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The argument from variation against using one's own intuitions as evidence

Esther Goh – BA Student.
Nanyang Technological University.
50 Nanyang Ave, Singapore, 639798, Singapore.
e-mail: Esth0016@e.ntu.edu.sg

In philosophical methodology, intuitions are used as evidence to support philosophical theories. In this paper, I evaluate the skeptical argument that variation in intuitions is good evidence that our intuitions are unreliable, and so we should be skeptical about our theories. I argue that the skeptical argument is false. First, variation only shows that at least one disputant is wrong in the dispute, but each disputant lacks reason to determine who is wrong. Second, even though variation in intuitions shows that at least one disputant has the wrong intuition in the thought experiment, it is not evidence of unreliability of *any* disputant's intuition regarding the philosophical theory being tested. So, variation in intuitions is not good evidence that *one's own* intuitions are unreliable. One reply from the literature in peer disagreement is that we should conciliate if we cannot determine who is wrong. I argue that these disagreements are instead *unconfirmed* peer disagreements (i.e., no good reason to take or dismiss disputants as an epistemic peer, inferior or superior). I argue that if you have a strong intuition about a case, then it is rational for you to remain steadfast. Thus, variation in intuitions does not call for skepticism.

Keywords: metaphilosophy, philosophical methodology, intuitions, experimental philosophy, epistemology of disagreement, peer disagreement

Аргумент вариативности: против использования интуиций в качестве доказательств

Эстер Го – студент-бакалавр.
Наньянский технологический университет.
50 Nanyang Ave, Сингапур, 639798, Сингапур.
e-mail: Esth0016@e.ntu.edu.sg

В философской методологии интуиции используются в качестве средств обоснования философских теорий. В этой статье автор анализирует скептический аргумент о том, что вариативность интуиций указывает на их ненадежность. Это обстоятельство, в свою очередь, ведет к скепсису в отношении основанных на них теорий. Однако автор полагает, что скептический аргумент ложен. Во-первых, вариативность указывает только на то, что, по крайней мере, один спорщик неправ, однако у нас недостаточных оснований для того, чтобы определить, кто именно неправ. Во-вторых, вариативность интуиций сама по себе не говорит о ненадежности интуиции какого-либо спорщика в отношении проверяемой философской теории. Таким образом, вариативность интуиций вообще не означает, что какая-то конкретная интуиция ненадежна. При этом в ряде работ отстаивается позиция о том, что спорщики должны примириться, если не могут определить, кто именно неправ. Однако автор отстаивает противоположную позицию. Он утверждает, что эти разногласия, напротив, являются разногласиями *предположительно* равных (т. е., у нас нет веских оснований для

признания спорщиков в качестве эпистемической ровни, равно как и для признания превосходства одного из них). Автор полагает, что при наличии уверенности в некоторой интуиции разумно следовать ей. Автор заключает, что тезис о вариативности интуиций не приводит к скептицизму.

Ключевые слова: метафилософия, философская методология, интуиции, экспериментальная философия, эпистемология несогласия, разногласия равных

Objection From Variation In Intuitions

In traditional philosophical methodology, intuitions are used as evidence to support philosophical theories.[1] Typically, these intuitions are elicited through thought experiments designed to test necessity and/or sufficiency philosophical theories. [Osborne, 2014, p. 444] According to Edouard Machery and Alvin Goldman, authors of such thought experiments describe a hypothetical situation and invite readers to make an intuitive judgment about an aspect of the described scenario.[2] For example, they may ask, "Does a given predicate 'F' apply to an event, an individual, a pair of objects, etc. in the scenario?" [Goldman 2012, p. 280] If the reader's intuitive judgment supports the hypothesised philosophical theory, then the reader has evidence that the hypothesised philosophical theory is true. If the reader's intuitive judgment does not support the hypothesised philosophical theory, then the reader has evidence that the hypothesised philosophical theory is false. To illustrate, consider the following variant of the Gettier case used to test the philosophical theory that "Subject *S* knows *p* iff subject *S* has a justified true belief that *p*":

> "Suppose, while in good conditions for visual perception, you look up at the top of a hill and see what looks exactly like a zebra. Suppose further that you are in a location where zebras are somewhat commonplace. You then justifiably form the belief 'There is a zebra on the hill.' In reality, the 'zebra' is a cleverly painted mule; just behind the mule, outside of your visual reach, is an actual zebra on the hill." [Osborne, 2014, p. 444]

Philosophers then ask, "Do you know that there is a zebra on the hill?" Intuitively, it seems you do not. Here, Osborne offers a helpful heuristic to understand how the refutation of the theory is carried out by constructing the following argument:

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1 For a contrary view that says philosophers do not use intuitions as evidence, see [Williamson, 2007], [Deutsch, 2009, 2010], [Cappelen, 2012] and [Molyneux, 2014]. For defence of the claim that philosophers use intuitions as evidence, see [Pust, 2016], [Chalmers, 2014, pp. 535–544], [Devitt, 2015, pp. 669–699], [Climenhaga, 2017, pp. 69–104].

2 See [Machery, 2011, p. 194] and [Goldman, 2012, p. 280].

1. The subject has a justified true belief that there is a zebra on the hill. *(from the thought experiment)*
2. The subject does not know that there is a zebra on the hill. *(from the reader's intuition)*
3. Therefore, justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge. [Osborne, 2014, p. 444]

Osborne notes that the reader need not explicitly construct the argument above and accept each premise to be justified in inferring the falsehood of the hypothesised philosophical theory that "Subject *S* knows *p* iff subject *S* has a justified true belief that *p*". [Osborne, 2014, p. 444] However, the argument makes two things explicit. First, it shows clearly that the reader's intuition is used as evidence to justify his rejection of the theory. Next, it shows that the reader's *own* intuition is evidence *for him* that the theory is false. If the reader had the opposing intuition – that the subject *knows* that there is a zebra on the hill – then he would have evidence to justify his belief that the theory is *true*. For this use of intuitions to be justified, the following thesis must be true:

UOIE (Using-Own-Intuitions-as-Evidence): It is epistemically justified to use one's own intuitions as evidence for philosophical theories.

There is another way intuitions are used as evidence in philosophical methodology: through using the intuitions of others. For example, widespread agreement in intuitions regarding a particular case, say c, is evidence for philosophical theories that agree with the verdict in c.[3] Thus, if most people have intuitions that agree with premise (2) of Osborne's argument, we also have evidence that "Subject *S* knows *p* iff subject *S* has a justified true belief that *p*" is *false*. Less commonly, though possible, one may also use the intuitions of others as evidence for philosophical theories even if: (a) one lacks reason to think that there is widespread agreement, and/or (b) one has reason to believe that there is widespread disagreement, and/or (c) one has the conflicting intuition, and/or (d) one lacks the intuition.

Here is the problem. Experimental philosophers working on intuitions have raised findings that cast doubt on the evidential status of intuitions. According to Jonathan Weinberg, philosophers such as Robert Cummins argue that "our best possible accounts of where intuitions can come from do not square well with our hopes that they are any sort of reliable guide to a truth beyond themselves" [Weinberg, 2007, p. 318], while philosophers such as Stephen Stich and Jaakko Hintikka have argued that "intuitions can have no normative epistemic force, are ungrounded in any theory of their correct use, are unreliable, and generally speak-

[3] For example, [Machery et al., 2011] writes that the philosophers working in philosophy of language try to construct theories of reference that are consistent with our intuitions.

ing ought to be abandoned with the likes of palmistry and entrail reading" because intuitions have a lousy track record.[4] [Stich, 1990] and [Hintikka, 1999] There are thus multiple challenges to using *anyone's* intuitions as evidence.

In this paper, I evaluate the following skeptical argument (henceforth Variation-in-Intuitions-Argument):

> P1. There is variation in intuitions.
> P2. Variation in intuitions is good evidence that our intuitions are unreliable.
> P3. If our intuitions are unreliable, then we should be skeptical of our theories.
> C. We should be skeptical of our theories.

By variation in intuitions, I mean that different people have different intuitions regarding the same case. The conclusion of the Variation-in-Intuitions-Argument entails that UOIE is false. Goldman (2012) offers a possible interpretation of the Variation-in-Intuitions-Argument using the reliable-indicator construal of evidence.

> Reliable-indicator Criterion: X is evidence for Y if and only if X is a (fairly) reliable sign, or indicator, of (the truth or existence) of Y. [Goldman, 2012, p. 283]

On the reliable-indicator construal of evidence, intuitions are evidence for philosophical theories if and only if intuitions are a (fairly) reliable sign, or indicator, of the truth of those philosophical theories. Goldman thinks experimental philosophers have provided defeasible higher-order evidence (i.e., defeasible evidence about the evidential quality of intuitional evidence) that intuitions are unreliable by showing that there is variation in intuitions. [Goldman, 2012, p. 286] In other words, Goldman thinks that variation in intuitions implies unreliability in *everyone's* intuitions; including our own intuitions. For example, Goldman notes a study on Gettier cases by Jonathan Weinberg, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen Stich that shows that there is variation in intuitions. In their research, they found that 50% of East Asians and only 26% of Westerners had the intuition that the subject knows in the Gettier case. [Goldman, 2012, p. 286] Thus, we see both variations in intuitions within and between different cultural groups. One might object that their studies cannot be replicated, or question the way they conducted their experiment.[5] If one does so, one has provided higher order evidence that defeats the evidence presented by the findings of experimental philosophers. [Goldman, 2012, p. 288] I will, however, set these

[4] See [Weinberg, 2007, p. 318], [Cummins, 1998], [Stich, 1990] and [Hintikka, 1999].
[5] See for example [Seyedsayamdost, 2015].

issues aside. Assuming that there indeed is variation, should this call for skepticism of our philosophical theories that are supported by our disputed intuitions?

To see why Goldman thinks that variation implies unreliability, suppose in the above variant of the Gettier case, 30% of readers judge that they know that there is a zebra on the hill while 70% of readers judge that they do not know that there is a zebra on the hill. Call this scenario the *Disputed-Gettier-Case*. Since there is only one right answer – either they know, or they do not know, at least 30% of the readers have judged wrongly. If so, it would seem that the readers' intuitions are not reliable indicators of the truth of the philosophical theory "Subject *S* knows *p* iff subject *S* has a justified true belief that *p*." If our intuitions are not reliable indicators, then we have reason against using them as evidence for the philosophical theory "Subject *S* knows *p* iff subject *S* has a justified true belief that *p*."

When generalised to any given thought experiment where the readers have contrary judgments, say p and not-p, assuming that there is one right answer, at least one group made the wrong judgment. [Goldman, 2012, p. 288] Furthermore, if there is high variation in thought experiments, it is less likely that our intuitions get the right judgments (e.g., if there is a 50/50 split, we will only make the right judgment 50% of the time). [Goldman, 2012, p. 288] Thus, variation in intuitions is evidence that our intuitions are unreliable in such disputes, and consequently cannot be used as evidence for the truth of such disputes (i.e., UOIE is false). So, we should be skeptical of philosophical theories relying on intuitions that vary amongst readers.

To further motivate the Variation-in-Intuitions-Argument, consider two recent instances of variation regarding our sense perception. The first concerns the actual colour of a dress – whether the dress is blue and black or white and gold. The second concerns whether a speaker is actually saying "yanny" or "laurel".[6] In both cases, a large majority of subjects claim that only one option can be right and seems right to them.[7] Sense perception thus seems to be an unreliable indicator of the truth of those disputed matters, for consider: Assuming that only one answer is correct, if 50% believed that the speaker was only saying "laurel" while the other 50% believed that the speaker was only saying "yanny", then at least 50% are wrong. If so, sense perception produces the wrong belief at least 50% of the time in such cases; thus, it does not reliably track truth regarding the

6 See www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-31656935 and [Salam, 2018].

7 I do note that there have been recent scientific explanations behind the variation in perceptual judgments and it has come to light that there is no particular "right" answer. However, suppose we were unaware of the scientific explanations. We seem to have good reasons to believe that only one answer is right. Would we then have good evidence to think that our senses were unreliable?

yanny/laurel debate. Such cases hence seem to be evidence that the human sense faculty is unreliable regarding those disputed matters (i.e., we have reason to doubt that human hearing can correctly distinguish between "yanny" and "laurel"). Given this, we should not trust anyone's senses in such disputes.

One further clarification should be made: A single case of variation in sense perception does not provide sufficient evidence that sense perception is generally unreliable. We do not conclude that everyone's sense perception is unreliable in *all* perceptual matters because of the disagreement about the dress colour and whether the speaker said "yanny" or "laurel". Similarly, we should not conclude from a single case of variation in intuition (e.g., *Disputed-Gettier-Case*) that everyone's intuitions are generally unreliable in tracking the truth of *all* philosophical theories. Minimally, we must show that there is a significantly large number of disputed intuitions (for example, as evidenced by the burgeoning literature in experimental philosophy) to plausibly claim that everyone's intuitions are unreliable in tracking the truth of all philosophical theories.

One may object at this point that even if experimental philosophers can show that there are many cases where our intuition seems to be unreliable, we should not immediately conclude that intuition is generally unreliable in tracking the truth of all philosophical theories. This is because we do not make such conclusions in other fields. Consider sense perception again. Although we can show that there are many cases where our sense perception seem to be unreliable indicators of perceptual truths (e.g., visual illusions where sense perception has a significant likelihood of being wrong), we do not conclude that perception is generally unreliable in all perceptual matters. Similarly, even if there are many cases where our intuition has a significant likelihood of being wrong, we should not conclude that intuition is generally unreliable in tracking the truth of *all* philosophical theories.

However, the reason why we do not conclude that everyone's perception is generally unreliable is that we have independent evidence to think that the number of cases where our perception is accurate far outweighs the number of cases of visual illusions. If our evidence showed us that the number of visual illusions we have far outweighed the number of cases where our perception is accurate, we should conclude that our perception is generally unreliable regarding the truth of all perceptual matters. After all, we would conclude that our perception is generally unreliable if we found out that evil demons were constantly deceiving us about the external world and that all our perceptual beliefs were false. We cannot say the same about intuitions – we do not have independent evidence to think that the number of cases where our intuitions get it right outweighs the cases where our intuitions get it wrong. Thus, the kinds of considerations that make it rational to think that perception is reliable do not vindicate UOIE.

Reliability Of One's Own Intuitions

In this section, I argue that evidence of variation in intuitions elicited by thought experiment T, that is used to test philosophical theory P, is *not* evidence of unreliability of *our own* intuitions regarding P. For example, variation in intuitions in *Disputed-Gettier-Case* is not evidence of unreliability of our own intuitions regarding the theory "Subject *S* knows *p* iff subject *S* has a justified true belief that *p*." My first argument is that variation in intuitions only shows that at least one disputant's intuition (elicited by T to test P) is wrong, but each disputant lacks reason to determine who is wrong. So, variation in intuitions is not evidence that *our own* intuitions are wrong. This is for three reasons. First, since there is only one right answer in the dispute, parties that disagree cannot both be right. Second, we cannot conclude from variation that both (or all of the) parties are wrong because it is possible that one of the disputants got it right. Thus, variation only shows that at least one disputant is wrong. Finally, variation in intuitions cannot show who is wrong in the dispute because such variation only shows that at least *someone* is wrong; it does not say who is wrong. One must have evidence independent of the dispute to identify who is wrong. So, variation in intuitions is itself not evidence that *our own* intuitions are wrong (or that the intuitions of one's disputants are wrong).

My second argument is that even though variation in intuitions (elicited by T to test P) shows that at least one disputant has the wrong intuition in T, it is *not* evidence of unreliability of *any* disputant's intuitions regarding P. This is because the concept of wrongness and one's reliability can come apart. That is, it is possible for both parties to be reliable and yet one of the disputants is wrong. Consider the following scenario: Suppose Sammy is 99% reliable regarding mental calculations. He is a mental calculations expert. You give him a restaurant bill to calculate and, in this instance, he makes the wrong calculation. Even though he makes the wrong calculation, we do not conclude that the reliability of Sammy's mental calculation decreased when he was calculating *this* restaurant bill. Rather, the likelihood of him making the right calculation regarding this restaurant bill is still 99%, and this instance is part of the 1% likelihood that he gets it wrong. If this is not intuitive, suppose instead of Sammy, we have a 99% reliable calculator. We use the calculator to calculate the bill, and in this instance, it makes the wrong calculation. Here, we do not conclude that the calculator is unreliable; it is still 99% reliable. Instead, this instance is part of the 1% likelihood that the calculator gets the calculation wrong. Similarly, showing that one disputant is wrong in this instance is not evidence that the disputant who got it wrong is unreliable. Given my above two arguments, we can conclude that variation in intuitions is not evidence of unreliability of our own intuitions. Thus, the challenge against UOIE fails.

How about the previously mentioned perception cases (i.e., disagreement about the colour of the dress and the yanny/laurel debate)? Those cases seem to show us that variation in perceptual judgments should give us reason to conclude that our sense perception is not reliable in such cases. Before I offer my reply, it is important to note that both perception cases (e.g., the yanny/laurel debate) and cases of intuition (e.g., *Disputed-Gettier-Case*) seem to rely on the assumption that our intuitions and perception are all (generally) equally likely to get us right belief. This is because we knew that we had unequal levels of reliability regarding perception and intuitions, we would expect variation in perceptual and intuitive judgments. However, this is an assumption left undefended.

Nonetheless, I will grant for now that we are all (generally) equally likely to have the right intuition. Given that we are all (generally) equally likely to have the right intuition, one might argue as follows: If disputants are equally likely to make the right intuitive judgments about cases that involve philosophical theories, then they are also equally likely to make the wrong intuitive judgments about cases that involve philosophical theories. If these disputants are equally likely to make the wrong intuitive judgments about cases that involve philosophical theories, then they are equally likely to make the wrong intuitive judgments in *Disputed-Gettier-Case*. If so, showing that one of the disputants made a mistake in *Disputed-Gettier-Case* allows us to infer that the other disputant would have been *equally likely to make that same mistake* in *Disputed-Gettier-Case*. So, it seems that even if the other disputant made the right judgment, it would be by mere luck. Thus, both are unreliable in *Disputed-Gettier-Case*. Similarly, the perceptual disputes above seem to show that we are individually unreliable in those matters because we have independent reason to believe that we are already equally reliable regarding perception (e.g., the biology behind how we see and hear is the same in most adults, the person disagreeing with us seem to have no medical record of having bad eyesight or hearing disabilities, etc.). Given that we have independent reason to believe that we are equally reliable, we should think that we are equally reliable in tracking truth in the disputed matter since it pertains to perception. If we have reason to believe that we are equally likely to be right and yet disagree, then even if we are right, we seem to only be accidentally right, for we were equally likely as our disputant to have gotten the wrong perceptual beliefs. If so, then it seems that we cannot track truth reliably with regards to the disputed matter – thus, such disputes are proof that we are unreliable in that disputed matter.

However, I think this argument fails. As argued earlier, evidence that one disputant has the wrong intuition in T is not evidence of unreliability of that disputant's intuitions regarding P. Even if more people joined the dispute, evidence that one disputant is wrong does not become evidence of unreliability of everyone's intuitions regarding P. For consider: Suppose Sammy joins Jim. Jim is also 99% reliable in mental calculations and

likewise given the same restaurant bill. First, even though Sammy and Jim are both equally likely to get the calculation right, they are both not guaranteed to get the calculation right (since there is a 1% chance Sammy gets it wrong and a 1% chance that Jim gets it wrong). Thus, the fact that either makes a mistake is compatible with the fact that they each have a 99% likelihood in making the right calculation regarding this restaurant bill. Now suppose Sammy makes a mistake in his calculation while Jim does not. As argued earlier, Sammy is still 99% reliable even though he makes a mistake. Jim's reliability in calculating this restaurant bill does not increase to 100% either, even though he does not make a mistake calculating this restaurant bill. Instead, both are still equally likely (i.e., 99% chance) to make the right calculation regarding the restaurant bill. Thus, Sammy's mistake does not make Jim unreliable even though they were both equally likely (i.e., 1% chance) to make the same mistake. It also does not follow that Jim made the right judgment by mere luck; Jim made the right judgment based on his cognitive abilities.

Goldman's conclusion in a case where 50% of the subjects have the intuition that p while 50% have the intuition that not-p is that at least 50% are wrong, and thus intuitions are unreliable. One might think that we can hence conclude that the subjects are 50% reliable. This, however, will not do.'50%' expresses one's likelihood of *being the wrong one* in the dispute where we cannot independently evaluate who made a mistake. For suppose yet again that unknown to us, it is Sammy who made a mistake. Since Sammy and Jim have the same reliability of 99% regarding the bill, they are equally likely to be the wrong one in the dispute. Thus, we judge that there is a 50% chance that it is Sammy who made the wrong judgment but Jim did not; and a 50% chance that it is Jim who made the wrong judgment but Sammy did not. To emphasise, this does not mean that both their reliability drops to 50%. They are still 99% reliable.

Another analogy is this: Suppose a dice was thrown and covered before Sammy and Jim could see what it landed on. They are then asked to guess the number on the dice. Sammy guesses that the dice landed on "1", while Jim guesses that the dice landed on "2". Individually, the reliability of their guess is 16.666%. Now suppose someone peeked at the dice number and told both Sammy and Jim that only one of them is right, but did not mention who. Here, it seems that the chance that Sammy is right is 50%, while the chance that Jim is right is 50%. However, this does not make the reliability of their guess increase to 50%. Given this, we can make a distinction between individual reliability and one's likelihood of being the right one in the dispute. Variation in intuitions thus does not show individual unreliability even in disputants who are equally likely to get the right beliefs.[8]

[8] One may object further that if two parties have divergent intuitions across a number of thought experiments, then we have evidence that at least one of the parties have

Using One's Own Intuitions In Cases Of Unconfirmed Epistemic Peerhood

Thus far, I have argued that variation in intuitions elicited by thought experiment T (that is used to test philosophical theory P) is not evidence of unreliability in *any* disputant's intuitions regarding P. Instead, it only shows that at least one disputant is wrong and that we cannot tell who. Some may think this is still problematic for UOIE. This is because even though variation in intuitions does not show unreliability, *assuming that we are equally likely to have the right intuition*, we cannot tell who made a mistake. If so, we should suspend judgment whether we have it right, and consequently also suspend judgment about the content of our intuitions. This line of thought, known as Conciliationism, comes from the literature in peer disagreement. Conciliationism is the claim that gaining evidence that you are a party to a peer disagreement calls for you to make at least some doxastic conciliation. [Mattheson, 2017] Some philosophers who endorse Conciliationism are [Bogardus, 2009], [Feldman, 2006], [Kraft, 2012] and [Matheson, 2015].

Peer disagreements are disagreements in which all disagreeing parties are epistemic peers. According to Jonathan Matheson, roughly, agents S1 and S2 are epistemic peers regarding p if and only if they are in an equally good epistemic position regarding p. [Mattheson, 2017] Here, one's epistemic positions regarding p is determined by one's evidential possession regarding p (i.e., how good his evidence regarding p is) and evidential processing regarding p (i.e., whether he has good cognitive faculties and epistemic virtues). [Mattheson, 2017] One way to tell that S1 and S2 are epistemic peers is if they are equally likely to be right about p – even if S1 and S2 do not have equal evidential possession and equal evidential processing regarding p. Matheson argues that this is because "[e]xcesses in one area can account for deficits in the other, resulting in no net loss or gain." [Mattheson, 2017]

The claim that UOIE is problematic thus relies on two further claims: (1) variations in intuitions are cases of peer disagreements, and (2) Conciliationism is true. Regarding (2), although initially compelling, other philosophers have provided strong defences of the opposite view – the Steadfast view.[9] That is, gaining evidence that you are a party to a peer disagreement does not call for you to make *any* doxastic conciliation. [Mattheson, 2017] My purpose in this section, however, is not to argue whether Conciliationism is right or the Steadfast view is right.

unreliable intuitions. However, even if this inference is granted, the disagreements alone do not show who is unreliable (and also does not show that both parties are unreliable).

9 For a strong defence of the Steadfast View, see [Kelly, 2005].

Instead, I will argue that (1) is false – variations in intuitions are cases of what Frederick Choo calls unconfirmed peer disagreements. [Choo, forthcoming] In cases of unconfirmed peer disagreements, there is no good reason for us to take or dismiss our disputants as an epistemic peer, inferior or superior. We just do not know our epistemic positions relative to our disputants.[10] I then argue that whether one should remain steadfast (i.e., one does not make any doxastic conciliation) or skeptical in cases of unconfirmed peer disagreement depends on the strength of one's own intuitions. I do think that in most cases, philosophers use their stronger intuitions to support their philosophical theories. If so, this would permit steadfastness despite variation in intuitions. Thus, variation in intuitions does not call for skepticism.

According to Choo, there are two methods to assess if someone is your epistemic peer.[11] The first is whether you have wide-ranging agreement or disagreement with your disputant regarding other intuitions that are related to the disputed intuition. For example, suppose you and another agent have agreeing intuitions about the Trolley Cart thought experiment – you both agree that the lever should not be pulled to divert the cart to kill one person instead of five. Thus, you and that agent seem to have intuitions that do not support the philosophical theory "An act is morally justified if it maximises utility." We may raise further thought experiments that test that same philosophical theory.[12] If you and that agent still have *agreeing* intuitions in many of these thought experiments, we have evidence that you and that agent are epistemic peers regarding the truth of that philosophical theory. However, if you and another agent have disagreeing intuitions about the Trolley Cart thought experiment and *further disagreeing intuitions* in other thought experiments which test the same philosophical theory, we have evidence that you and that agent are *not* epistemic peers regarding the truth of that philosophical theory.

There are two worries if we use the first method to assess whether we are peers regarding making the right intuitive judgments about philosophical theories. First, it seems that wide-ranging agreement among the same disputants in intuitions regarding the truth of more specific positive philosophical theories (i.e., philosophical theories that are not broad, general claims or negation claims) is rare. For example, there

[10] For further discussion on unconfirmed peer disagreements, see [Choo, forthcoming]

[11] See [Choo, forthcoming]. See also [Grundmann, 2013] and [Elga, 2007] for similar views. Grundmann argues that there are four different ways to justify the peerness assumption: (1) justification by default, (2) the track record method, (3) arguing from widespread background agreement and (4) arguing from general philosophical competence. He then argues that all four cannot be met.

[12] For example, we may ask, "Is it morally permissible to kill one person if a terrorist threatens to kill 20 other people unless you killed one person?"

are many variations of philosophical theories in philosophical literature to accommodate the different, more specific intuitions that disputants have. If so, *we lack evidence that we are peers* in disputes regarding the truth of specific positive philosophical theories. Even if we are peers regarding broadly agreed upon philosophical theories, it is the disputes that we are concerned with and if we can remain steadfast in those disputes. Second, I think that wide-ranging disagreement with your disputant is not conclusive evidence that you are *not* epistemic peers. Here is one way that there can be wide-ranging disagreement in epistemic peers. Recall Matheson's argument that S1 and S2 can still be epistemic peers even if S1 and S2 do not have equal evidential possession and equal evidential processing, as long as they are in an equally good epistemic position. If S1 and S2 do not have equal evidential possession and equal evidential processing when making intuitive judgments, the differences in evidential possession and evidential processing may cause differences in other related intuitive judgments. The wide-ranging disagreement in intuitions may materialise in something like the following scenario: You and your disputant have different evidential possession and different evidential processing but are individually equally unreliable (e.g., 50% reliable). Out of all the wide-ranging disputes, you happen to be right 50% of the time while your disputant is right the other 50% of the time because of the differences in evidential possession and evidential processing. Hence, both of you are 50% reliable. So, wide-ranging disagreement is *not* evidence that we are not epistemic peers. If so, the first method of assessing is inconclusive because *we lack evidence that we are peers* in disputes and *we lack evidence that we are not peers.*

The second method of assessing whether someone is your epistemic peer is based on the relevant credibility-conferring features (i.e., evidential possession and evidential processing). [Choo, forthcoming] Some examples of relevant credibility-conferring features regarding intuitions are: possessing knowledge of the relevant philosophical distinctions, competence in the language, familiarity with the philosophical theory being tested, freedom from biases and having un-muddled intuitions (i.e., intuitions that are not misdirected or about notions other than the ones under discussion).[13] Here is the problem. There are disputes over what the relevant philosophical distinctions are and which intuitions are un-muddled, and there seems to be no independent way of verifying what they are. When it comes to determining what the relevant distinctions are, philosophers often object to their disputants on the grounds that their disputants are not making good philosophical distinctions, while their disputants argue that these distinctions are irrelevant. Furthermore, both disputants maintain that they are right. For example, some philosophers

[13] The term "muddled intuitions" is coined by [Schroer & Schroer, 2013].

have argued that there is an intuitive do/allow distinction in the Trolley Cart thought experiment which is relevant in determining the correct ethical judgment, while their disputants argue that these distinctions are irrelevant to the truth of our ethical theories.[14] When it comes to determining which intuitions are un-muddled, philosophers often object to their disputants on the grounds that their disputants have muddled intuitions, while their disputants simply deny this. Here is one example from Cote-Bouchard:

> "*Illness:* After making several tests, Rita's doctor has bad news. She has a very serious illness and only has a 5% chance of survival. This particular illness is very sensitive to patients' anxiety and stress levels. Since Rita is very anxious and stressed about dying, following the evidence and believing the truth about her prognosis will lower her chances to almost 0. On the other hand, believing (falsely and unjustifiably) that she will almost certainly survive will dramatically increase her chances." [Cote-Bouchard, 2017, p. 30]

Cote-Bouchard writes that this seems to be a case where *intuitively*, there is *nothing good* in conforming to epistemic norms. He also writes that disputants argue that he has muddled intuitions – his intuition is tracking an all things considered value instead of pro tanto value. [Cote-Bouchard, 2017, p. 32] Cote-Bouchard in turn replies that he *is* talking about pro tanto value, while disputants maintain that his intuition is muddled. [Cote-Bouchard, 2017, p. 33] In the above examples, there seems to be no independent check to verify who is right. We only have evidence that at least one is wrong. Thus, it seems that we cannot even begin to compare based on credibility-conferring features. If so, we currently have no good reason to take or dismiss our disputants as an epistemic peer, inferior or superior. We just do not know our epistemic position relative to our disputants.

Given that we seem to be in an unconfirmed peer disagreement regarding intuitions, what should we believe? Should we remain steadfast or conciliate? I propose that whether a person should remain steadfast or conciliate depends on the strength of one's own intuitions. If one has a strong intuition regarding p, then one should remain steadfast despite having evidence there is unconfirmed peer disagreement. However, if one has a weak intuition regarding p, then one should have some degree of conciliation. Why accept my view? Here are two examples from the field of mathematics and the field of perception that seem to endorse a similar principle.

> Regarding mathematical disagreements where we have no independent evidence about the epistemic status of our disputant (i.e., unconfirmed peer disagreement):

[14] See for example [Kagan, 1989, pp. 83–127].

Case 1: Suppose you made the mental calculation "2+2=4". A stranger then asserts, "No, 2+2 is not equal 4!"
Case 2: Suppose you made the mental calculation "230x27=6,210". A stranger then asserts, "No, 230x27 is not equal 6,210!"

Regarding perceptual disagreements where we have no independent evidence about the epistemic status of our disputant (i.e., unconfirmed peer disagreement):
Case 3: Suppose you see your computer in front of you. A stranger then asserts, "No, there is no computer in front of you!"
Case 4: Suppose you see that in a far distance, there is a black horse grazing under a tree. A stranger then asserts, "No, it is a dark brown horse grazing under a tree!"

In both Case 1 and 3, it strongly seems to you that 2+2=4 and that there is a computer in front of you. Here, it seems that there is no reason to conciliate. In fact, David Christensen points out that if the conciliationist accepts the skeptical principle that a person should conciliate as long as he has no good evidence to privilege himself, then the conciliationist will be lead to global skepticism if she meets a global skeptic. However, Christensen thinks it is clear that meeting a global skeptic should not call for conciliation. [Christensen, 2011, p. 15–16] This differs in both Case 2 and 4. In Case 2 and 4, it weakly seems to you that "230x27=6,210" and that there is a black horse grazing under a tree. Here, it seems reasonable for us to conciliate. Furthermore, meeting a global skeptic would not call for global skepticism for we have beliefs that strongly seems to us to be true. It would only call for skepticism in our weaker claims.

Similarly, if one has a strong intuition (say for example the intuition that p and not-p cannot be true at the same time), then there seems to be no reason to conciliate in unconfirmed peer disagreements. However, if one has a weak intuition, then it seems reasonable for one to conciliate. Since in most cases philosophers use their stronger intuitions to support their philosophical theories, this would permit steadfastness despite variation in intuitions. Thus, variation in intuitions does not call for skepticism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have argued that the skeptical argument that variation in intuitions is good evidence that our intuitions are unreliable fails for two reasons. First, variation only shows that one of the disputants is wrong, but does not show who. Second, even though variation in intuitions in thought experiment T shows that at least one disputant has the wrong intuition in T,

it is not evidence of unreliability of any disputant's intuitions regarding the philosophical theory being tested. I have also considered a reply from the philosophy of disagreement which calls for skepticism if the parties are in a peer disagreement. I argue that variation in intuitions is not a case of peer disagreement – instead, it is a case of unconfirmed peer disagreement. Last, I argue for the principle that whether a person should remain steadfast or conciliate depends on the strength of one's own intuitions. If one has a strong intuition regarding p, then one should remain steadfast despite having evidence there is unconfirmed peer disagreement. However, if one has a weak intuition regarding p, then one should have some degree of conciliation.

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