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The problem of religious peer disagreement: A response to Harold Netland

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The Problem of Epistemic Peer Disagreement: A Response to Harold Netland

by Jim Beilby
Forthcoming in *Philosophia Christi*

What is the Problem of Epistemic Peer Disagreement?

Here is an example: You are doing the math to divide a dinner check. Your friend, who is just as good at math as you, comes up with a different number. Should you doubt the number you came up with?

If so, shouldn't the disagreement of "epistemic peers" – people who are just as intelligent, informed, and sincere as you – cause you to revise or seek additional argumentative support for your religious beliefs?

Harold Netland (Professor of Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) says "yes." I disagree.

My Critique of Netland's Stance

1. Who is my religious peer? For most issues more complicated than "dinner check math" this is far more complicated than it seems.
Even a person who shares 98% of my knowledge base might lack a crucial bit of information that explains why we disagree.

By itself, disagreement of epistemic peers doesn't suggest I should change my beliefs.

I should change by beliefs only if that my peer's disagreement flows from reasons that are unknown to me.

Suppose I agree that peer disagreement requires me to provide additional arguments for my religious beliefs. How does the provision of additional arguments help me, when each of those arguments are contested by epistemic peers? Where does the demand for additional evidence stop?