terms of one’s fault is as good as that of the other’s fault, each should move her belief, to a certain degree, towards that of the other. The idea is that the probability of the two of being mistaken is exactly the same, then “splitting the difference” among the different beliefs proposed is required (Elga 2007).

To understand how the two principles work and their motivation, it is worth mentioning the most well-known thought example put forward in the literature.

Suppose that five of us go to dinner. It’s time to pay the check, so the question we’re interested in is how much we each owe. We can all see the bill totally clearly, we all agree to give a 20 percent tip, and we further agree to split the whole cost evenly, not worrying over who asked for imported water, or skipped desert, or drank more of the wine. I do the maths in my head and become highly confident that our shares are \$43 each. Meanwhile, my friend does the maths in her head and becomes highly confident that our shares are \$45 each. How should I react, upon learning of her belief? [...] If we set up the case in this way it seems quite clear that I should lower my confidence that my share is \$43. In fact, I think (though this is perhaps less obvious) that I should now accord these two hypothesis roughly equal credence. (Christensen 2007, 193)

The idea, as Enoch critically puts it, is that, according to the “equal weight view”, peers are analogous to thermometers, or more provocatively, to truthometers: they are to be considered mechanisms retaining a certain probability of issuing a true understanding about a certain topic (Enoch 2010). Holding on an impartial account, proponents of the “equal weight view” see disagreement from a further perspective, not that within the disagreement, but that of an impartial spectator assigning similar weight to different views. From the first person perspective, peers understand their respective epistemic imperfection. By awareness of human epistemic imperfection, the impartial perspective to consider disagreement is grounded. “The first-person perspective is not the dogmatic perspective: it does not entail denying or ignoring the possibility that I have made a cognitive

error. [...] I am perfectly capable of taking an impartial attitude toward some of my beliefs.” (Christensen 2007, 204).

To sum up, assuming an imperfect epistemic capacity in accordance with the “uniqueness thesis”, the “equal weight view” holds that participants in a peer disagreement on each side have good reason to think they are as likely as those on the other side to have gone wrong, thus they should become less confident in their beliefs. It might seem that a natural outcome of the “equal weight view” is the commitment to split the difference. Indeed, splitting the difference might seem a natural way of putting the theory of giving peers’ beliefs the same weight into practice. However, it is important to note that there is no mandate for uniform and univocal difference splitting among proponents of the “equal weight view” (Christensen 2009). Let us put aside real, technical difficulties generated by the operation of splitting the difference (Jehle and Fitelson 2009) and, in particular, problems concerned with the aggregation of trust and its probability distribution (Shogenji 2007). The different conciliatory accounts are distinguished precisely by their own different takes on how to split the difference in case of disagreement.

According to strong conciliatory views, because of disagreement one becomes justified in suspending judgement with regard to what one’s first evidence supports. When one finds out that an epistemic peer disagrees about a given issue, this fact defeats whatever support she had for holding on to what she believed before full disclosure. On this perspective, it seems that the attitude to be assumed in a disagreement is more agnostic rather than neutral. The discovery of disagreement provides evidence not to lower degrees of confidence in belief, but to resign from endorsing a belief altogether. As Feldman puts it, “the better alternative is suspending judgement. The idea that it is reasonable to maintain a belief until better evidence for some rival comes along is ludicrous.” (Feldman 2006, 228).

One of the consequences of this perspective concerns one’s reasoning before the disagreement for it seems that, if suspending judgement is required, disagreement becomes a defeater not only for the single beliefs, but also for the first reasoning on the evidence both peers have done in isolation (Feldman 2007, Sosa 2010). In this sense, disagreement challenges one’s view in providing a higher-order evidence which shows the complex incompatibility of all the single evidences which support each peer’s belief. Given the power of disagreement, the first evidence is no longer available to rational individuals as it was before.

The problem with such a radical endorsement of the “equal weight view” is its proximity to scepticism. The need to reduce confidence to the point of suspending judgement means moving towards a zone where holding a belief is less and less justified. Radical approaches of conciliatory views usually are based on concerns similar to those linked with religious disagreement which makes the link to agnosticism even more explicit. Feldman, for example, proudly presents his position as a “kind of contingent real-world scepticism.” (Feldman 2006, 217). He equates

disagreement in religion to those in the scientific field, and to discussions about public policies, but he never provides an argument for such equation. Such move makes the idea of suspending judgement on matters of sciences, politics, and philosophy at least problematic. Indeed, it seems implausible that rationality requires such “spinlessness” (Elga 2007), that is to simply kiss goodbye convictions on controversial political, philosophical, or scientific matters (Pettit 2005, Van Inwagen 1996).

Another perspective within the conciliatory group but in direct opposition with suspending judgement is presented by Elga. It is a position placed within a Bayesian framework and it holds that if one is an epistemic peer of another, it must be the case that one’s prior credence in the other being right, conditional on a neutral disagreement (a matter upon which there are no factors which may make one think she is better equipped than the other to get things right) is the exact half. “Suppose that [...] you think that you and your friend are equally likely to evaluate it correctly. When you find out that your friend disagrees with [you], how likely should you think it that you are correct? The ‘equal weight view’ says: 50%.” (Elga 2007, 488).

Given this general principle, Elga’s strategy is, in case of disagreement, to require peers to adjust credence and confidence in their belief in a way such as for each to meet the other halfway. However, since this egalitarian 50% take on disagreement is based on the very notion of peerhood, Elga recognizes a problem for his position he identifies with the label of “spinelessness”—the problem of slipping into scepticism and reducing individuals to silence. Indeed, it is not at all clear why the radical view defended by Feldman requiring suspension of judgement is any different from Elga’s. The problem lies in the fact that, according to Elga, there are different kinds of disagreement: on one hand, there are those “clean, pure examples of disagreement” (Elga 2007, 492) in which the “equal weight view” seems to apply without a doubt because when disagreement is cast on, for instance, an arithmetic problem there are tools available to test the level of peerhood among those at dispute. Being good at arithmetic is something which can be shown in some sense, it can be tracked uncontroversially. On the other hand, there are “messy examples of real-world disagreements about hard cases” (Elga 2007, 492) in which the “equal weight view” seems to lead to absurdity. To make an example, although one is known to be thoughtful, well-informed, intellectually honest, and so on, if she takes a stance on some political claim, it seems that acknowledging her as a peer is more problematic and less straightforward than in the arithmetic case. In this sense, Elga spots the problem in the fact that messy, real-world cases lack shared standard for peerhood. “The difference is that in the clean cases one is in a position to count one’s associates as peers *based on reasoning that is independent of the disputed issue*. But in the messy real-world cases, one is rarely in the position to do so.” (Elga 2007, 492). Since the “equal weight view” is intrinsically tied up with a strong notion of peerhood, it needs, according to Elga, to restrain its claim only to those cases in which objective standards to test peerhood are available. However,

this move seems problematic. It saves the possibility to affirm one's views on controversial political, moral, and philosophical matters, but at the expenses of symmetry, namely at the cost of denying the possibility of setting standard of peerhood within such context. It seems to propose a solution for disagreement which works only with a limited range of cases and subject matters, turning all the remaining issues into discussion without relevant and useful methods of assessment.

A third, moderate, and more sophisticated option within conciliatory views on disagreement is the one presented by Christensen. Differently from Elga and Feldman, Christensen is concerned with the effects of peer disagreement on one's confidence in belief. Without proposing an all-or-nothing position, rejecting a mode of reasoning which requires either to always refrain from endorsing a view or to reduce cases of peer disagreement only to those whose standards of reliability are shared, Christensen's move rests on the grey zone of degrees. The idea is that disagreement should not always change one's belief in a certain proposition or theory. Rather, what should change is the *degree* of confidence one has toward both her own and her opponent's views (Christensen 2007). In this sense, belief revision is not a unified, monolithic mode of addressing disagreement. On the contrary, Christensen argues that changing degree of confidence is subjected to context, namely on circumstances and subject matters of disagreement. This can be seen by his treatment of different thought examples: the restaurant case [see, above] is treated differently from the "Extreme Restaurant Case", which is a slightly modified version of the former. There, in calculating the restaurant bill, one's peer becomes confident that each share of the check is \$450 which is simply implausible since \$450 is a bit over the whole tub. In this situation, according to Christensen, even though there is no independent argument to deny peerhood to another who is clearly mistaken, one needs not to lower any degree of confidence in her own belief in virtue of some common-sense and ordinary knowledge (Christensen 2007, 199-201). Although working at the level of degrees of confidence and taking into account contextual conditions seems promising, Christensen's position remains problematic for those contextual standards which can provide a clear tool to assess one's degree of confidence are never specified.

Despite the attractiveness of a position such as the "equal weight view" which rests on an egalitarian commitment in thinking disagreement in terms of symmetry, and on a strong conception of human fallibility, there are two important critiques any conciliatory view needs to address. The first critique has been developed by Kelly and it concerns evidence in relation to the idea of splitting the difference (Kelly 2010). His argument proceeds as follow, considering the example of Right and Wrong: Right and Wrong are mutually acknowledged peers considering whether P. At t_0 , Right forms 0,2 credence in P, and Wrong forms a 0,8 credence in P. The evidence available to both of them actually supports a 0,2 credence in P. Right and Wrong then compare notes and realize they disagree. Given this scenario, it seems implausible to split the difference for each will end up at t_1 with

credence 0,5 for, before their epistemic compromise, Right and Wrong were in strongly asymmetrical positions. The problem individuated by Kelly is that it is counterintuitive to hold that both Right and Wrong should make equally extensive revision given their different starting point. The problem is the role played by evidence from isolation to full-disclosure: “with respect to playing a role in determining what is reasonable for [them] to believe at t_1 , [the original evidence] gets completely swamped by purely psychological facts about what [they] believe.” (Kelly 2010, 125).

A second related, but different critique to the “equal weight view” concerns the impact of numbers in the comparison of views. Holding an egalitarian position means taking into account all the possible views peers are to propose and, in turn, it seems reasonable to think that the bigger the number of peers against one’s view, the more irrational it would be for her not to change confidence in belief. If one (reflective, intelligent, etc.) person believes that P and one of her peers believes non-P, she has a reason, in virtue of the “equal weight view”, to change her confidence. But if twenty of her peers believe non-P, it seems not only that she has a reason, but that it would also be irrational for her not to change her confidence. However, since the “equal weight view” is committed to epistemic fallibility, what happens if she is the one actually being right and the twenty peers mistaken? It seems at least controversial to hold that when a considerable number of peers disagrees with one, the latter should change her attitude regardless of what the correct answer is, as Christiansen argues (Christensen 2007, 207). Indeed, it seems counterintuitive to regard a person holding a true belief, despite others’ opinions, as irrational. The trouble of giving peers too much of reliability and shrinking the work of evidence in disagreement is to end up with a position which could sustain that propositions and theories to believe are those most defended in debates among peers. In this sense, the “equal weight view” seems to have the undesirable result of grounding the possibility of assessing theories by surveying expert peers on a particular subject matter.

The third critique is a theoretical one and it is of a kind which affects all sceptical positions. Let us imagine some people defending the “equal weight view” and some other people, on the contrary, rejecting the “equal weight view”, as it happens in the philosophical debate. Let us further imagine all these individuals to be smart, sharp, and serious epistemologists, peers with regard to the debate on the epistemology of disagreement. In this scenario, the “equal weight view” would recommend its supporters to suspend judgement, or lower the degree of confidence about the “equal weight view” itself. This does not mean exactly that the “equal weight view” is self-defeating because it does not entail its own negation. Rather, its agnostic character makes it simply impossible to be believed justifiably. And this is a quite worrying result (Kelly 2005, Enoch 2010, Elga 2010). At best, the “equal weight view” is self-undermining, which is a problem that cannot be cured by advocating some form of humility in philosophy (Christiansen 2009).

3.2. *Steadfast perspectives*

In opposition to conciliatory views of disagreement, there are those positions usually referred to as “steadfast” (Christiansen 2007 and 2009). To put it roughly, a steadfast perspective on peer disagreement argues that one may maintain her confidence in the face of others who believe otherwise. Steadfast positions firmly reject scepticism and hold that the fact of peer disagreement does not undermine one’s rationality of maintaining a belief. In this sense, steadfast positions assign a priority to the first person standpoint in defending the idea that, in forming and revising a belief, the one who owns such belief has a unique and ineliminable role. There is an inescapable inner perspective within disagreement which makes it impossible to totally eliminate one’s own point of view, to bracket its importance (Foley 2001, Kelly 2006).

Of course, this does not mean that disagreement is neither puzzling, nor problematic. Rather, it does not pose a crucial, or definitive threat to one’s rationality in holding on a certain reasonable belief. It might seem that steadfast positions need to assume a dogmatic “I don’t care” kind of view, but this would be misleading. Since it is highly implausible to hold that one should remain as confident in her view every time she is confronted with another opposite opinion, if steadfast positions would merely endorse such claim they would be simply flawed and unjustified. On the contrary, steadfast positions need not to be implausible for they rely on a complex idea of asymmetry which is to be found through the process of disagreement.

One interesting way of looking at the steadfast perspective is to highlight its commitment to the value of epistemic diversity. Drawing from a permissive conception of rationality (Rosen 2001), it seems plausible to think that, to a given evidence, there may be more than one reasonable epistemic response. It is plausible to affirm that two intelligent, serious, thoughtful individuals may share the relevant elements of a given evidence faultlessly, and yet reach different conclusions.² From this, it may flow a sort of “live and let live attitude” (Christensen 2007) seeking for open-mindedness among peers in accepting the possibility of different kinds of justified reasoning. In this sense, endorsing a live and let live attitude entails appreciation of epistemic diversity and, thus, the possibility to retain a belief with respect to such diversity. This position is called the “extra weight view”³ (Feldman 2006). The idea is that when one finds out that her epistemic peers have arrived at a contrary conclusion, the “extra weight view” says that she should be pulled “a little bit towards” in the peers’ direction, but she is nevertheless rational to keep believing to be more likely to have got it right than her peers. Wegdwood,

² Steadfast positions need not to be committed to epistemic permissiveness and reject the “uniqueness thesis”. Although they can endorse the idea that for any given state of evidence there is a unique degree of belief that it warrants, steadfast perspectives are considered closer to epistemic diversity than conciliatory views, which are inconsistent with it (Kelly 2010). However, discussions of peer disagreement in general do not depend on theories of epistemic permissiveness (Christiansen 2007, 190-192; Enoch 2010, 958).

³ Feldman describes, but does not endorse the “extra weight view”.

for example, argues for “egocentric epistemic bias” to be legitimate. According to such view, there is a fundamental asymmetry between one’s own intuitions and those of other people. For this reason, it is rational to trust one’s own intuition *a priori*, whereas it is only rational for one to trust other people’s intuitions if one has some independent reason, prior to the disagreement, to regard them as reliable. The idea is that one’s own perspective on the world is privileged because of the intrinsic nature of intuition. Therefore, it is perfectly rational sometimes to be impressed by other people’s intuitions, which do constitute an important source of evidence. However, in general, when other people’s intuitions are not convincing, regardless their soundness and logical construction, it is rational to stick to one’s intuitions in force of their intimate relation with the thinker, between thoughts and their owner. In short,

it is rational to have a primitive trust in one’s own intuitions, but not in the intuitions of others. [...] widespread disagreement [...] may not require us to suspend judgement [...] it may allow each of us to continue having more confidence in the propositions that we believe. (Wedgwood 2007, 263)

It seems that a commitment to legitimate egocentric epistemic bias would turn into a sort of dogmatism. Since peers can be at disagreement faultlessly, granted they reasoned correctly from the evidence, each one has reason to just affirm her own view. It is important to note that, when advocating for egocentric epistemic bias, what Wedgwood has in mind are those controversial moral disagreements concerning the rightness and wrongness of certain practices which not only are very difficult to assess, but also engage individuals deeply. They are disagreements lacking a clear-cut method of resolution and, at the same time, concern those issues which are the focus for discussion among rational individuals.

Furthermore, it is important also to note that this position, which could be simply called the “extra weight view” (Elga 2007, Enoch 2010), faces some difficulties concerning the relation between one’s own assessment of the evidence and the overall view. It seems that, if disagreement is never to change one’s conclusion, when supported by reasonable justification, one’s own first reasoning of the evidence is always to be regarded more important and more justified than the outcome of the overall discussion among peers. This may lead to claim a sort of irrelevance of disagreement. If the real important reasoning is the first one, carried out in isolation, then disagreement may count merely as a sort of happening phenomenon to be considered, but not explained. Moreover, if the evidence gained after full disclosure is to count less than the first reasoning, it might be very well justified for a person to stick to her guns to a great degree, even if a handful of peers disagree with her. But this is controversial. Given epistemic fallibility, if not just one, but many others are to disagree with me, this fact should have an impact on my confidence in holding on to my consideration.

It is clear that proponents of the “equal weight view” revolves mainly around the concept of peerhood and focus on how peers are fallible, coping with a non-ideal

capacity to know, whereas steadfast views are, on the contrary, tied more closely to a substantive idea of evidence. A steadfast position different from the “extra weight view” is the “right reason view”, which links the problem of changing the degree of confidence in one’s belief directly with one’s initial evaluation of the evidence. The fact that, after carefully considering some evidence and having come to a reasonable conclusion, one is confronted with others’ different reasoning is important for it shows the essential role played by evidence.

Let us imagine that a shared piece of evidence, *in fact*, strongly supports a hypothesis which is correctly understood by one. If another, who is her peer, on the other hand, misjudges and wrongly believes an opposite hypothesis producing a disagreement, then the “right reason view” holds that is perfectly reasonable for the one who evaluated correctly the shared evidence to retain her hypothesis, which is *in fact* the correct one. She can stick to her correct evaluation of evidence, despite disagreement with her peer. In this case, the focus is individuated in the asymmetry cast upon the distinction between *thinking to evaluate correctly* and *evaluating correctly* a certain evidence. “The rationality of the parties engaged in [an epistemic disagreement] will typically depend on who has *in fact* correctly evaluated the available evidence and who has not.” (Kelly 2006, 180). Disagreement among peers is, thus, explained by the possibility of a perfectly rational thinker not to be convinced by a given evidence.

In this picture, the asymmetry is in some sense already implied and built into the disagreement itself, it is a constituent part of it. It is important to note that when it comes to the “right reason view”, permissiveness of rationality is not a necessary condition. Indeed, the “right reason view” could be supported by either a permissive or a uniqueness account. On one hand, it may well be the case that two peers arrive at incompatible beliefs evaluating the same evidence by different kinds of reasoning, but one of the two may misjudge the reasoning which evaluates the evidence best. On the other, it might simply be the case that there is only one way of evaluating the evidence and, among two peers at disagreement, one is not doing it correctly. The crucial point is that the cause of disagreement is an asymmetry between the peers in the evaluation of a particular evidence. In both epistemic frameworks, let it be either permissive or unique, the one who reasoned rightly should not change her belief and the one who reasoned wrongly should consider disagreement as a further evidence to change her belief.

The most prominent defender of the “right reason view” is Kelly, whose perspective is usually referred to as the “total evidence view” which states that “what is reasonable to believe [in a peer disagreement] depends on both the original first order evidence as well as on the higher order evidence that is afforded by the fact that one’s peers believe as they do.” (Kelly 2010, 142). Rejecting the “equal weight view” and its commitment to assign priority to the evidence flourishing by the disagreement, the “total evidence view” holds that one’s first order evidence should be weighted together with all the other evidence available because it seems

reasonable sometimes to ignore a certain evidence (Kelly 2010). To put it with a question, why should it be true that the evidence sprang from full disclosure always dominates the one reasoned upon in isolation?

The “total evidence view”, which is a refinement of the “right reason view”, captures an important feature of evidence which the “equal weight view” seems not to take into account properly. Indeed, it seems very reasonable to say that one who just gets something right has reason to stick to her correct belief, despite her peer’s incorrect reasoning. However, if it is true that the “equal weight view” is pushed all the way towards the evidence of disagreement because of its strong consideration of peerhood, it is also true that steadfast positions seems to be pushed all the way towards one’s initial evidence and, thus, to be condemned on the slippery slope of dogmatism.

There are three objections which can be moved against the “total evidence view”. First, it seems very implausible that peer disagreement is to be irrelevant to those who responded correctly to a given evidence and it seems that Kelly’s position undermines the impact of peer disagreement in general. The second objection is related to the first one and it questions the actual aim of Kelly’s view. It seems that the response of the “total evidence view” is not really focused on the epistemic significance of disagreement, it does not concern the impact of disagreement as an epistemic phenomenon. Rather, it seems to be cast on the evaluation of the overall evidence *per se*. It is clear that in terms of the overall, ideal evaluation there must be a condition of asymmetry. However, this does not mean that the impact and significance of disagreement, as an experience among individuals, reflects only such an asymmetry. It is the symmetry of peerhood which makes disagreement compelling. Indeed, it seems that, if we accept Kelly’s position, we are committed to understand disagreement as a sort of omniscient, oracular god telling two peers: “one of you is correct in regards of p”. And it seems odd to think that the two of them should respond differently to such puzzling verdict. Finally, it seems that in terms of normativity, the “total evidence view” is useless. Let us imagine two individuals stuck in a disagreement upon a certain issue. According to Kelly’s proposal, in trying to address their disagreement fairly, they should understand who responded rationally and correctly to the first evidence in order to understand who should revise belief. But this is disappointing: if they knew who responded correctly to the initial evidence there would be no disagreement in the first place. It is true that the “equal weight view” risks to avoid disagreement altogether in requiring to suspend judgement, but the “total evidence view” seems no less problematic in putting up a framework apt only to look at evidence and not to really engage with disagreement.

Among steadfast position, there is a third perspective which tries to combine a concern for the epistemic importance of disagreement and the idea that it is sometimes reasonable to stick to one’s belief in the face of peers’ opposition. Enoch’s “not merely a truthometer view” is a steadfast position which privileges the first

person standpoint in highlighting the importance of *believing* a proposition, a hypothesis, or a theory *to be true*. What does the work in Enoch's picture is not so much the fact that your peer believes a certain hypothesis opposite to yours, but that you believe your hypothesis *to be true*. From the first person standpoint, disagreement is a problem not because my peers believe a certain hypothesis to be true whereas I believe its opposite to be true. Rather, disagreement is a problem because my peers believe a certain hypothesis to be true whereas, on the contrary, that very hypothesis *is false* (according to me).

Working at the level of reliability, Enoch proposes a counterfactual test: reliability is to be linked with actual understanding, for if one, let us call him Fred, correctly believes a proposition to be true, he is to be held reliable even by someone believing, incorrectly, the opposite proposition, let us call him George. It is a fact that Fred is reliable because he is the one who got it right. And if, in another occasion, both George and Fred incorrectly believe a proposition to be true, then they both have reason to decrease their reciprocal reliability, despite what they believe to be true. Enoch's idea is that when it comes to reliability, what is important is who understand *in fact* correctly. This counterfactual test is set to show that, from the first person perspective, a disagreeing peer is not merely someone who *differs* in opinion from me, but someone who I take to be *wrong*. "Your reason to change your mind about [your peer's] reliability is [not] *that you believe that p*, but rather *that p (as you believe)*." (Enoch 2010, 30). The asymmetry is not posed on evidence. Rather, the crucial point is that, in a disagreement, each part takes the other to be wrong and one's own belief to be right.

What is really important then in a peer disagreement is one's conviction about the held belief. Reasons belong to a subject who takes them to be relevant, normatively guiding, and thus to epistemically justify the relevant response. In this way, the asymmetry in rightness is balanced with a remaining, ineluctable symmetry: both peers can likewise lower their confidence in the other, they can hold the other less reliable in the exact same way. In this sense, the "not merely a truthometer" view differs from the "right reason views" for it does not restrict the significance and importance of disagreement to the one who is fully right. The view is committed to symmetry among peers and the possible attitudes they can take with regard to each other, but it is not committed to a symmetry between competing beliefs, as the "equal weight view". In this case, the point of view from which disagreement is engaged with is from within, it is that of a participant to the dispute. In this sense, the core of the argument lies in the idea that peers cannot be considered merely truthometers, mechanisms to record evidence, because from the situated point of view, peers cannot, do not, and are not required to take themselves merely as truthometers. Acknowledging one's fallibility does not require to stop believing hypothesis to be true. Thermometers are only tools to assess evidence, they work to produce measures. Individuals assessing evidence test not only pieces of evidence for a given hypothesis, but also their own reliability in assessing evidence in general and have a inner perspective on it which they cannot escape.

It may be possible to suggest that Enoch's view is just a refinement of the "extra weight view", but that would be a mistake. Although it is true that the consequences of accepting the "not merely a truthometer view" are the same as those of endorsing the "extra weight view", the two perspectives are very different from each other. The latter holds that it is reasonable not to change one's belief in the face of peer disagreement because one's reasons are to weight more than those of others. The former, on the contrary, simply states that the credence one ends up believing seems (according to her) best supported.

The distinction between intentionally giving one's view extra weight on one side, and refusing to treat oneself merely as a truthometer while foreseeing that one's view will in effect be given extra weight on the other side, seems [...] to be normatively relevant. (Enoch 2010, 35)

In this sense, the two views share the same conclusion, but they strongly diverge on the reasons why such conclusion is acceptable.

A similar position is the idea of "partial defeaters". A defeater for a belief P is something, such as another belief, which makes it irrational to continue to hold P (Plantinga 2000, 359-361). "If p is a reason for S to believe q , r is a defeater for this reason if and only if $(p \& r)$ is not a reason for S to believe q ." (Pollock 1986, 38). Consequently, a partial defeater is something which causes a loss of some, but not all of the justification of a belief. The general idea of partial defeaters with regards to the problem of epistemic disagreement is straightforward: disagreements among peers are neither such that each one's belief is fully defeated by that of the other, nor such that each one's belief is not defeated at all (Thune 2010). Such a view worries about reasoning within an "all or nothing" framework in the context of disagreement, and defends the idea of focusing on degrees of confidence. Thune's argument is a refined version of the "total evidence view" and starts with two premises. First, following Plantinga (1993), there are differing degrees of confidence with which we hold our belief, even if we cannot measure them. To make an example, I believe that Bonatchesse is in Switzerland, that the string theory is correct, and that I am a female with different degrees of confidence.

Second, degrees of confidence with which we hold our beliefs often change over time and in response to various stimuli. To make an example, in primary school I learned that the provinces of the Italian region of Piedmont are eight. Now, I still hold that belief, I checked the position of each province on the atlas I used to carry at school and I have no reason to doubt the atlas. But if someone shows me that the atlas I used in school is not updated for it was printed in 1993, and that the number of provinces within the Italian territory, in general, have changed, considering, for example, that another Italian region, Lombardy, added one province to its political subdivision, what should my reaction be? I have not been told that the number of provinces in Piedmont has changed, but that it might be the case. Given this new scenario, some justification for my belief is lost in force of an additional evidence, namely someone telling me that my atlas is not updated and

that Italian regions in the past years have been revising the number of their provinces. This new evidence is not a total defeater, in the strict sense, but a partial one. I would need to check on an updated atlas to test whether my belief about provinces in Piedmont is still true, but until then I am reasonably *less* justified in holding it.

Similarly, in cases of peer disagreement, it is necessary to distinguish between reliability in the context of a particular proposition, hypothesis, or theory and reliability in a more general sense. Indeed, if peerhood is understood in terms of general reliability with regard to a given subject matter, when two peers find themselves stuck in a disagreement about a particular issue within that subject matter, they do not need to deny each other to be generally reliable. It is reasonable to consider one a peer despite the fact that she made a mistake on a particular occasion. The fact that once in my life I got a fine for speeding does not make me a dangerous driver overall, or the fact that my peers at university believe in moral constructivism while I believe in moral realism does not defeat my reliability as a moral philosopher, or theirs. In this sense, disagreement does not affect reliability of peers. If one's first evidence is so strong that, when weighted with the higher order evidence provided by disagreement, maintains its epistemic appeal, there is a reason to keep the belief while acknowledging a partial defeater. The conclusion of this reasoning is that disagreement cannot be escaped without acquiring at least a partial defeater. The opponent's belief cannot be totally discarded, even though one may still hold on to the belief she thinks is the most trustworthy.

CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this paper has been the philosophical debate on peer disagreement. It has undertaken two projects. The first is to reconstruct the different and most prominent positions within the philosophical discussion of it which is a normative debate of an epistemological problem, addressing the question of how we should deal with disagreement, the normative requirements disagreement poses to peers and their beliefs.

The second project is to show the puzzling character of disagreement. Despite the different positions put forward in the debate and their different responses, disagreement remains a puzzling, disturbing, controversial phenomenon. The commitment to peers' symmetry strikes as right as much as willingness to participate and defend one's thesis. Providing reasons and justifications to those who disagree with us seems impossible to avoid, and yet if we still keep discussing among controversial issues is because we think a right answer to those disagreements must exist. In this sense, the normativity of disagreement is crucial, the questions about how to treat disagreement are fundamental and an all-or-nothing take seems to undermine the puzzling effects of disagreement. For these reasons, the ideas of

partial defeaters and degrees of confidence in general are interesting. They permit to welcome a tolerant attitude to disagreement without reducing positions to silence. Individuals are to propose theories and hypothesis, on basis of evidence and sound reasoning, and if they find someone disagreeing with those very claim, they do not need to stop believing their reasoning to be the most appealing. At the same time, the puzzlement and significance of disagreement is acknowledged and taken into account by considering the partial defeater action of other peers' belief.

REFERENCES

- Baker, J. (1987), "Trust and Rationality", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 68, pp. 1-13
- Christiansen, D. (2007), "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News", *Philosophical Review*, 116, n. 2, pp. 187-217
- (2009), "Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy", *Philosophy Compass*, 4/5, pp. 756-767
- Conee, E. and Feldman, R. (2004), *Evidentialism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Davidson, D. (1984), *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Elga, A. (2007), "Reflection and Disagreement", *Nous*, 41, n. 3, pp. 478-502
- (2010), "How to Disagree about How to Disagree", in R. Feldman and T. Warfield (ed.), *Disagreement*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 175-186
- Enoch, D. (2010), "Not Just a Truthometer: Taking Oneself Seriously (But not Too Seriously) in Cases of Peer Disagreement", *Mind*, 119, n. 476, pp. 953-997
- Feigl, H. (1953), "The Scientific Outlook: Naturalism and Humanism", in H. Feigl and M. Brodbeck (eds), *Readings in the Philosophy of Science*, New York, Appleton-Century-Croft
- Feldman, R. (2006), "Epistemological Puzzles about Disagreement", in S. Hetherington (ed.), *Epistemological Futures*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 216-236
- (2007), "Reasonable Religious Disagreement", in L. Antony (ed.), *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Foley, R. (2001), *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- (2005), "Universal Intellectual Trust", *Episteme*, 2, n. 1, pp. 5-11
- Frances, B. (2010), "The Reflective Epistemic Renegade", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 81, n. 2, pp. 419-463
- (2011), "Disagreement", in D. Prichard and S. Bernecker (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*, New York, Routledge, pp. 68-74
- Goldman, A. (1999), "Internalism Exposed", *Journal of Philosophy*, 96, n. 6, pp. 271-293

- Jehle, D. and Fitelson, B. (2009), “What Is the ‘Equal Weight View?’”, *Episteme*, 6, n. 3, pp. 280-293
- Jones, K. (1996), “Trust as an Affective Attitude”, *Ethics*, 107, n.1, pp. 4-25
- Kelly, T. (2005), “The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement”, in J. Hawthorne and T. Gendler (eds), *Oxford Studies in Epistemology Vol. 1*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 167-195
- (2010), “Peer Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence”, in R. Feldman and T. Warfield (eds), *Disagreement*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 111-174
- King, N. (2011), “Disagreement: What’s the Problem? or A Good Peer is Hard to Find”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, online version
- Lackey, J. (2008), “A Justificationist View of Disagreement’s Epistemic Significance”, in A. Millar, A. Haddock, and D. Pritchard (eds), *Social Epistemology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 298-325
- Pettit, P. (2005), “When to Defer to the Majority Testimony and When Not”, *Analysis*, 66, n. 291, pp. 179-187
- Plantinga, A. (1993), *Warrant: The Current Debate*, Oxford, Oxford University Press
- (2000), *Warranted Christian Belief*, Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Pollock, J. (1986), *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*, Totowa, Rowman and Littlefield
- Shogenji, T. (2007), “A Conundrum in Bayesian Epistemology of Disagreement”, available at http://fitelson.org/fwe/few_07/shogenji.pdf
- Sidgwick, H. (1981), *The Methods of Ethics* [1874], Indianapolis, Hackett
- Sosa, E. (2010), “The Epistemology of Disagreement”, in A. Millar, A. Haddock, and D. Pritchard (eds), *Social Epistemology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 278-297
- Thune, M. (2010), “‘Partial Defeaters’ and the Epistemology of Disagreement”, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 60, n. 239, pp. 355-372
- Van Inwagen, P. (1996), “Is It Wrong Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone to Believe Anything on Insufficient Evidence?”, in J. Jordan and D. Howard-Snyder (eds), *Faith, Freedom and Rationality*, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 137-154
- Webb, M. (1992), “The Epistemology of Trust and the Politics of Suspicion”, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 73, n. 4, pp. 390-400
- Wedgwood, R. (2007), *The Nature of Normativity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press
- White, R. (2005), “Epistemic Permissiveness”, *Philosophical Perspectives*, 19, n. 1, pp. 445-459
- Williamson, T. (2000), *Knowledge and Its Limits*, Oxford, Oxford University Press