



EXPERTS, ADVISORS AND AUTHORITIES

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How should we take into account the known opinion of another person—an advisor—when her opinion differs from our own independently-formed opinion? Obviously, the answer depends on our own level of expertise as compared with that of the advisor: no one would claim that we should give the same weight to the opinion of a peer, whose level of expertise is similar to our own, and to that of an expert, whose level of expertise far exceeds our own. What is controversial is whether the only difference between the appropriate responses in both cases can be described in terms of the comparative weights to be assigned to our own opinion and to the differing opinion of the advisor.

According to one kind of view, the answer to the latter question is positive: whenever our independent opinion differs from that of an advisor, we should give some weight to our own opinions, and to that of the advisor. The case of the expert differs from that of a peer in that in the former we should assign a much greater weight to the advisor's opinion than to our own, while in the case of the peer, the weights assigned to each should be much more equal. Call this the expert-as-evidence view. A different kind of view draws a page from the political philosopher's discussion of political authority, to describe the appropriate reaction to the opinion of a trustworthy expert. Call this the expert-as-authority view. According to this view, just as a legitimate, authoritative order to do something should function not merely as a very weighty consideration in favor of doing that thing, but rather as one that should preempt other considerations available to us, so with the expert: We should not treat a trustworthy expert's opinion that p merely as an extremely weighty reason for believing that p , but should treat it instead as a *preemptive reason* for believing that p .

In this talk, I compare the expert-as-evidence view, as defended, e.g. by Adam Elga, with the experts-as-authority view. These different kinds of views, I argue, have different implications about how we ought to interact with experts, and how experts ought to interact with us; moreover, they suggest different characterizations of the kind of failure we exhibit when we fail to interact with experts as we should. On both accounts, I argue, the expert-as-authority view fares better, in the sense that its implications better fit our pre-theoretic intuitions. I then explore possible ways of defending the expert-as-authority view and the pre-theoretic intuitions which support it. I argue that Zagzebski's recent attempt to justify this view fails, and present an alternative account which can succeed in this task.