

IDEALIZATION AND UNIQUENESS IN PEER DISAGREEMENTS: THE CASE OF RELIGIOUS DISAGREEMENT

IDEALIZAÇÃO E UNICIDADE NOS DESACORDOS ENTRE PARES: O CASO DO DESACORDO RELIGIOSO

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Abstract: In this paper, I discuss two important topics for religious disagreement, namely, idealization and uniqueness. In the literature on disagreements, there is an idealized notion of *epistemic symmetry*, however, this idealized scenario perhaps it is not the best way to understand actual disputes between peers. Another important point is the *uniqueness thesis*, this principle says that a body of evidence supports only one doxastic attitude or only one proposition. Thus, with this principle in mind, authors like Richard Feldman have a skeptical view on disagreements. He says that, in cases of peer disagreements, both agents should abandon their beliefs and suspend judgment, since the evidence does not justify two competing beliefs at the same time. In Feldman's opinion, this is also sound for the religious disagreement. Nevertheless, we can contest the uniqueness thesis, arguing in favor of permissiveness of evidence, this thesis on the contrary claims that a particular body of evidence supports competing beliefs at the same time. Therefore, with a permissiveness principle in mind, I will argue that both agents in a dispute can be justified. In a religious disagreement, for example, both an atheist and a theist can be justified in maintaining their respective beliefs.

Keywords: Idealization. Uniqueness thesis. Religious disagreement.

Resumo: Neste texto, discuto dois pontos importantes para o desacordo religioso, a saber: a idealização e a unicidade. Na literatura sobre desacordos existe uma noção idealizada de *simetria epistêmica*, porém, esse cenário idealizado talvez não seja a melhor maneira de entender as disputas reais entre pares. Outro ponto importante é a *tese da unicidade*, este princípio diz que um corpo de evidências sustenta uma única atitude doxástica ou uma única proposição. Assim, com esse tipo de princípio em mente, autores como Richard Feldman defendem uma visão cética para os desacordos. Ele afirma que, em casos de desacordos entre pares, ambos agentes deveriam abandonar suas crenças e suspender o juízo, uma vez que a evidência não justifica crenças competidoras ao mesmo tempo. Na opinião de Feldman, isso também é válido para o desacordo religioso. No entanto, podemos contestar a tese da unicidade, argumentando em favor da permissividade das evidências, esta tese ao contrário afirma que um corpo particular de evidências pode sustentar crenças competidoras ao mesmo tempo. Portanto, com um princípio de permissividade em mente, irei argumentar que ambos agentes podem estar justificados em uma disputa. No desacordo religioso, por exemplo, tanto ateus quanto teístas podem estar justificados em manter suas respectivas crenças.

Palavras-chave: Idealização. Tese da Unicidade. Desacordo Religioso.

INTRODUCTION

There are many problematic issues in the discussion on disagreements, but I will begin by discussing the question of idealization in scenarios of epistemic disagreements. An idealized notion of *epistemic symmetry* is problematic and can be incompatible with real cases of peer disagreements. Furthermore, another topic I want to discuss is the *principle of uniqueness*, this thesis says that a particular body of evidence supports only one doxastic attitude or only one proposition. Although accepted by some authors it is possible to contest this idea, in fact, other authors adopt a permissiveness principle instead of uniqueness, in which the evidence supports more than one doxastic attitude. Thus, I am going to argue that, in some cases, an appeal to uniqueness may not be the best way to understand and to assess what happens on a scenario of peer disagreement. The religious disagreement between theists and atheists, for example, is a paradigmatic case in which the uniqueness thesis does not apply.

In disagreement literature, the definition of epistemic peer is very much idealized, and the manner through which we characterize the notion of *peerhood* can make a substantial difference in our understanding of the cases at hand (BIRO & LAMPERT, 2018, p. 383). If epistemic peers are agents that are *equals* in terms of their cognitive skills, it is clear that cases of genuine peer disagreement are empirically unlikely. As a matter of fact, there is always a cognitive difference between two epistemic agents, they hardly ever have exactly the same capacities for perception, intelligence and reflection, for instance. Hence, distinct agents will never make exactly the same evaluation of any given evidence. Thus, if an idealized notion of *epistemic symmetry* is not empirically plausible, we can say that a disagreement between *ideal* epistemic peers does not exist. If perfect epistemic peers do not exist, the disagreement between them does not exist either. In everyday life, what would explain disagreements is precisely the difference in skills, possession and appreciation of evidence.

Another central point to understanding disagreements is the *uniqueness thesis* (FELDMAN, 2006b, p. 205; KELLY, 2010, p. 119; MATHESON, 2015b, p. 54). This principle says that, given a particular body of evidence, cannot be the case that the belief that P and the belief that $\neg P$ are justified at the same time. In other words, the evidence can justify just one of these doxastic attitudes, but not both of them. A particular body of evidence allow us to believe, disbelieve or suspend judgment about one proposition, but does not allow having more than one of these doxastic attitudes at the same time¹.

The uniqueness principle is used in cases of peer disagreement in order to prevent relativism and incoherence. Based on uniqueness, we know that contradictory beliefs cannot be both justified at the same time. Nevertheless, the uniqueness thesis is not unanimous in epistemology, some authors defend a principle of permissiveness instead, this claims that a particular body of evidence supports competing beliefs at the same time (ROSA, 2018). In this perspective, a body of evidence can justify different doxastic attitudes or

1 For simplicity, in this article I will consider the classic tripartite division for doxastic attitudes.

more than one proposition at the same time. Accordingly, if we adopt permissiveness for evidence, our understanding on disagreements changes drastically. In this case, even affirming opposite propositions, two agents can be justified and would be rational in holding their respective beliefs. I intend to argue that this is the case for religious disagreement, theist and atheist are both rational in holding their respective beliefs. In religious disagreement, instead of uniqueness, we can adopt a permissiveness principle to the evidence. Thus, a given body of evidence for a religious question can justify different beliefs, and based on that same evidence, atheists and theists are equally rational concerning their specific beliefs.

In light of this analysis of disagreements, at first I will criticize the idealized definition of epistemic peers presented in the literature. Moreover, and this is the point I want to highlight, perhaps the uniqueness thesis is not sound for all cases of peer disagreements. In some cases, like in religious disagreement, a permissiveness principle to the evidence can be a better alternative².

EPISTEMIC PEERHOOD: THE PROBLEM OF IDEALIZATION

One of the biggest problems in the discussion about disagreements, as previously mentioned, is the idealized notion of *epistemic symmetry*. In this section, I discuss some of the most prominent definitions for epistemic peerhood in the literature in order to criticize the excessive idealization of these scenarios.

The main definition says that epistemic peers are agents that are equals, in terms of their cognitive skills or intellectual virtues and in respect to the judgment and familiarity with the evidence regarding a given question. Thomas Kelly, for instance, defines *epistemic peerhood* as follows:

Let us to say that two individuals are epistemic peers with respect to some question if and only if they satisfy the following two conditions:

- i) They are equals with respect to their familiarity with evidence and arguments which bear on that question, and
- ii) They are equals with respect to general epistemic virtues such as intelligence, thoughtfulness, and freedom from bias (KELLY, 2005, p. 175).

For Jonathan Matheson, the central notion of epistemic peerhood is:

S1 and S2 are epistemic peers regarding p at t just in case S1 and S2 are in an equally good position regarding p at t (where one's epistemic

² Perhaps, denying the uniqueness in this case implies we should abandon this principle completely because the thesis is universal and the case of religious disagreement would be a counterexample. However, this is a broader question that I will not discuss in this paper, my focus here is just to highlight that, in the religious disagreements, permissiveness seems to be more adequate than the idea of uniqueness.

position is determined by one's evidence and one's ability to process it well) [MATHESON, 2015b, p. 24].

In these formulations, epistemic peerhood is an idealized concept. We can say that two agents are epistemic peers only when they are *equals* in respect to intellectual competencies and familiarity with the evidence regarding a specific question. It is necessary to say that the idea of equality is very rigid even out of mathematical context, two things are equals when they have exactly – and necessarily – the same properties and characteristics.

Other definitions, a little bit more modest, still feature quite idealized scenarios. For example, Feldman (2006b, p. 201) says “Let’s say that people are epistemic peers when they are roughly equal with respect to intelligence, reasoning powers, background information, and so on”. And Christensen (2009, p. 756) says that “[i]f one has good reason to believe that other person is one’s (at least approximate) equal in term of exposure to the evidence, intelligence, freedom from bias etc. (such a person is often referred to as one’s ‘epistemic peer’)”. Even in the face of more flexible definitions such as these, it would still be hard to accept that different agents are ‘roughly’ or ‘approximately’ equals in terms of intelligence, reflection and evaluation of evidence. If we look closer, it is easy to see that two real agents are never equals or even approximately equals in this kind of thing. By the way, taking into account a series of factors like education, culture, society etc. even if the agents are as close as possible considering those criteria, they are most likely different in terms of intellectual skills. In respect to possession and familiarity with evidence, we can also say that two agents never possess the same evidence, or never make exactly the same evaluation of evidence. The point I want to highlight is that there is always some asymmetry between agents, even if it is a small one. No one is equally intelligent, prudent, thoughtful and reflective when compared to another person. For that reason, two agents never make the same evaluation of the evidence in favor or against a given proposition.

With this analysis of peerhood in mind, the existence of *ideal* epistemic peers³ is very unlikely. We can talk about peerhood, but the perfect symmetry between epistemic agents indeed does not exist. In practice, epistemic symmetry between agents is just apparent. Thus, if epistemic idealized peers do not exist, the disagreement between them does not exist either. Disagreements happen only because the agents involved are not “real” perfect epistemic peers. When we are judging a question, the difference in intellectual skills, possession and assessment of evidence explain why we have distinct beliefs. Although, it is also necessary to highlight that in many contexts those differences are not big ones. In many situations, it is difficult to identify an agent as being epistemic superior or inferior to another, because their skills and evidence can be quite similar. When we are in this type of situation, we can call them epistemic peers. The correct notion of peerhood, therefore, should emphasize that epistemic peers are reliable agents for judging a specific question. When there is no big asymmetry between two agents, in respect to their intellectual skills

3 Epistemic agents that are exactly or even approximately equals.

and in their access to the evidence for a question, we can say that they are epistemic peers. For example, in a jury, we have different agents with different intellectual skills, but all of them can appreciate the same information (evidence) about the case. Here, these agents are all reliable to judge the question if the defendant is guilty or innocent. In other words, we can say that these agents are epistemic peers.

Therefore, the epistemology of disagreement exaggerates when it presents a highly-idealized definition for epistemic peers. An idealized scenario can make us misunderstand real cases of disagreement, and many lessons that apply to the ideal world do not apply to the real world (BIRO & LAMPERT, 2018, p. 383; KIRK, 2020, p. 19). In practice, epistemic peerhood is not so rigid and perfect as an ideal concept. Hence, I think the problem of disagreement is better understood through real disputes instead of idealized scenarios. In this sense, religious disagreements, for example, provides a good template for us to discuss the problem of disagreements, once it is a real case where the agents and their dispute are in fact real.

THE UNIQUENESS PRINCIPLE

Another important element in the discussion of disagreements is the so-called *uniqueness thesis*. In general, it says that a particular body of evidence justifies only one proposition between competing propositions and only one doxastic attitude for a specific proposition (FELDMAN, 2006b, p. 205; KELLY, 2010, p. 119; MATHESON, 2015b, p. 54). This principle is important for two reasons: first, it can prevent relativism and, second, it avoids incoherence. In other words, a particular set of facts, information, and arguments, for a particular question, justifies only one proposition over other competitor propositions that is possible. In addition, it justifies just one doxastic attitude, that is, when we access the available evidence for a given proposition, we can believe, disbelieve or suspend judgment, but it is not possible to have more than one doxastic attitude at the same time concerning that proposition.

The reasons in favor of uniqueness thesis are very straightforward. First, if a specific body of evidence can justify competing propositions at the same time, this would bring us to a radical relativism. It would be possible, for example, that propositions like “it is raining now” and “it is not raining now” were both justified at the same time. The uniqueness thesis avoids precisely this kind of relativism that is quite problematic and clearly false. Second, another reason in favor of the uniqueness thesis is that it prevents incoherence, avoiding the occurrence of different doxastic attitudes for the same proposition. It would not be possible, for example, to believe and disbelieve that “it is raining now”. Maintaining these two doxastic attitudes concerning any given proposition at the same time would be a display of incoherence.

Thus, based on the uniqueness principle, epistemic peers, that is, agents who access the same body of evidence on a specific issue, are not justified in supporting opposite

propositions or different doxastic attitudes. Instead, they should converge in their opinions. If the evidence justifies only one proposition (or only one doxastic attitude), and epistemic peers are agents who access that same evidence, then, those agents should not be in disagreement. On the contrary, they would be justified to the same proposition or to the same doxastic attitude for the proposition in question. More precisely, we can express this argument thus:

- A. Two agents access the same particular body of evidence (are epistemic peers).
- B. A particular body of evidence justifies only one proposition over competing propositions (uniqueness).
- C. A particular body of evidence justifies only one doxastic attitude, that is, belief, disbelief or suspension of judgment for a given proposition (uniqueness).
- D. Therefore, two agents would not be justified to sustain P and $\neg P$ (from A and B). Both would be justified to one and same proposition, like proposition B shows.
- E. Two agents could not believe and disbelieve the same proposition at the same time (from A and C). Both would be justified to maintain just one and same doxastic attitude, like proposition C indicates.

We can notice from D and E above that, if uniqueness is true, agents who access the same body of evidence should converge in their opinions (in their propositions/doxastic attitudes) not disagree. From another perspective, if they are in disagreement, it means that at least one of them is wrong (is not justified to support his proposition/doxastic attitude).

Nevertheless, we can ask, is it possible epistemic peers rationally disagree about some question? In other words, is it possible for both to be justified in their opposite beliefs, even when starting from the same body of evidence? For some types of issues, or in some specific situations, it seems possible epistemic peers rationally disagree. Here, a possible explanation is that the uniqueness thesis is false. Indeed, some authors do not accept the uniqueness, instead of it they give preference to a permissiveness principle (ROSA, 2012, 2018). According permissiveness, a particular body of evidence for a given question justifies more than one proposition or more than one doxastic attitude at the same time. Thus epistemic peers could rationally disagree, or be justified in their opposite beliefs, even starting from the same body of evidence. Actually, what I am going to suggest is that, perhaps, the uniqueness principle is not appropriate to deal with some cases of disagreement. The religious disagreement, for instance, can be a case where the uniqueness thesis does not apply.

But, before developing this argument against the idea of uniqueness in religious disagreement, let us see how is it possible to deal with peer disagreements (FRANCES & MATHESON, 2019; MATHESON, 2015a, 2015b). In the next section, I will discuss the skeptical position of Richard Feldman on peer disagreements in general and on religious disagreement in particular.

RICHARD FELDMAN ON DISAGREEMENTS: THE CASE OF RELIGIOUS DISAGREEMENT IN PARTICULAR

For Feldman, disagreement affects entirely the justification of our beliefs, and sometimes it is necessary to abandon a belief if that belief is in disagreement with that of an epistemic peer (FELDMAN, 2005, 2009). This position is quite rigorous because the agents should suspend judgment about the disputed proposition. Regarding the religious disagreement, Feldman says that this is just another case of peer disagreement, so the same solution applies. In other words, once the agents are epistemic peers in full disclosure, atheists and theists cannot be justified in their respective beliefs, in fact, they should abandon their beliefs and suspend judgment about the disputed proposition.

In Feldman's view, we can understand the scenario of disagreement as involving two different stages. At the first stage, what he calls *isolation*, each agent forms his respective belief based on the same available evidence, but they do not know about the existence of disagreement between them. At this moment, the agents are rational and justified in their beliefs. He says:

Pro and Con have examined similar bodies of evidence and, after careful and serious thought, Pro comes to the conclusion that P is true and Con comes to the conclusion that P is not true. To each person, the conclusion arrived at seems plainly true. We may add to the story that each is an intelligent person who has not found himself or herself to be wrong very often when arriving at conclusions in this way (FELDMAN, 2006a, pp. 219-220).

At this stage, both agents are rational in maintaining their respective beliefs because they do not know about the existence of a disagreement, they do not know that an equally intelligent agent assesses the available evidence differently.

However, we have a second stage, which Feldman calls *full disclosure*, here the agents know about the disagreement. In this stage, they know that there is a disagreement and the opponent is an epistemic peer, here both agents know that they are similarly intelligent and equally reliable to judge the disputed question. In this stage "Pro and Con have thoroughly discussed the issues. They know each other's reasons and arguments, and that the other person has come to a competing conclusion after examining the same information" (FELDMAN, 2006a, p. 220). At this moment, a full disclosure of information occurs, they know that they are sharing the same body of evidence – so-called first-order evidence. Nevertheless, they also share the information that there is a disagreement between them. This piece of information is a kind of evidence as well and we call this second-order evidence. When they know about the existence of an epistemic peer in disagreement, this second-order information affects the previous justification each one had for their own belief. In this situation, they come across a defeater for their own previous justification.

When we look at this scenario proposed by Feldman, we can ask two main questions.

First, what is the reasonable attitude for the agents in the stage of isolation? And, second, what is the reasonable attitude for the agents in the stage of full disclosure? As we can notice, in isolation the agents are rational in maintaining their respective belief. Based on the same body of evidence E, Pro is justified in believing that P is true and Con is justified in believing in the falsehood of this proposition, that is, in believing that P is not true. For Feldman, we can defend the maintenance of a disagreement between epistemic peers in stage of isolation (FELDMAN, 2006a, p. 223). In other words, each agent is rational in maintaining his belief based on that evidence. However, we cannot say the same thing when we evaluate the situation in stage of full disclosure (*Ibidem*).

The total available evidence in the stage of full disclosure is different from that in isolation. In full disclosure, beyond the original evidence E there is other information shared by the agents – for example, the information that they are epistemic peers, that there is a disagreement between them etc. In this context, the total evidence would be something like E* (the original first-order evidence E plus the shared second-order information). In isolation, they have only first-order evidence, but in the full disclosure, they also have second-order evidence. The disagreement informs them that there is another possible evaluation to the first-order evidence and this is an information about what that original evidence E itself supports. The point is that information about the evidence is also evidence and a new piece of information can be a defeater. In full disclosure, therefore, Pro and Con have access to the total body of evidence E*, that is, the first-order information plus the second-order information. However, as we know, gaining new evidence can be a defeater for our previous justification, in other words, a new piece of information can defeat a justification already established.

For Feldman, this is precisely what happens in the full disclosure stage. When agents know about reasons and arguments of the opponent, they gain a defeater for their own previous justification. The second-order evidence goes against the first-order evaluation. Accordingly:

But once one thinks explicitly about the topic, it becomes harder to see how it can remain reasonable to maintain belief once one realizes that one has no good reason to think one's evidence supports that belief. In effect, this realization serves as a defeater of whatever support the original evidence provided. The underlying idea is that it is harder to reasonably maintain belief once one reflects on one's epistemic situation in the way that disagreements with full disclosure demand. It is not that the standards are higher in reflective situation. Rather, it is that reflection can, and in these cases does, make it evident that one does not have a good reason to think that one's belief is well supported, and this in turn undermines the support one initially had for that belief (FELDMAN, 2006a, p. 232).

The point Feldman calls attention to in the passage above is that, in full disclosure, after reflection about the reasons and arguments of their opponent, they no longer have

guarantees about what the original evidence in fact supports. That is, they do not have guarantees whether their initial evaluation is correct, they have no assurance anymore whether their initial justification is correct, whether that evaluation is as good now as it appeared to be earlier. In this case, their previous justification is necessarily undermined.

Therefore, for a peer disagreement in the stage of full disclosure, the most reasonable attitude is the suspension of judgment. In this state, both agents gain a defeater for their own previous justification, both of them do not have good reason to affirm what the original evidence in fact supports. In isolation, the evidence available to the agents give them support to their respective beliefs, but in full disclosure the evidence does not give them justification for their beliefs anymore. Thus, for Feldman, in contexts of full disclosure “the parties to the disagreement would be reasonable in suspending judgment about the matter at hand” (FELDMAN, 2006a, p. 235). The author admits, however, that suspending judgment in scenarios of peer disagreements can be a very skeptical conclusion. But, he also highlights that this is a legitimate doxastic attitude and cannot be neglected by the agents. For him, in many cases of peer disagreements the suspension of judgment is indeed the right alternative. Although, in others cases – perhaps the majority – we can see some asymmetries between the agents and, in these cases, this skeptical conclusion is not required.

For Feldman, religious disagreement is just a specific case of peer disagreement and the same solution applies. In other words, given the agents are epistemic peers and that they are in full disclosure, both should suspend judgment about the disputed question (FELDMAN, 2006b, p. 212). In a stage of full disclosure, atheists and theists have no justification to maintain their respective beliefs.

In order to construct a scenario of religious disagreement, Feldman presents a very common situation between his own students as a model of that kind of disagreement. In one of his classes, the students were divided between those that believe in God and those that do not believe. The first ones we can consider as being theists and last ones as being atheists. Feldman calls attention to the point that all students were agreeing to disagree, everyone thought that both parts were justified. There was no problem for everyone in maintaining your respective belief, even knowing that the other part had an opposite belief. However, for Feldman his students were mistaken, these two parts – both beliefs – could not be justified at the same time. In this context, like in all other peer disagreement scenarios in the stage of full disclosure, the correct attitude for the agents should be the suspension of judgment. In other words, atheists and theists should abandon their respective beliefs. Notice that the argument in support of this conclusion is based on the uniqueness thesis. Feldman is an advocate of that principle, which says that a particular body of evidence justifies only one proposition or only one doxastic attitude for a given proposition. Thus, being epistemic peers and sharing the same body of evidence, both parts in this dispute – their opposite doxastic attitudes – could not be justified at the same time by the same evidence.

In the religious disagreement, the available information to the agents would be something like this:

- 1) God exists.
- 2) Our shared evidence supports (1).

The theist says that both 1 and 2 are true. The atheist says that both 1 and 2 are false. Notice that after their discussion their evidence includes not only the original arguments themselves and their own reactions to them, but also the fact that the other person – an epistemic peer – assesses the evidence differently (FELDMAN, 2006b, p. 211).

For the theist, the available evidence supports his belief and he is justified in believing that ‘God exists’. On the other hand, for the atheist the shared evidence does not support this proposition, for him the evidence supports an opposite proposition, namely, the belief that ‘God does not exist’. It is necessary to highlight, and Feldman calls attention to this point, that in this scenario the total evidence includes not only the original evidence to the question in dispute. There is also second order-evidence, information about the existence of a disagreement, that someone equally instructed assesses the evidence differently and has an opposite belief. For Feldman, to know that there is an epistemic peer in disagreement makes all the difference.

In the case of religious disagreement, it would not be reasonable for the agents to maintain their respective beliefs knowing that there is a dispute with an epistemic peer. Supposing that the uniqueness is correct, both beliefs cannot be justified at the same time. In other words, based on the same body of evidence, these opposite propositions or these different doxastic attitudes cannot be justified at the same time. Therefore, maintaining the disagreement after full disclosure of evidence would not be reasonable. In addition, they do not have reasons to affirm that one part makes a better evaluation of evidence because both are peers. Thus, the right alternative in this case is the suspension of judgment. Theist and atheist should abandon their beliefs and suspend the judgment about the disputed question (FELDMAN, 2006b, p. 213). The theist does not have any reason to think that his assessment of evidence is better than the assessment made by the atheist, he cannot simply say that the atheist’s belief is irrational. The same is valid in the opposite direction, the atheist cannot maintain his own belief saying that the theist is irrational. Moreover, the agents cannot prioritize his own position in detriment to the position of his opponent, because they are epistemic peers. Then, in this case, the only reasonable attitude for the agents is the suspension of judgment.

In summary, for Feldman, religious disagreement is like any other case of peer disagreement in full disclosure. Because the agents in disagreement are epistemic peers, they cannot prioritize one of the parts in such a dispute. Furthermore, in accordance with the uniqueness principle, both parts in this dispute cannot be justified at the same time. Then, in this case, the correct attitude to the agents, like in other cases, is the suspension of judgment about the question under dispute.

AGAINST THE UNIQUENESS THESIS IN RELIGIOUS DISAGREEMENT

From another perspective, in contemporary epistemology, some authors do not endorse the uniqueness principle, on the contrary, they affirm the idea of *Permissiveness* of evidence. In this section, I argue that religious disagreement is a good case of dispute between peers because the agents involved in this context are real epistemic agents, not idealized ones. Furthermore, in case of religious disagreement, a permissiveness principle of evidence seems more adequate than uniqueness. For many complex questions, like religious ones, the available evidence is underdetermined and does not support a particular belief more than its rival. Indeed, two or more competing beliefs can be justified by that same body of evidence. Hence, in cases where the evidence is underdetermined, we can adopt a permissiveness principle for the evidence. Thus, on the contrary of Feldman's argument, with a permissiveness principle in mind we can say that atheist and theist are both justified in the religious disagreement, both are reasonable in maintaining their respective beliefs.

Firstly, it is important to say that the scenario of religious disagreement proposed by Feldman is appropriate to discuss the problem of peer disagreements. The agents involved in this context are his own students, real epistemic agents. Although they are far away from perfect symmetry, we can consider them as epistemic peers because they are reliable to judge the question, since they are intelligent, thoughtful, reflective etc. and assess the available evidence carefully. In this case, the dispute between them is real and the disagreement indeed happens. Thus, religious disagreement is a good template for us to understand the disputes between peers, because it is a very common situation involving people we call real epistemic peers (PITTARD, 2019). The epistemology of disagreement should prioritize this sort of scenario, instead of highly-idealized ones that do not correspond with the reality. The most important cases of disagreements, those we are in fact interested in, are real epistemic disagreements not the idealized ones.

Nevertheless, in some situations we can contest the uniqueness principle. In epistemology, there is an intense discussion about the idea of permissiveness or uniqueness of evidence. These two theses are in direct conflict with each other. About this, we can quote Rosa:

Permissivism is roughly the view that different doxastic attitudes toward a given proposition – e. g. the attitudes of believing and doubting a proposition respectively – may be licensed by the same body of evidence. This view is in direct conflict with the Uniqueness Thesis, which says that for any body of evidence E and any proposition p there is at most one kind of doxastic attitude toward p that is licensed by E (ROSA, 2018).

In this debate, there are critics and supporters for each one of these two theses (ROSA, 2018). Thereby, many authors deny the uniqueness principle, that a body of evidence justifies only one proposition or only one doxastic attitude for a given proposition. Instead, they affirm the principle of permissiveness of evidence, which says

that a body of evidence can allow more than one proposition or different doxastic attitudes at the same time (ROSA, 2012, 2018).

In some cases, dealing with specific issues, the permissiveness principle for the evidence seems more adequate than the idea of uniqueness. When dealing with highly complex questions, such as scientific ones or religious topics by excellence, the evidence is sometimes underdetermined. That is, the body of available evidence does not direct the justification for a specific proposition or doxastic attitude, quite the opposite, the evidence can support (in general it supports) different propositions or different doxastic attitudes simultaneously. Distinct epistemic agents can start from the same body of evidence about a specific issue and come to very different conclusions, their treatment of the evidence can be rational, and thus, their beliefs can be justified, although they are in conflict or radically in opposition. The main point here is that, starting from the same underdetermined evidence, they can be both justified in their position regarding that question.

The underdetermination is the idea that the evidence in itself does not support a theory more than another equivalent rival theory (TURNBULL, 2017). This topic is very important and much discussed in the philosophy of sciences. Once we know what is determined by evidence, this would throw some light and could dissolve scientific disputes. However, sometimes the evidence does not direct the discussion nor indicate the choice for a specific theory. Our evaluation of evidence can make us choose a theory or another, but the evidence in itself does not direct anything (TURNBULL, 2017). On the contrary, what happens in general is that, because of underdetermination, more than one theory can be justified by the evidence at the same time (*Ibidem*). The point here is that the evidence in itself does not direct us to a specific choice, it has no inclination – nor indicates – a specific theory. Instead, the evidence supports different scientific theories simultaneously. In other words, the same evidence can support two or even more rival theories. Thus, even in respect to scientific questions the evidence can justify different theories at the same time.

Thus, at least in some situations or for specific questions, it is possible to uphold a permissiveness principle for evidence. And, by affirming permissiveness – instead of uniqueness – we have a very different perception of peer disagreements. If permissiveness is correct, in a peer epistemic disagreement both parts can be justified at the same time. Therefore, in this perspective Feldman's arguments about religious disagreement or even about disagreements in general would be mistaken. Indeed, for many cases of disagreements, the idea of permissiveness seems to be more adequate than the idea of uniqueness. The case of religious disagreement would be an example. In this case, the available evidence is underdetermined and does not justify one theory more than any other, it does not justify a theistic theory more than an atheistic one. This way, even in disagreement, epistemic peers could be both justified in their respective beliefs at the same time.

Consider the following example: John has a serious illness that makes he loses his sight gradually, the disease is advanced and he has already lost more than 90% of his sight. One certain day, beyond all expectations, John simply wakes up cured of his illness

and with his sight totally reestablished. Cases like this are relatively common, sometimes people that have serious illnesses are healed in a sudden way. This kind of fact can support different opinions about religious questions, this same evidence can justify distinct beliefs. For an atheist, for example, the healing of John can be seen as chance and good fortune or as an effect of medical treatment he had received, this is not a proof of God's existence. On the other hand, for a theist the sudden healing can be seen as an effect of divine activity, therefore, a proof of God's existence. Looking at the same evidence – to the fact of John's healing – the theist believes that 'God exists' and the atheist does not believe this proposition. The atheist believes in the opposite proposition, namely, that 'God does not exist'. The point I want to highlight here is that the evidence in itself is underdetermined. The fact that John was healed suddenly, frustrating all expectations and all we knew about the disease, does not support one theory more than the other. In this case, the evidence in itself does not support the theistic hypothesis more than atheistic hypothesis. Actually, this same fact – the same evidence – can justify both theories simultaneously.

Thus, regarding complex questions like religious ones, we can maintain the permissiveness instead of uniqueness because the evidence is underdetermined. In other words, a body of evidence about religious questions can justify more than one doxastic attitude – or more than one proposition – at the same time. If this analysis is correct, we can extract a quite different conclusion for the religious disagreement than that presented by Richard Feldman. For Feldman, in religious disagreement, like in all other cases of peer disagreement in full disclosure, the agents should abandon their beliefs and suspend judgment about the disputed question. Given his defense of the uniqueness thesis, both agents cannot be justified because the evidence does not support different doxastic attitudes at the same time. However, as we have seen here, in many situations the evidence is underdetermined. Even regarding scientific questions, sometimes the same evidence can support more than one theory, even rival ones. In religious questions the same happens, sometimes the evidence is also underdetermined and does not support one hypothesis more than the opposite hypothesis. Actually, the evidence in respect to religious questions can justify different beliefs at the same time. That is the reason why we can adopt a permissiveness principle in these contexts.

Someone like Feldman would say that giving up the uniqueness thesis ties us to relativism and incoherence, allowing opposite propositions and different doxastic attitudes being justified at the same time. However, from the agent's point of view there is no incoherence here because each agent in particular does not support both doxastic attitudes at the same time. Each one is only one part of the dispute and supports just one proposition or just one doxastic attitude, therefore, there is no incoherence from his subject perspective. Regarding relativism, sometimes this position seems to be correct. For many complex questions, and indeed religious questions are very complicated ones, we do not have a unique and definitive answer.

Therefore, adopting the permissiveness principle, we can say that atheists and theists are both rational in maintaining their respective beliefs. It is not required to suspend judgment

about the disputed question because the evidence in this context can support both parts in dispute. The available evidence in this case is underdetermined and can support more than one doxastic attitude or more than one proposition at the same time. Thus, in the religious disagreement, we can say that atheists and theists are both justified in maintaining their beliefs.

CONCLUSION

In the first place, we highlighted that an idealized scenario is not a good way to understand cases of peer disagreements. The epistemic symmetry exists only in an idealized world, in practice, perfect symmetry does not exist although some agents can be quite close in terms of intellectual skills and assessment of evidence. Besides, what we are interested in are real cases of disagreements not idealized ones, and the lessons extracted from an ideal world perhaps would not be sound to real cases. For that reason, for being a real case of disagreement, the religious dispute between atheist and theist is a good case for us to understand and to discuss the problem of disagreements. Secondly, we affirmed that the uniqueness thesis is not unanimous in contemporary epistemology, many authors instead defend a permissiveness principle for evidence. For some highly complex questions, there is the underdetermination of evidence, the idea that the evidence in itself does not support a specific theory over its equivalent rival. The problem of underdetermination affects all issues, from scientific questions through religious ones. If our analysis is correct, when the evidence about a religious topic is underdetermined, instead of uniqueness we can adopt a permissiveness principle for evidence, since that evidence can justify more than one proposition or doxastic attitude at the same time. Thus, adopting such a principle, in the case of religious disagreement, atheists and theists would be rational and both are justified in maintaining their respective beliefs.

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