

When Self-Trust and Peer-Trust Collide

JUSTIN LEE, *UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS*

According to the Asymmetry View, one rationally ought to have more epistemic self-trust than trust in one's disagreeing epistemic peer unless one has case-specific reasons not to (e.g. one is drunk during the given disagreement). In this essay, I argue that the Asymmetry View is wrong as a general principle of how to balance epistemic self-trust and trust in one's peer. To this end, I challenge Enoch's argument from the ineliminability of the first-person perspective, which I deem the most compelling defence of this principle. I concede that Enoch could defend a more modest version of the Asymmetry View by altering his argument to account for my criticisms. Nonetheless, I stress that this modified principle is applicable only in rare and indeed unrealistic cases.

1 Introduction

My buddy Solomon and I are enjoying our neighbourhood café's new chocolate mousse. Judging by its flavour profile and what I know about various couvertures on the market, I think it is made from Guanaja 70%. Solomon disagrees; Caraïbe 66% is his conclusion. Through our past conversations, though, we have come to consider ourselves epistemic peers on chocolate-related matters. That is, we each deem the other equally well informed about chocolate and equally reliable in judging chocolate-related information. Should I therefore maintain or lower confidence in my belief about the mousse, or perhaps suspend judgement? This touches the core of recent philosophical debates about disagreement: what is the most epistemically rational, i.e., evidentially supported and logical, response to a doxastic disagreement with one's supposed epistemic peer?

A crucial factor in answering this is the balance one should have between epistemic self-trust and trust in one's peer (hereon "peer-trust"). When locked in disagreement with Solomon, is it epistemically rational for me to trust my epistemic faculties—senses, inferential capacities, etc.—more than his? The Symmetry View says it is not—I should have equal self-trust and peer-trust. This supports lowering confidence or suspending judgement. The Asymmetry View (hereon "AV"), meanwhile, says I should have more self-trust than peer-trust unless I have case-specific reasons not to (hereon "specific defeaters"). A possible specific defeater is that I am drunk while Solomon is not, since this means his faculties are probably more reliable on this occasion. AV thus supports maintaining confidence, absent such a specific defeater.

In this essay, I argue that AV is wrong as a general principle of how to balance epistemic self-trust and peer-trust.¹ Except in some rare and unrealistic cases, it is not epistemically rational to have more self-trust than peer-trust, even absent specific defeaters.

I begin by explicating what I deem the most compelling argument for AV: Enoch's argument from the ineliminability of the first-person perspective (hereon "1PP"). I then turn to Peter's objection that one of Enoch's premises is misleading and consider how Enoch might respond by distinguishing between two types of epistemic rationality. Thereafter, I maintain that, even with this distinction in place, said premise remains in trouble because it ignores two general defeaters, i.e., defeaters that arise in virtually all peer disagreements: (i) our recognition of our own epistemic fallibility and (ii) our appreciation of higher-order symmetry. This means AV, as a general principle, must fall. I concede that Enoch could defend a more modest version of AV by altering the offending

¹While this undermines a crucial source of support for the option of maintaining confidence, I do not address whether we should ultimately reject said option. My focus is squarely on the balance of trust during peer disagreements.

premise to account for these general defeaters. Nonetheless, I stress that this modified principle is applicable only in rare and indeed unrealistic cases.

2 Enoch: Argument for AV

Enoch begins by observing that my iPP has an “ineliminable role” in the “form[ation] and revisi[on] [of my] beliefs”.² That is, to determine what to believe, I must rely on how things seem to *my* epistemic faculties. This makes epistemic self-trust necessary for getting me anywhere in my epistemic life.³

Among my beliefs, Enoch points out, are those about the reliability of others.^{4 5} Even in judgements I make of another’s reliability, and thus of how much to trust them, then, my iPP is ineliminable. To determine how much peer-trust to have in Solomon, I must rely on *my* faculties to assess how reliable his are.

But *how* do my faculties assess Solomon’s? Enoch says it surely has to heavily involve how often *my* faculties consider *his* correct on chocolate-related matters, i.e., on his epistemic track record regarding chocolate *as I see it* (or *as it seems from my iPP*).⁶ Each time he is right *as I see it*, I gain evidence that he is as reliable as I am.⁷ Each time he is wrong *as I see it*, I gain evidence that he is less reliable than I am.

Given this evidential situation, Enoch concludes that, absent specific defeaters, whenever one disagrees with someone they initially regard as an epistemic peer, one should come to trust said peer less in light of that very disagreement.⁸ I have, drawing on past conversations, judged Solomon to be equally reliable. Hence, prior to our disagreement, I should have equal self-trust and peer-trust. However, I now deem him wrong about the mousse. This makes it epistemically rational for me to demote him from peerhood, i.e., to trust his faculties less than mine.⁹

For clarity, Enoch’s argument may be rendered thus:

P1) My iPP is ineliminable from my assessment of my peer’s reliability.

P2) If P1, then a significant part of my evidence for my peer’s reliability is their track record *as I see it*.

SC) A significant part of my evidence for my peer’s reliability is their track record *as I see it*. [from P1 and P2]

P3) If SC, then absent specific defeaters, it is epistemically rational for me to have more epistemic self-trust than peer-trust during a disagreement.

C) Absent specific defeaters, it is epistemically rational for me to have more epistemic self-trust than peer-trust during a disagreement. [from SC and P3]

3 Peter: Track Record Misleads

In response to Enoch, Peter holds that using my peer’s track record in the way he describes would mislead me, for it neglects the possibility that the disagreement could be the result of my, and

²Enoch, “Not Just a Truthometer”, 962.

³Enoch, 980.

⁴Enoch, 973.

⁵Rattan, “Disagreement and the First-Person Perspective”, 36.

⁶Enoch, 973.

⁷So, for Enoch, Solomon’s being right *as I see it* would not offer me evidence that he is *more* reliable than I am. Absent specific defeaters, then, my self-trust would, as Schafer puts it, “constrain” my peer-trust; see Schafer, “How Common Is Peer Disagreement?”, 31.

⁸Enoch, 974, 980.

⁹This procedure for determining how to balance self-trust and peer-trust may immediately strike the reader as question begging. See Enoch, 980-1, for his reply that such question begging is unproblematic and indeed necessary to prevent radical scepticism. I find this reply suspicious, but do not contest it in what follows, since radical scepticism is beyond the scope of this essay.

not Solomon's, getting things wrong.¹⁰ Since I have antecedently judged him to be my peer on chocolates, I should deem him no more likely than I am to err on a chocolate related-matter. When the disagreement about the mousse arises, then, it should be unclear to me which one of us has arrived at the wrong conclusion. I cannot simply assume he is the one who is wrong just because he is wrong *as I see it*. Hence, I do not actually have reason to trust him less.

If Peter is correct, then P₃ is misleading and false. That a significant part of my evidence for Solomon's reliability is his track record *as I see it* does not make it epistemically rational for me to trust him less than myself when we disagree. Such a demotion, Peter emphasises, would make sense only if I can eliminate the possibility that my opinion about the mousse is wrong, and thus be assured that it is Solomon who has erred.¹¹

4 Enoch: First-Person VS Third-Person Epistemic Rationality

Enoch, however, might reply that Peter fails to appreciate the evidential situation of my 1PP as party to the disagreement. My epistemic faculties have processed direct evidence—sensory inputs and relevant background knowledge—about the mousse and concluded that it is made from Guanaja.¹² From my 1PP, then, Solomon is wrong. Crucially, Enoch acknowledges the possibility that, as a matter of fact, Solomon is not wrong¹³—this is the heart of Peter's objection. However, he insists that, since the direct evidence *as seen from my 1PP* supports the conclusion that Solomon is wrong, this conclusion is legitimate evidence *for my 1PP* that he is less reliable than I am.¹⁴ Thus, Enoch maintains that I am epistemically rational in having more self-trust than peer-trust. For clarity, he could specify that I am *first-person* epistemically rational in so balancing my trust, a balance of trust being rational in this sense if it is supported by the evidence *as seen from the trust giver's 1PP*.

Contrastingly, Enoch might hold, Peter's picture of the disagreement presupposes the evidential situation of one who takes the third-person perspective (hereon "3PP") to it.¹⁵ Suppose Peter consults Solomon and me on the mousse. She deems us equally well informed and reliable, and thus deserving of equal trust on the matter. I say it is made from Guanaja and Solomon denies this. At least one of us must be wrong, but she has no evidence as to what the mousse is made of other than her prior evidence that Solomon and I deserve equal trust and our currently conflicting testimonies.¹⁶ Since she has no direct evidence about the mousse like we do, it is unclear to her which one of us has erred.¹⁷ Thus, an explanation of the disagreement in terms of Solomon's being less reliable is, as seen from her 3PP, no more reasonable than one in terms of my being less reliable. This explains why my having more self-trust than peer-trust looks like the result of my being misled, and thus irrational, from her 3PP. Indeed, Enoch could specify that it is admittedly not *third-person* epistemically rational for me to have more self-trust than peer-trust because *the evidential situation of the 3PP* to the disagreement does not support this balance.

Hence, Peter, as occupant of the 3PP, can charge me with irrationality. I might even appreciate from my 1PP that she could do so from her 3PP, and thus understand that it would be third-person irrational for me to have more self-trust than peer-trust.¹⁸ However, Enoch would insist, it is, in a different sense, epistemically rational for me, as occupant of a 1PP in the disagreement, to have such a balance of trust, since this is what my 1PP's evidential situation supports. I can be first-person

¹⁰Peter, "Epistemic Self-Trust and Doxastic Disagreements", 1196.

¹¹Peter, 1196.

¹²Enoch, 986, fn. 62.

¹³Enoch, 984.

¹⁴Enoch, 984.

¹⁵Enoch, 960-2.

¹⁶Enoch, 986, fn. 62.

¹⁷If she obtains direct evidence and forms a belief about the mousse based on it, she will automatically be party to the disagreement. Her 1PP might side with mine or Solomon's, or perhaps disagree with both.

¹⁸Enoch, 986, fn. 62.

rational while being third-person irrational.¹⁹

With this distinction between two types of epistemic rationality in place, Enoch might say that what he is really arguing for is not that it is epistemically rational *simpliciter* for me to have more self-trust than peer-trust given Solomon's track record *as I see it*. Rather, it is *first-person* rational. Hence, Peter's criticism, which highlights my *third-person* irrationality, poses no threat to P₃. For clarity, Enoch might alter P₃ as such:

P₃*) If SC, then absent specific defeaters, it is *first-person* epistemically rational for me to have more epistemic self-trust than peer-trust during a disagreement.

In what follows, then, I take C* to be the general principle of balancing self-trust and peer-trust that Enoch defends:

C*) Absent specific defeaters, it is *first-person* epistemically rational for me to have more epistemic self-trust than peer-trust during a disagreement.

5 Does the Distinction Really Protect Enoch's Argument?

Even accepting the aforementioned distinction, however, Enoch's argument is left open to Peter's criticism, for I can appreciate *from my IPP* that I am epistemically fallible.

As noted above, Peter highlights that Solomon's being wrong *as I see it* can license my demoting him only if I can eliminate the possibility that I am wrong, and thus be assured that it is in fact Solomon who has erred. However, I, like most, can appreciate even from my IPP that my faculties are fallible. I acknowledge that I am not fully reliable even as regards chocolate, so I have no reason to think my answer secured from error. Therefore, I should indeed consider the possibility that it is because I have erred that Solomon and I are locked in disagreement, just as Peter counsels. Moreover, since our past conversations have evidenced to my IPP that we are equally reliable, his erring would seem no more likely than mine. My appreciation of my fallibility thus defeats my purported licence to have more self-trust than peer-trust.

To diagnose where Enoch's argument goes astray, I call attention to how Enoch states that my peer's track record *as I see it* is "a *significant* part of [my] evidence as to [his] reliability"²⁰ and yet seems to assume it is the *only* relevant evidence for my peer's reliability, absent specific defeaters.²¹ He does not acknowledge defeating evidence other than specific defeaters like drunkenness that would be relevant to peer disagreements. However, it would be epistemically irrational for me to balance my trust without accounting for another important piece of evidence, i.e., my fallibility. This would be to privilege a subset of my total evidence, and thus be misled, as Peter maintains.

6 The Upshot and A Pushback

It should be underlined that recognition of one's fallibility is commonplace and thus a general defeater, i.e., a defeater that would affect virtually any peer disagreement. This should make it extremely clear that P₃* is false. In just about any case, recognition of one's fallibility would be present to defeat one's purported licence to demote one's peer, making such demotion first-person irrational despite the significance of the peer's track record *as one sees it*. Enoch's argument is thus unsound, and AV as a general principle of how to balance trust is undermined.

Admittedly, Enoch could push back with counterexamples. What about cases wherein an agent has no recognition of their fallibility? If I am infallible as regards chocolate, for example, no evidence of my fallibility in this domain could arise. Or perhaps, even if I am fallible, I could be truly ignorant about or have forgotten any evidence of this. If so, then it should be first-person

¹⁹Cf. Foley's distinction between internalist and externalist justifications; see Foley, *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others*, 21.

²⁰Enoch, 973; emphasis added.

²¹Indeed, Peter takes Enoch to consider the track record the only relevant evidence; see Peter, 1194.

rational for me to trust myself more than Solomon, for this would be supported by evidence I actually possess—namely, his track record *as I see it*. And it would not do, Enoch might maintain, to object that being ignorant or forgetful are epistemic failings. For, as Foley observes, not every epistemic failing constitutes irrationality.²² So long as I respond to all relevant evidence accessible to my iPP, I am first-person rational. Thus, Enoch could propose that P_3^* be tweaked as such:

P_3^{**}) If SC, then absent specific defeaters and recognition of my fallibility, it is *first-person* epistemically rational for me to have more epistemic self-trust than peer-trust during a disagreement.

This pushback seems reasonable, and while it cannot salvage AV, it at least allows Enoch to defend a modified version of it, as captured by C^{**} :

C^{**}) Absent specific defeaters and recognition of my fallibility, it is *first-person* epistemically rational for me to have more epistemic self-trust than peer-trust during a disagreement.

Yet, I stress again that recognition of one's fallibility is commonplace. It is foolish to think any human could be infallible in a given domain. Moreover, aside from the highly delusional or cognitively impaired, it would be practically impossible for us who are so constantly and thoroughly fallible to remain ignorant or forgetful of this human predicament. Thus, this modified AV licenses demoting one's peer only in very rare and indeed unrealistic cases.

Unfortunately for Enoch, even P_3^{**} would not be enough to patch up his argument, for P_3^* faces a problem other than that which this new premise is designed to circumvent.

7 Christensen and Rattan: Revenge of Higher-Order Symmetry

I shall look at two ways this problem could be framed.

Christensen presents it as follows.²³ That I disagree with Solomon counts against his reliability—this aligns with P_3^* . However, that he—someone I have antecedently judged from my iPP to be equally reliable—disagrees with me also counts against my reliability, and this is something I can appreciate even from my iPP. Hence, while P_3^* licenses demoting Solomon in light of his track record *as I see it*, it seems, even from my iPP, that I should demote myself too. Thus, I can appreciate a higher-order symmetry between us. Ultimately, Solomon and I should appear equally reliable to my iPP, which defeats my having more self-trust than peer-trust, *contra* P_3^* .

Meanwhile, Rattan, taking inspiration from Christensen, puts the problem thus.²⁴ P_3^* licenses anyone to asymmetrically privilege their own faculties in the balance of self-trust and peer-trust, given their peer's track record. Therefore, when Solomon and I disagree, I can appeal to P_3^* to privilege my faculties and Solomon can make a similar appeal for his. That Solomon can do so is something I can appreciate from my iPP, which means I can appreciate a higher-order symmetry between us. This pushes my iPP towards according equal trust to our faculties, *contra* P_3^* .

7.1 Enoch: Higher-Order Symmetry is Irrelevant

Enoch, however, insists that higher-order symmetry is no threat to his argument.²⁵ When I demote Solomon in light of our disagreement, he emphasises, I am *not* demoting him on this basis: "Solomon believes it is not Guanaja, whereas *I believe it is Guanaja*", i.e., we have different beliefs. If I am, Enoch concedes, the disagreement should count equally against both parties and thereby generate higher-order symmetry. However, my iPP's actual basis for demotion is this: "Solomon believes it is not Guanaja, whereas *it is Guanaja*", i.e., Solomon is wrong. This means

²²Foley, 42.

²³Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement", 196.

²⁴Rattan, 34.

²⁵Enoch, 981-3.

the disagreement in no way commits me to symmetry, forwards Enoch, for only Solomon seems wrong from my iPP. I am therefore first-person rational in trusting my faculties more.

However, I shall contend that this reply fails for two closely related reasons.

8 Higher-Order Symmetry's Revenge is Not Over

First, even the asymmetry Enoch uses in attempt to fend off the problem can give rise to appreciation of higher-order symmetry. Yes, when I disagree with Solomon, I deem him wrong. But, surely, I can also appreciate from my iPP that Solomon thinks, from his iPP, that I am wrong. Individuals considering each other wrong is constitutive of disagreement, after all. This generates a higher-order symmetry my iPP can appreciate. Moreover, since my iPP has antecedently judged him to be equally reliable, an explanation of our each taking the other wrong in terms of his being less reliable should strike my iPP as no more reasonable than one in terms of my being less reliable, *contra* P₃*.

Secondly, it seems this higher-order symmetry I have just highlighted is already embedded in the aforementioned presentations of the problem, which means Enoch's reply attacks a strawman. To illustrate, let us look closer at how Christensen and Rattan frame it.

Christensen writes that "my discovering that my friend has reached what seems to me to be the *wrong* conclusion does constitute evidence that [he] has made a *mistake*" and that "the fact that [he] disagrees with [me] also constitutes evidence that I have made a *mistake*".²⁶ Rattan, meanwhile, writes that it initially seems I can leverage P₃* because "only *my* reasoning appears *right* from my [iPP]" and that my peer can make a "*similar* invocation" of her iPP.²⁷

Both philosophers present the problem in terms of my deeming my peer wrong and myself right as well as recognition that my peer deems me wrong and himself right. Neither seems to be concerned with the mere difference in belief Enoch targets.²⁸

9 Enoch: Can You Really Appreciate Higher-Order Symmetry?

There is, however, another response Enoch might offer. Enoch recognises that Solomon considers me wrong and himself right,²⁹ but nowhere acknowledges that this asymmetry, and thus the higher-order symmetry, can be appreciated from my iPP. Perhaps Enoch might use this as the basis for a pushback. For if it turns out that one cannot appreciate the relevant higher-order symmetry from their iPP, then it may be first-person rational for them to trust themselves more than their peer.

However, in most cases, parties to a peer disagreement would be able to appreciate that their opponent thinks they are wrong, and thus the relevant higher-order symmetry. This means such appreciation constitutes another general defeater. To illustrate this, I return to my disagreement with Solomon. I can appreciate that, from Solomon's iPP, he thinks "this fool believes it is Guanaja, whereas *it is not* Guanaja", i.e., that I am wrong. That is why I naturally want to persuade him to think "*it is* Guanaja", i.e., that while he thinks I am wrong, I am actually right. If I can only appreciate that our beliefs are different, however, I would think that from his iPP, he only thinks "this fool believes it is Guanaja, whereas *I believe it is not* Guanaja". But my natural urge during a disagreement is not to persuade him to think "*I believe it is* Guanaja", i.e., that while he thinks he has a view different from mine, he actually does not. I take it that, in virtually every case of peer disagreement, we are similarly disposed to persuade our peers to *believe as we believe*, and not to *believe that they actually believe as we believe*. Perhaps this means we are *naturally disposed* to trust ourselves more than our peers during disagreements with them. Crucially, though, it also evidences that we do indeed appreciate our peers' considering us wrong, and thus the relevant

²⁶Christensen, 196; emphases added.

²⁷Rattan, 34; last two emphases added.

²⁸It seems the underlying problem is that Enoch misinterprets Christensen's argument; see bottom of Enoch, 975.

²⁹Enoch, 984.

higher-order symmetry, which makes us *first-person rationally required* to have equal self-trust and peer-trust.

Admittedly, if I truly cannot appreciate that Solomon thinks I am wrong, it may indeed be first-person rational, though in another sense an epistemic blunder, for me to trust my faculties more than his. But it is hard to even imagine cases wherein one cannot appreciate that one's disagreeing peer thinks one is wrong.

10 Another Upshot and Another Possible Pushback

First-personal appreciation that my peer thinks I am wrong, and thus of higher-order symmetry, offers another reason to deem P_3^* false. This reinforces that AV is wrong as a general principle.

Moreover, given such appreciation, even P_3^{**} would not be enough to repair Enoch's argument. Absent specific defeaters and recognition of my fallibility, if I can appreciate that someone I have antecedently judged to be equally reliable thinks I am wrong, and thus appreciate the relevant higher-order symmetry between us, it would not be first-person rational to have more self-trust than peer-trust. Indeed, if I did not obtain evidence of my fallibility prior to our disagreement, that my peer thinks I am wrong now supplies such evidence, which should make me aware of said fallibility.

If Enoch wants to insist that there are still some cases wherein it is first-person rational to have more self-trust than peer-trust, he would have to tweak P_3^{**} and C^{**} as such:

P_3^{***}) If SC, then absent specific defeaters, recognition of my fallibility, and appreciation that my peer thinks I am wrong, it is *first-person* epistemically rational for me to have more epistemic self-trust than peer-trust during a disagreement.

C^{***}) Absent specific defeaters, recognition of my fallibility, and appreciation that my peer thinks I am wrong, it is *first-person* epistemically rational for me to have more epistemic self-trust than peer-trust during a disagreement.

I take it as uncontroversial, however, that cases wherein a party to a disagreement lacks *all* defeaters mentioned in C^{***} are extremely rare and unrealistic, which foregrounds just how limited in applicability this modified AV is.

11 Conclusion

To conclude, AV is wrong as a general principle of how to balance epistemic self-trust and peer-trust, despite Enoch's argument from the ineliminability of one's iPP in assessing an epistemic peer's reliability. While Enoch assumes said ineliminability entails that, absent specific defeaters, we should always deem our peers wrong, and thus deserving of less trust, in light of our disagreements, Peter rightly notes that this ignores the possibility that it is we who have erred. Though Enoch might dismiss this objection by distinguishing between first- and third-person forms of epistemic rationality, Peter's criticism still holds because of the general defeater that is our first-personal recognition of our epistemic fallibility. Moreover, our first-personal appreciation that our peers deem us wrong, and thus of higher-order symmetry, constitutes another general defeater of AV's counsel to trust oneself more than one's disagreeing peer. Moreover, while Enoch might alter one of his premises to sidestep these defeaters and defend a modified AV, this modified principle licenses having more self-trust than peer-trust only in rare and indeed unrealistic cases.

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