Credal (peer) disagreement: why should I care?

Over the last fifteen years much ink has been spilled in philosophy on the rationality of epistemic agents who stubbornly stick to their mind in the presence of a disagreement with a peer, to the point that a whole new subfield has emerged -- named the epistemology of peer disagreement after its main topic of interest. But why out of the many socially epistemic practices of daily life is a disagreement with a peer noteworthy in the first place? Why should I -- and all my fellow epistemic agents -- especially care about it?

A possible answer comes from a crucial assumption at the core of the most prominent position in the epistemology of disagreement – Conciliationism – that requires both peers to revise their opinions in response to the disclosure of the disagreement. According to the assumption in question – known as `defeat' – learning of a peer disagreement on a proposition gives me a reason to believe that I am mistaken. The mistake in question might amount to my holding an irrational belief. Or my holding a false belief. Or both. In any way -- the story inspired by Conciliationism seems to suggest -- I need to pay special attention to the disagreement: after all, as an epistemic agent I deeply care about being rational, I deeply care about being truthful and obviously I deeply care about being rational and truthful.

When we operate in a fine-grained model of belief and the mistake in question is taken to consist of me holding a false attitude, however, the defeat assumption is less straightforward. Learning that a peer disagrees with me in fact cannot give me a reason to believe that my credence is false because there is no such a thing as a false credence. In a credal framework then not only does the story for the special interest in the disagreement hinted at by Conciliationism become ungrounded but we also lose the conciliatory rationale itself.

What a formulation of the defeat assumption apt to restoring both consists of in a graded model of belief is the question addressed in this essay. Now, this looks just like a far-fetched problem – one might object: after all, in the epistemology literature the peer disagreement usually points to me not having correctly responded to the available evidence, the mistake at the core of the defeat assumption amounts to my holding an irrational attitude and false credences are not even mentioned. In the first part of the talk, I will address this objection by appealing to an interpretation of rationality as providing us with the best route to true beliefs. In the second part, I will claim that even if the value of rationality is not substantive, but more sui generis, the problem of the correct formulation of credal defeat still persists for the subset of peer disagreements in which rationality is permissive. In the third part, I will focus on a credal version of defeat that replaces truth with gradational accuracy and show how this fairly obvious proposal is in need of disambiguation, on pain of emptiness.