Self-Undermining Conciliationism

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*Synopsis*:

Conciliationism is the family of views that rationality requires agents to reduce confidence or suspend belief in p when epistemic peers (i.e. agents who are (approximately) equally well-informed and intellectually capable) disagree about p. In this paper I will only focus on the suspension of belief version of Conciliationism known as the Equal Weight View (henceforth EWV), which roughly says: when peers recognize that they disagree on p, these peers should suspend belief on p. Many have objected to the EWV by arguing that it is epistemically self-undermining. That is, because there is disagreement amongst epistemic peers (i.e. philosophers) about the truth of the EWV, the EWV applies to and, by its own conciliatory reasoning, epistemically defeats itself.

While there are many responses to this challenge in the literature, these responses can be put into two groups: the *Solution Responses* which attempt to provide an argument that shows the self-undermining argument is flawed; and the *Skeptical Responses* which accept that this argument is sound but attempts to mitigate the impact of its skeptical conclusion (i.e. the self-undermining argument does not show that the EWV is *false*, but only shows (at best) that no one knows the EWV). In this paper I argue that both kinds of responses (are very likely to) fail. And, therefore, the EWV is (almost certainly) false because it is self-undermining.

After explaining the self-undermining challenge in more detail in §1, in §2 I argue that all potential Solution Responses are also likely to be defeated by the very same Conciliatory reasoning they are attempting to defend. More specifically, I argue that because Solution Response arguments almost certainly contain reasoning or premises that are or will be disagreed upon by epistemic peers, they will likely fail to provide an adequate (i.e. epistemically undefeated) defense of the EWV from the epistemic self-undermining challenge. In the paper I provide a formalized representation of this argument and illustrate it by showing how this argument refutes Elga’s often cited “self-exempting” Solution Response and a recent Solution Response from Christiansen.

In §3 I argue that all Skeptical Responses are likely to fail by arguing for the following claim: *if* the EWV is epistemically self-undermining, then it is also *veridically* self-undermining. A view or proposition is veridically self-undermining iff this view or proposition entails its own falsity. In other words, I show how the epistemic self-undermining challenge can be extended to show that the EWV leads to a *reductio ad absurdum.* For clarity, I provide a formalized representation of this argument and also defend it from objections.

In §4 I conclude by providing the following summary of my overall argument in this paper:

1. The EWV is (almost certainly) epistemically self-undermining. (via the argument in §2)
2. If the EWV is epistemically self-undermining, then it is false. (via the argument in §3)
3. Thus, the EWV is (almost certainly) false.

In other words, neither Solution nor Skeptical Responses save the EWV (and Conciliationism) from being either epistemically or veridically self-undermining. (497 words)