

# Yet Another Argument Against Preemption

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# Project Information

## Publication(s):

- Feldbacher-Escamilla, Christian J. (submitted). "Preempting Preemption". In: *manuscript*.

## Talk(s):

- Feldbacher-Escamilla, Christian J. (2017-05-22/2017-05-22). *Yet Another Argument Against Preemption*. Workshop. Presentation (invited). Believing on Authority. University of Innsbruck: Department of Philosophy.

# Motivation

*Preemption*: Belief or disbelief of an epistemic authority in a proposition should **completely replace** all reasons for or against the proposition of an epistemic subject submitted to the authority.

NB: independent or not completely covered by debate on:

- peer or reasonable **disagreement**
- **expert** knowledge



Held for the social realm by Joseph Raz.

Held for the epistemic realm by Arnon Keren and Linda Zagzebski.

# Line of Reasoning

- Zagzebski's **definition** of 'epistemic authority' and preemption

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- **Qualitative explication**

- General critique
- Framing in terms of belief revision

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- **Quantitative explication**

- In terms of credences and update
- **Modification by Constantin and Grundmann**
- Argument in favour by the **principle of total evidence**
- Argument in favour by accuracy constraints

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- **Accuracy: probability matching** and the maximizing rule

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- **Still: Sometimes preemption runs against accuracy**

# Epistemic Authority and Preemption

# Epistemic Authority and Preemption

Broad outline of *epistemic authority*:

*Consider epistemic authority of  $a$  over  $s$  regarding a specific domain of beliefs to consist of  $s$  trusting  $a$ 's "way in which he gets his belief more than the way in which  $[s]$  would get the belief. In cases of these kinds the conscientious thing to do is to let  $[a]$  stand in for  $[s]$  in  $[s]$ ' attempt to get the truth in that domain and to adopt his belief" (cf. Zagzebski 2012, p.105)*

*Preemption*: The reasons provided by  $a$  replace the reasons of  $s$  and  $s$  rationally bases her decisions within the domain on these reasons.

NB:  $s$  does not take over evidence  $e^a$ , but  $Bel^a(p)$

# Epistemic Authority and Preemption

Let  $a$  believe in  $p$  ( $Bel^a(p)$ ); then  $a$  is an *epistemic authority* for  $s$  regarding proposition  $p$  iff

- *Preemption*:  $Bel^a(p)$  is a preemptive reason for  $s$  to believe in  $p$ , i.e. for  $Bel^s(p)$
- *Content independency*: If it were the case that  $Bel^a(\neg p)$ , then this would be a preemptive reason for  $Bel^s(\neg p)$
- *Subject dependency*:  $s$  believes that she would also believe in  $p$  if she were better at getting the truth like she believes  $a$  to be.
- *Normal justifiability*:  $s$  is epistemically justified in this belief.

# A Qualitative Explication and Critique



## General Critique

Arguments of Arnon (Keren), Christoph (Jäger), Federica (Malfatti), Johannes (Findl), Katherine (Dormandy) et al.

# Explication in Terms of Belief Revision

## Preemption of Belief (PEB)

Given  $Bel^a(p)$  and  $s$  gets to know this at  $t \rightarrow t'$ :

*Update of belief:*  $Bel_{t'}^s(p)$  iff  $Bel_t^s(p|Bel^a(p))$

*Update of reason:*  $Bel_{t'}^s(p)$  iff  $Bel_{t'}^s(p|Bel^a(p))$

Equals roughly

$$(Bel^s - p) + \{Bel^a(p) \rightarrow p, Bel^a(p)\}$$

E.g.:  $e^s \rightarrow p, Bel^a(p) \Rightarrow$  contraction  $Bel^s - p \Rightarrow$   
 by this also  $e^s \notin Bel^s \Rightarrow$  expansion by  $Bel^a(p) \rightarrow p$  and  $p$

# A Quantitative Explication and Modification

# Credences and Preemptive Update

From *synchronisation* of *Bel* and *Cr* it follows:

$$Bel \Leftrightarrow Cr$$

Preemption of Credence (PEC):

Given *s* gets to know the credences of *a* at  $t \rightarrow t'$ :

*Credence update*:

$$Cr_{t'}^s(p) = Cr_t^s(p | Cr^a(p) = x) = x$$

# Credences and Preemptive Update

Equivalently:

Preemption View (PV):

Given ...

$$Cr_{t'}^s(p) = 0 \cdot Cr_t^s(p) + 1 \cdot Cr^a(p) = Cr^a(p)$$

Contrary to (cf. Kelly 2011)

Total Evidence View (TEV):

Given ...

Then there are weights  $w^s, w^a$ , such that:

$$Cr_{t'}^s(p) = w^s \cdot Cr_t^s(p) + w^a \cdot Cr^a(p)$$

$$\text{where } w^s, w^a \geq 0 \text{ and } w^s + w^a = 1$$

## A Modification

In order to overcome problems of (PV), Jan Constantin and Thomas Grundmann provide the following modification:

Epistemic Authority via Superiority (EA):

$a$  is an epistemic authority for  $s$  regarding  $p$  at the transition point  $t \rightarrow t'$  iff at  $t \rightarrow t'$   $s$  is epistemically justified in believing that  $a$  is superior regarding evidence and inference (and this belief is true).

NB: A similar modification is provided by Sarah Wright.

# The Principle of Total Evidence

Given this restriction, there is a simple argument for (PV):

- (1) Epistemic **superiority w.r.t. evidence** in the sense  $e^a \vdash e^s$ ;
- (2) The **principle of total evidence**: If  $e' \vdash e$ , then choose  $Pr(\cdot|e')$  instead of  $Pr(\cdot|e)$
- (3)  $Cr$  should “mimic”  $Pr$ .

$c_1$	$c_2$	$c_3$		
$c_1$	$c_2$	$c_3$	$c_4$	$\dots$

Hence: (PV) w.r.t. evidential superiority

But what about epistemic **superiority w.r.t. inference**?

This is argued for by **accuracy constraints** (e.g. via *undercutting defeaters*).

# Failing of Probability Matching Favours Preemption



# Decision Theory

Consider two decision theoretical rules:

- **Probability matching rule:**  $\frac{|\{i \leq n : Bel_{t_i}(p[t_i])\}|}{n} \approx Cr(p)$
- **Maximizing rule:**  $\frac{|\{i \leq n : Bel_{t_i}(p[t_i])\}|}{n} = 1/0$ , iff  $Cr(p) \geq / < 0.5$

One can show that the **maximizing rule fares** on average **better** than probability matching.

Application to **(EA)**, **(PV)**, and **(TEV)**:

Given **(EA)**:

reliability of *s*

reliability of *a*

$$\frac{|\{i \leq n : Bel_{t_i}^s(p[t_i]) \text{ and } p\}|}{n} < \frac{|\{i \leq n : Bel_{t_i}^a(p[t_i]) \text{ and } p\}|}{n}$$

If *s* applies **(PV)**, i.e. the **maximizing rule** w.r.t.  $Cr^a(p)$ , then *s*' reliability **approaches** on average that of *a*.

If not, as, e.g., in **(TEV)**, then *s*' reliability will on average **fall behind** *a*.

# Yet Another Argument Against Preemption

## Wise Crowds

So, we have seen that (PV) accounts for epistemic **superiority** w.r.t:

- **evidence** via the principle of total evidence, and
- **inference** via approaching the authority *a*'s reliability on average.

However, what about **outperforming** *a*'s reliability?

There is an argument from the *wisdom of crowds* which can be directed against (PV).

NB that, e.g., Adam Elga proposed such an argument against the **steadfast view** in case of **peer disagreement**.

## Wise Crowds

E.g. for a wise crowd effect: If a crowd is diverse, then the error of the average credence will be smaller than the error of the credence of an average individual (cf. Page 2007):

$$E^{\{s_1, \dots, s_n\}}(p) = E^{\emptyset\{s_1, \dots, s_n\}}(p) - D^{\{s_1, \dots, s_n\}}(p)$$

More famous: *Condorcet Jury Theorem*

In general: “Crowd sourcing” outperforms “individual sourcing” given two conditions:

- Competence in the sense of a reliability  $> 0.5$
- Independence in the sense of probabilistic independence or diversity

## Wise Crowds

(TEV) can implement “crowd sourcing”, e.g., by equal weighting.

By this  $s$  can outperform  $a$  on average (in terms of reliability).

So, given a setting of competent and independent agents ...

... epistemic superiority is no longer in favour of (PV), but ...

... in favour of a specific version of (TEV).

# Summary

## Most important results

- Indication of **qualitative preemption** in terms of **belief revision**
- **Bridging** the qualitative version with its quantitative counterpart (PV)
- Constructing another **argument against preemption** even for the restricted case of **epistemic superiority**

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