

5-2012

## Steadfastness and the Epistemology of Disagreement

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STEADFASTNESS AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF DISAGREEMENT

# STEADFASTNESS AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF DISAGREEMENT

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

By

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## **Acknowledgements**

I first became interested in the topic of the epistemic significance of peer disagreement while sitting in a graduate seminar led Dr. Thomas D. Senior. I would like to thank him for turning me on to the importance of this topic, for agreeing to supervise my research, and for countless hours of conversation about my arguments throughout this work. He has taught much about doing philosophy, and this dissertation is immeasurably better for his insights. In short, I am thankful for his friendship and assistance along the way.

I would also like to thank my dissertation committee members, Dr. Edward Minar and Dr. Jack C. Lyons for their willingness to engage me in discussion on numerous points I was trying to work out along the way. Their constructive feedback helped me develop examples and lines of argument in a more interesting and robust fashion. I am grateful for their professional example and instruction during my graduate work at the University of Arkansas.

In addition, I would like to thank my philosophical colleagues for their readiness to discuss my work. Their gentle prodding has helped me hone my arguments for the better.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their constant love and support. One stands out above them all, however, and that is my lovely wife Julie. She has been my biggest fan, greatest support, and faithful cheerleader throughout the PhD process. Many thanks to her for joyfully going on this journey with me, for being as excited about my progress as me, and for reading and editing the whole dissertation. Her ability to simultaneously support my work and make light of some of the philosophical terminology is a true gift—one that has made our home a fun place to be. I love you!

## Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Doctoral Dissertation	15
Chapter 1: Equal Weight Views	15
Introduction	15
1.1 Motivating the Equal Weight View	18
1.2 Analysis and Criticisms of the Equal Weight View	36
1.3 Conclusion	61
Chapter 2: Thomas Kelly's Total Evidence View	62
Introduction	62
2.1 Kelly's Total Evidence View and the Argument from Consensus	65
2.2 Analysis of Kelly's Argument from Consensus	75
2.3 Conclusion	95
Chapter 3: Steadfastness and Disagreement: A First Look	96
Introduction	96
3.1 Preliminary Remarks	98
3.2 William Rowe, Disagreement, and the G.E. Moore Shift	100
3.3 A Problem for Argument Egalitarian Steadfastness, Proposed Solutions, and New Renditions of Steadfastness	108
3.4 Temporarily Tying Some Ends Together	131
3.5 Conclusion	135
Chapter 4: Steadfastness Matured: Keeping it Steady	136
Introduction	136
4.1 Motivating Steadfastness	139
4.2 Concerning Diachronic Epistemic Features	144
4.3 Steadfastness as a Rationality-Enhancing and Cognitive System-Enhancing Virtue	151
4.4 Objections and Replies	169
4.4.1 Steadfastness Matured and Cognitive Defects	169
4.4.2 Steadfastness Matured and the Evidence Proportionality Principle	173
4.5 Conclusion	180
Bibliography	182

## Steadfastness and the Epistemology of Disagreement

### Introductory Remarks

*Looking back on it, it seems almost incredible that so many equally educated, equally sincere compatriots and contemporaries, all drawing from the same limited stock of evidence, should have reached so many totally different conclusions--and always with complete certainty.*

(John Mitchell, *Who Wrote Shakespeare?*)

### *Disagreement and the Everyday Real-World*

As John Mitchell's quote poignantly states, disagreement pervades our everyday lives. This is the case whether we are literary critics disagreeing about the Shakespearean authorship or volunteer fireman disagreeing about the most expedient route to a call, whether we are professional philosophers debating free will or plumbers disagreeing about the most efficient piping plan for a new building. Even more generally, we disagree about what precisely is right and wrong as well as the nature of morality itself. We disagree about politics and economics. We disagree about the best means to physical health, the best methods of education, and the best route to a happy life. We disagree about science, religion; and the relationship between science and religion. And if you have a significant other, you can add to this list all kinds of other areas of disagreement! As I see it, disagreement pervades our everyday lives, and this pervasiveness serves as a reason for philosophers to reflect upon the significance of disagreement. Another reason is that I do not see our disagreement on the aforementioned topics (and many others) dissipating any time soon. Hence, I think working through one's understanding about the epistemic significance of disagreement is both personally advantageous, and most importantly, socially beneficial. It is



personally advantageous, because it will help me discern whether it is rational to persist in my belief(s) in the face of disagreement or whether some modification in my belief is required. But this personal discernment really matters to our social epistemic lives.

Disagreements arise among those with whom we interact and live; and the question of what affect disagreement should have on our beliefs is relevant to my actions toward and interactions with my intellectual opponents.

### *Disagreement and the Epistemologist (or Philosopher)*

Recently, philosophers in general and epistemologists in particular have taken up this discussion of disagreement. In particular, they have begun to inquire into the significance of disagreement, but they have narrowed the focus of the discussion in a few important ways. Specifically, they are interested in *known disagreement among intellectual or epistemic peers regarding some specified domain of inquiry*. Notice *first* the notion of “known disagreement” which simply stipulates that (at least) two parties on a disputed topic are aware of the fact that someone disagrees with their conclusion on the given issue. So, we are not interested in the situation where an intellectual has some conclusion or set of conclusions with respect to a body of evidence but lacks knowledge of what others in her field think on that topic and its “supporting evidence.” That is, we are not interested in disagreement in *isolation*. Instead, disagreement is most epistemologically significant, so it seems, when it is *known*.

To make this point more obvious, consider the following case. Suppose you are one of four researchers who are trying to figure out which of four drugs is the best option for treating some disease. There are currently four treatment options: A, B, C, and D. Suppose further that you and the other three researchers are at different research universities and

unaware of all the others' work on the matter. After a time of testing each treatment option, you conclude that A is the best option. At this point, you hold your belief in *isolation*, and one might think that you are justified to believe your conclusion. Now suppose you get the most recent copy of a famed medical research journal, and in it are the three other researchers' results. Each has concluded that one of the other options is a better course of treatment. That is, you now *know* that another researcher disagrees with your conclusion. How does this new information affect your belief that your original conclusion is true?<sup>1</sup> Such is the question of the significance of known disagreement as opposed to you merely happening to have a divergent belief from the other three whose beliefs you are unaware of.

*Second*, it is important that the known disagreement be between *intellectual peers*, or at least, that is what the recent literature has supposed. For the sake of this discussion, the notion of "peer" receives a stipulated or idealized definition by philosophers. That rendering is, roughly, a person who is of equal intellectual abilities regarding the evidence and domain of inquiry under discussion, and a person who is equally interested in pursuing what the evidence supports.<sup>2</sup> For example, suppose you and I are attempting to figure out the best course of action regarding retirement planning (i.e. investments, savings, etc.). Imagine that we fit the stipulated definition of *peers* here, but as it turns out, we disagree about what set of actions are best to take to secure for ourselves a modest retirement. Perhaps, among other

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from an example in Richard Feldman, "Plantinga on Exclusivism," *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (January 2003): pp. 87-88.

<sup>2</sup> I say "roughly" here, because there is no exact agreed upon definition of 'peer' in the literature. This will become obvious as we go. What we do have in the literature is a common theme of what an intellectual peer amounts to, and that is reflected in what I have stipulated here. The key qualities of that common thread are equals in terms of cognitive abilities, and equally conscientious. The latter includes equal care with the evidence relevant to a given proposition, and equal interest in pursuing the truth in a given domain

things, we disagree about such matters like what sorts of investments are the wisest in a down economy to secure a modest retirement. Is it rational for me to continue believing that my retirement plan is the best given that you conclude quite the opposite? Or is one of us required to modify our belief in light of this disagreement? Or should both of us be rationally required to modify our beliefs in light of our disagreement?

How you or I answer these questions will lead to very different views of the significance of disagreement and what our response should be. But for now it is worth pointing out that our main concern regards known disagreement among peers, and this need not entail that the peers are “experts” on the given domain in question. While it is possible that the known peer disagreement be among experts, it need not be that way. My chosen example highlights this point, because you and I could meet the conditions for being *intellectual peers* regarding retirement plans, but we need not be *experts* in the sense normally construed. That is, we need not ourselves be investors or retirement gurus.<sup>3</sup> Instead, all that is needed is that we have equal intellectual abilities as regards that evidence and its bearing on the issue of retirement, and we need to be equally interested in the evidence’s bearing on our conclusion regarding retirement plans. So, we should not confuse being a *peer* with being an *expert*, although we may need to explore this relationship down the line.

*Third*, our series of three questions of how to respond to known disagreement among peers calls for yet a further narrowing. I worded those questions in terms of *rationality* or *reasonability*. What is the most reasonable thing to do in the face of known peer disagreement? Or what is *rationally required* of me to do when I disagree with a peer? These

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<sup>3</sup> I am here thinking of Adam Elga’s use of this term in “Reflection and Disagreement.” *Nous*, 41 (2007): 478-502.

questions are common ways of raising the problem and proposing solutions in the literature on disagreement, where the problem/solution relationship is understood in terms of what is *rational* or *reasonable* to do or not do in the face of known peer disagreement. Consider a few examples. In his paper, “Epistemological Puzzles about Disagreement”, Richard Feldman opines, “Regardless of how people actually do respond to disagreement, there are perplexing questions about what the *reasonable* responses can be (italics added).”<sup>4</sup> Feldman seems to think that how we respond to known disagreement with a peer is a matter of what constitutes the most reasonable or rational reaction. Likewise, Earl Conee understands the epistemology of disagreement to be about rationality when he says,

We are *rational* only if we heed the dictates of reason. We heed our epistemic reasons by taking the doxastic attitudes that align with their support. . . .Someone has a *rational* doxastic attitude toward a proposition when the person’s belief, disbelief, or suspension of judgment on the proposition is fully epistemically *reasonable* under the circumstances. . . people and their doxastic attitudes *disagree* about a proposition when their doxastic attitudes toward the proposition differ (emphasis mine).<sup>5</sup>

Further examples of this understanding of disagreement abound in the literature, but these few suffice for the sake of introduction. What’s interesting to note here is that others (including the aforementioned authors in other writings) seem to focus their discussion of disagreement not so much in terms of *rationality* or *reasonability* but in terms of *justification* (or they may mix the two). For example, Richard Fumerton introduces his paper, “You Can’t Trust a Philosopher” in the following way:

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Feldman, in *Epistemology Futures*, S. Hetherington, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 216-36.

<sup>5</sup> Earl Conee, “Rational Disagreement Defended.” *Disagreement*. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 69-90.

On what is surely the classical approach to epistemology, each of us must build all of our knowledge and justified belief on a foundation of evidence to which we have a privileged access. Still, even within such a framework, setting aside certain skeptical concerns, we can reason legitimately from our egocentric perspective that there are others who *disagree* with us concerning conclusions we have reached. Under what circumstances can such discoveries *defeat whatever justification* we might otherwise have had for believing some proposition?<sup>6</sup> (emphasis mine)

Being a well-worn epistemic concept, *justification* may seem like a better way of construing the debate about disagreement. Richard Fumerton seems to think so. When known peer disagreement occurs, the issue is one of whether I can retain my epistemic justification for believing some proposition P or not. That is, known peer disagreement raises the question of defeat for one's epistemic justification. Perhaps what is worth asking here then is this: are rationality and justification being used interchangeably in this debate about disagreement, and if so, what does this mean for how the debate is framed and discussed at present?

One answer is that they are being used interchangeably. I think evidence for this comes from at least two sources. The most obvious is that writers like Richard Feldman have written on disagreement both in terms of rationality and justification.<sup>7</sup> For example, in his paper "Epistemological Puzzles about Disagreement", Feldman spends some time explaining how he is and is not using the term 'reasonable' in the context of his discussion of the possibility of intellectual peers having reasonable disagreements. In a footnote he says, "I

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Fumerton, "You Can't Trust a Philosopher," in *Disagreement*, Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 91-92.

<sup>7</sup> Compare his "Epistemological Puzzles About Disagreement" in *Epistemology Futures*. S. Hetherington, editor. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 216-36 and "Reasonable Religious Disagreements" *Philosophers Without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, Louise Antony, editor. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 194-214 where disagreement is discussed primarily (though not exclusively) in terms of 'rationality'; with his 'later writing' "Evidentialism, Higher-order Evidence, and Disagreement," *Episteme*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2009): 294-312 where he construes his so-called mature view almost exclusively in terms of epistemic justification.

will sometimes substitute the words ‘rational’ or ‘justified’ [for the word ‘reasonable’]”<sup>8</sup>, because his concern regards “the immediate epistemic status of beliefs.”<sup>9</sup> So it seems fair to say that what Feldman finds to be the most rational or reasonable response to known peer disagreement is, if not identical with, intimately related to what one is most epistemically justified to believe given one’s evidence. Hence, if you are epistemically justified to believe P, then it would seem that you are rational to so believe, and conversely, if you are not justified to believe P, then it would seem you are not rational to believe it.

This line of thought connects to my second reason for thinking that these two terms really are being used interchangeably, namely, our three aforementioned philosophers all adopt an evidentialist view of epistemic justification and subsequently of the debate about disagreement. Very roughly, a person is epistemically justified insofar as P is supported by or fits S’s evidence for it. More finely, justification is the relation between some body of evidence E and some proposition P; so one is justified when E supports P. In terms of ‘rationality’ then, S is rational to believe P when S’s body of evidence E supports P and is irrational in believing if P is not so supported by E.

It is not surprising then that the literature on disagreement reflects the interchangeability of these two terms as ways of framing and discussing the debate. The way the game is being played is to adopt some sort of evidentialist line in discussing what bearing disagreement has on a person’s rationality or justification for believing P. Whether intentional or not, it seems that the current discussion is framed in such a way that rationality

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<sup>8</sup> See, Richard Feldman, “Epistemic Puzzles About Disagreement,” in *Philosophers Without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, Louise Antony, editor. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 220 footnote 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 221.

and justification are understood as referring to the same thing: what bearing known peer disagreement has on an agent's epistemic standing with respect to their belief that P, where *epistemic standing* gets worked out in terms of *rationality* or *justification* or both.

But this need not be the case. A second answer is that these terms are not interchangeable. It is possible that rationality and justification are distinct epistemic notions, so disagreement pertains to one and not the other. Put differently, rationality and justification can come apart as it were and really refer to different epistemic concepts. If so, then an epistemic agent might have one without the other. A person may be rational or reasonable to believe P given her evidence, but this need not entail that P is epistemically justified for S. She might think that what is reasonable to believe is a matter of having performed her epistemic duty to form her belief in accord with her available evidence to the best of her ability.<sup>10</sup> For example, a person might have reasons to support political candidate B over C, yet this same person might think that these reasons are hardly sufficient to grant justification on his belief that B is a better candidate than C. After all, it may be the case that the evidential support relation has to do with rationality and not justification. More specifically, a person here might think that evidentialism about epistemic justification is false but is perfectly fitting when it comes to what makes some belief or other reasonable or rational to hold. Still more specifically, an externalist about justification may think that the justification relation has to do with factors other than evidence. A reliabilist, for example, could say that the justification relation is between a belief and a reliable belief forming process, not between a body of evidence and a belief. If this is right, then such a philosopher could argue that disagreement and one's response to it is really an issue of rationality and not of

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<sup>10</sup> I am indebted to Thomas D. Senor for pointing this out to me.

justification. Since rationality has to do with evidential support, and justification does not, then the significance of disagreement is more an issue of rationality than justification. The reliabilist then could willingly play the evidentialist game in terms of rationality and disagreement but eschew the evidentialist game in terms of justification.<sup>11</sup>

For the sake of ease in this project, I have chosen to play the game with the majority. I will use these terms interchangeably as noted above, because I think this will allow me to accomplish what I desire for my work. That desire consists quite generally in arguing that both the Equal Weight View and the Total Evidence View fail as satisfying responses to known peer disagreement.

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<sup>11</sup> But must an externalist take this route? It seems to me that the answer is ‘no’. An externalist about justification might work out his view of rationality in terms of justification like the evidentialist wants even though he is not committed to evidentialism about the relationship between a belief and what justifies it. For example, he might argue that if his conditions for justification (or warrant) are satisfied, then believing P is rational for him. I think this is what Alvin Plantinga has in mind in some of his work on religious epistemology and the related discussion of religious pluralism (or disagreement). After distinguishing different kinds of rationality, he goes on to argue that his proper function account of warrant can be construed as a view of epistemic rationality. That account says an epistemic agent S is rational to believe some proposition P when she has met all of his conditions for ‘warrant’, i.e. If S has come to believe P (a) by means of properly functioning cognitive faculties, (b) P is produced in the cognitive environment for which S’s faculties were designed, (c) the modules of the design plan are directly aimed at the production of true beliefs, and (d) there is a high objective probability that a belief formed in accord with those modules in that kind of cognitive environment is true.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of what we make of Plantinga’s theory of warrant the point is that the epistemic significance of disagreement can worked out using ‘rationality’ and ‘justification’ interchangeably or by seeing it only as an issue of rationality. And this choice need not be made along internalist/externalist lines about justification (warrant). See, for example, his *Warrant and Proper Function*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 19, 46-7) for a more exact rendering of his conditions for warrant, but his applying this to the issue of rationality in the face of disagreement is found in at least the following works: *Warranted Christian Belief*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). “Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism.” In *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): pp. 172-92. This last work is what I’m referring to, although Plantinga’s paper first appeared in *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith: Essays in Honor of William Alston*, Thomas D. Senior, ed. (Cornell University Press, 1996).



A final conceptual narrowing that the philosopher must make when discussing disagreement regards what kind of rationality it is we are interested in. That should be obvious so far, but for the record, we are interested in *epistemic rationality* not *practical rationality*. This distinction is important, because it might be practically rational to engage in some action or activity while one's epistemic rationality might be called into question on the matter. For example, imagine that you and I are out for an afternoon stroll in the country woods. We like to do this while discussing our favorite philosophical disputes. As it turns out, the brush is especially thick this time of year, so when we turn around to go home, the path towards home is hard to make out and remember. We journey on only to come to a fork in the woods. Do we go left or right? Which choice will lead us back home? Given the circumstances and environment, we have no good reason to choose one over the other. As such, it seems like we lack any reasons or justification for one choice over the other. But we must choose. We want to get back home (and we know as much as to know that one trail will take us there). So we pick the right trail. The moral here is that practically it is rational to pick one (even if arbitrarily), because we must choose a means to our desired end. Each trail is equally as good a means as the other, all things considered, so we are *practically rational* to choose the right one. However, we are not *epistemically rational*. We have no reason to choose right over left.<sup>12</sup> This means we are epistemically unjustified to think one route is the one that will get us home and the other one will not. But this is no problem in the example, because we must act. Acting rationally however is distinct from believing rationally. Acting has to do with practical rationality where believing has to do with epistemic rationality. Throughout my work here, I will assume we are talking about epistemic rationality.

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements", pp. 203-4.

## Dissertation Overview and Chapter Divisions

So what does epistemic rationality require of two (or more) intellectual peers when they knowingly disagree about P after disclosing all P-relevant evidence? *In Chapter 1*, I consider one dominant answer to this question in the recent literature on disagreement, the Equal Weight View (or what others call ‘Conciliation’). As it turns out, this is actually a family of views that tells us that when two (or more) intellectual peers disagree, the rational response is for each person to the dispute to give equal weight to their peer’s response to the body of evidence E under consideration for some proposition P. When you do that, you will see that you should “split the difference” with them doxastically, because you lack any further reason to dismiss their response and privilege your own. In the end this will require you to either suspend judgment on your originally formed belief or to radically adjust your confidence in the direction of your peer. While there are a number of interesting cases that seem to favor the intuitions behind the Equal Weight View, I argue that there are a series of six objections that can be raised both to the Equal Weight View and its two underlying assumptions: the Uniqueness Thesis and the Evidence Principle. These objections form a cumulative case that is, in my view, sufficient to reject the Equal Weight View as a viable response to epistemic disagreement. As such, we must look elsewhere for a viable theory of how to handle disagreement among intellectual peers.

*In Chapter 2*, I consider the second kind of view of disagreement that holds more promise in helping us know what intellectual peers ought to do when they knowingly disagree, the Total Evidence View. The key difference between the Total Evidence View and the Equal Weight View is that it does not think peer disagreement is sufficient to warrant a

reduction in confidence with respect to P. Instead, we ought to take cases of peer disagreement on a case-by-case basis. When we do, some cases will require no confidence reduction, others a small reduction in confidence, still others a large reduction, and some will require abandoning belief altogether. One of the earliest and most interesting proponents of the Total Evidence View is Thomas Kelly, so I focus my attention on his articulation of the view. Most interesting, I think, is his argument for the claim that when one disagrees with a consensus of his peers, even if one has reasoned impeccably, consensus is a kind of evidence sufficient to warrant a reduction in one's level of confidence at least some. I dub this an Argument from Consensus, explain it, and then argue that it is unsound. Consensus is insufficient to warrant a reduction in confidence in cases where I have in fact reasoned impeccably. This is true even though I lack the God's eye view of that fact. Moral cases, I think, provide the strongest sort support for my counterargument, because these kinds of cases reveal that there's something unique about one's moral intuitions. Moral beliefs can be formed immediately and directly on one's moral intuitions, but a peer's moral intuitions cannot furnish this same direct grounding or basis. As such, a person can be rational to remain steadfast in the face of disagreement with consensus or a peer.

Since the Equal Weight Views and the Total Evidence View fail to provide us with a satisfying theory of peer disagreement, I think we do well to consider the final kind of view.

*In Chapter 3*, present a third theory of epistemic disagreement that I call Steadfastness.

According to generic Steadfastness it is reasonable for a person to stand her epistemic ground with respect to P after disagreement is known without reduction of confidence at all. I argue that there are a variety of options open to the proponent of Steadfastness to fill out this more generic rendering. I do this by explaining how William Rowe's work on "Friendly Atheism"

provides us with an impetus to demarcate a variety of Steadfastness views depending on the case of disagreement at hand. While each variety of Steadfastness is attractive, each faces a worry about how to understand its compatibility with the Uniqueness Thesis. To deal with this worry, I argue that there are two distinct readings of this thesis, one that highlights the relation between evidence and rationality (Rational Uniqueness) and the other that highlights the relation between evidence and a proposition's truth (Evidential Uniqueness). We will consider the prospects this distinction has for maintaining the consistency of Steadfastness and Uniqueness, and we'll see if it helps the varieties of Steadfastness preserve reasonable disagreement or not.

But this is not the final word. *In Chapter 4*, I extend what I said in the previous chapter and argue for my ultimate view—Steadfastness Matured. Steadfastness Matured is a substantive view about how to handle intellectual peer disagreement after disclosure in difficult cases. In order to keep peerhood and sameness of evidence intact, I present a unique explanation for why we might think that two cognizers S1 and S2 are reasonable to maintain their doxastic stances after they have disclosed their evidence and disagreement is known. That explanation focuses not on some bit of synchronic evidence (e.g. an inscrutable reason, different evidence, etc. as discussed in Chapter 3) that might “tip the scales” in one's favor so to speak. Instead, my explanation focuses on diachronic considerations that are present in a case of intractable disagreement that enables us to understand and evaluate a doxastic response as reasonable.

One such diachronic consideration is the history of their beliefs regarding P prior to known disagreement with an intellectual peer. Since their different beliefs about P were previously rational and they held their belief for a long time, I argue that we should allow

each subject ample time to consider and evaluate their newly acquired and accepted/believed body of evidence so that they might fully integrate it into their doxastic systems. Allowing each cognizer time brings us to the second diachronic issue: in order to stand firm in his doxastic stance for the right amount of time, each man needs to possess the relevant cognitive virtue(s) that will enable him to maintain cognitive health. Cognitive health here is understood in terms of stability in a doxastic system, because it's better for a cognizer's health to be stable doxastically than to shift his beliefs and doxastic attitudes on a cognitive dime. Stability in a doxastic system can be undergirded by the virtue of steadfastness, where this is a cognitive trait that enables one to stand firm for the right amount of time so that he can consider the significance of his new P-relevant evidence and integrate it into his doxastic system.

Once either man fully integrates his new P-relevant evidence into his system, then he should either (a) lower his level of confidence some (if he's unable to deal with newly acquired putative defeaters at that time) or (b) not lower his level of confidence at all if he is able to deal with these newly acquired putative defeaters. In the end both parties to the dispute can satisfy the conditions for Steadfastness Matured, and this means that intellectual peers can reasonably disagree about P.

## Chapter 1

### Equal Weight View(s)

*“Considering how many conflicting opinions there may be regarding the self-same matter, all supported by learned people, while there can never be more than one which is true, I esteemed it as well-nigh false all that went only so far as being probable.”*

–Descartes, *Discourse on Method*

*“If I find any of my judgments, intuitive or inferential, in direct conflict with a judgment of some other mind, there must be error somewhere: and if I have no more reason to suspect error in the other mind than in my own, reflective comparison between the two judgments necessarily reduces me to a state of neutrality.”*

–Henry Sidgwick<sup>13</sup>

### ***Introduction***

During the Fall of 2010 I had the privilege of teaching an Introduction to Philosophy class. As is usually the case, you never know what your students will be like—i.e. how they will respond to the material, you, and each other. To my delight, my current class was quite engaged and talkative. Perhaps this is attributable to topics like the Problem of Evil having a way of stimulating even the less-than-philosophically-inclined. Working through that problem and one theodicy-response, the views of students emerged with passion and a bit of intrigue. In coming to see the difficulty of the problem, one young man retorted, “Well, I just believe that Jesus died for my sins and that gives me hope in the face of evil. I respect the fact that others don’t agree with me, but they can believe as they will, but I will continue believing as I do.”<sup>14</sup> This was no retreat to relativism for this student. He was not saying that all views were equally true. Instead, it seems like he was echoing what many students in the

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<sup>13</sup> Henry Sidgwick. *Methods of Ethics*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition. (London: Macmillan, 1907), p. 342.

<sup>14</sup> True story from Chad Bogosian’s Introduction to Philosophy Class, September 2010.

spirit of tolerance want to say, namely, “I have my beliefs, you have your beliefs, and we can all just believe as we want and respect each other regardless of our differences.” Put differently, this young man echoed what seem to be the pre-theoretical intuitions many have about disagreement, namely, when disagreements arise, my intellectual opponent may persist believing as he does without my feeling the need to don him an idiot. I can see them as reasonable to persist believing as they do even though we happen to differ about our beliefs.

Richard Feldman found this same sort of “permissivism”<sup>15</sup> present among a recent class of his philosophy and religion students. Call this **Case 1**. Feldman asked his class what they thought the most rational thing to do is once they come to know that another student in their class has conflicting religious beliefs with their own beliefs, and their classmate can even cite something like *reasons* for their differing set of religious beliefs. To his surprise and dismay, Feldman’s class unanimously responded “yes” to the following two questions: (1) Can two equally intelligent and well-informed persons who have *shared* the same evidence, and are interested in the truth of what proposition that evidence supports have reasonable disagreements?; and (2) Can two equally intelligent and well-informed persons, who have shared the same evidence and are interested in the truth of what proposition that evidence supports reasonably maintain their own belief yet also think that the other party to the disagreement is also reasonable?<sup>16</sup> Affirmative answers to these two questions by Feldman’s students can be more explicitly stated as these two claims:

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<sup>15</sup> Roger White, “Epistemic Permissiveness.” *Philosophical Perspectives* 19 (2005): 445-59. This is his term as far as I can tell and used throughout the literature.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Feldman, “Reasonable Religious Disagreements”, in *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, ed. Louise Antony. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 194, 201.

- (1) Epistemic Peers who have shared their evidence can have reasonable disagreements.
- (2) Epistemic Peers who have shared their evidence can reasonably maintain their own belief yet also think that the other party to the disagreement is also reasonable.<sup>17</sup>

As will become obvious, (early) Feldman and the Equal Weight View (EWV hereafter) proponent find these students mistaken on both counts. While it may sound nice to affirm (1) and (2), it is not really the best epistemic stance for one to take in the face of known peer disagreement. More to the point: there are no *reasonable disagreements*. In order to understand this contention, I will proceed by unpacking the EWV noting the key principles and assumptions it consists of. This is best done by means of considering cases of disagreement that seem to favor the intuitions of the EWV. From there I will highlight a series of objections to both the EWV and its underlying principles which I think form a cumulative case against its viability as theory of how to respond to disagreement. In light of this cumulative case, I think the EWV should be abandoned.

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<sup>17</sup> But there really is a third claim here that can be distinguished from the claim in (2). That is, (3) Epistemic Peers who have shared their evidence can reasonably maintain their own belief yet think that the other party to the disagreement is unreasonable to maintain their respective views.



## Section 1

### Motivating the Equal Weight View: Cases and Core Assumptions

The recent interest in and subsequent burgeoning literature on the epistemic significance of epistemic disagreement can, in many ways, be attributed to the work of Richard Feldman.<sup>18</sup> His work on disagreement can be traced back to an interchange with Alvin Plantinga on the topic of Religious Pluralism and Exclusivism<sup>19</sup>, and it was there that we find in seminal form what has come to be known as the Equal Weight View. In fact, his comments there will help shed light on why he thinks his students' answers to (1) and (2) above are mistaken.

The Plantingian *exclusivist* holds that his religious tenets/beliefs are true and that those tenets of opposing religions are not only inconsistent with their own but false and mistaken. Contrary to the exclusivist, the religious *pluralist* says that “it is *irrational*, or egotistical and *unjustified*, or intellectually arrogant, or elitist, or a manifestation of harmful pride, or even oppressive and imperialistic to maintain that one’s own beliefs are true and the beliefs of others are false once one becomes aware of the variety of religious beliefs held by

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<sup>18</sup> By “recent” I mean within that last decade or since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, so I do not mean to say that Feldman started this discussion. As will become obvious, the discussion of disagreement has a substantial history especially in relation to religious diversity, religious pluralism, and what this means for religious believers holding that their religion is the uniquely true one. But the idea of the “significance of epistemic disagreement” seems to trace back to William Rowe’s paper “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism.” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Oct. 1979): 335-341. While not explicitly about the epistemic significance of disagreement, Rowe quite nicely delineates some ways for atheists to think about theists who continue to believe in God even though they are aware of instances of human and animal suffering. He thinks atheists can either be “unfriendly”, “indifferent”, or “friendly”. Rowe argues that the “friendly” response, according to which the atheist can think the theist is rationally justified to believe in God, is the right one. I will argue in Chapter 3 of this work that Rowe’s view is really one form of Steadfastness views.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Feldman, “Plantinga on Exclusivism”, in *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2003): 85-90.

sensible and intelligent people around the world (italics mine).”<sup>20</sup> Such an assessment by the pluralist of his exclusivist opponent seems to be made all the more salient when we take into account that all religions seem to have similar support for their tenets (e.g. religious texts, experiences, and internal markers.) If this is right, the pluralist thinks that there is a “parity of evidence” here that Plantinga and his opponents must be aware of, and in light of this awareness, it is unreasonable to maintain one’s original beliefs in the face of religious disagreement. Feldman makes clear his agreement with the pluralist when he writes, “I think that some version of the principle pluralists appeal to is correct.”<sup>21</sup>

The pluralist principle Feldman has in mind (which really maps onto the EWV nicely) runs as follows:

**(PP):** If (i) S has some good reasons (“internal markers”) to believe P, but (ii) also knows that other people have equally good reasons (“internal markers”) for believing things incompatible with P, and (iii) S has no reason to discount their reasons and favor her own, then S is not justified in believing P.<sup>22</sup>

Notice a couple key features of Feldman’s early thought here on religious disagreement.

*First*, he thinks the significance of known disagreement has to do with one’s justification for believing P. That is, known disagreement is significant in that the religious believer now must ask herself what happens to her perceived justification for her religious beliefs in light of the fact that other “sensible and intelligent people” disagree (i.e. “hold beliefs incompatible with P”). Feldman thinks that the known disagreement, especially the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 85

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 86

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 88.

satisfaction of (ii) and (iii) of PP serves to “undermine her justification for P”<sup>23</sup> even if it does not render P false.

Of course, condition (iii) may not be met, so the antecedent of PP would not be satisfied in this case.<sup>24</sup> For example, in an apparent case of disagreement one party to the dispute has a reason to discount her peer’s response to the evidence if the peer is cognitively impaired or is not functioning properly or is not being careful with the evidence. Recall the example I used in the main Introduction. There we imagined four medical researchers all working on a cure for some one ailment. As it turned out, each researcher concluded differently about which treatment was “best”: one said A, two said B, etc. Imagine though that the first doctor realizes some problem with the other researchers’ tests and subsequent results. Perhaps their data was figured wrong or there’s reason to think their conclusions followed more from biases and wishful thinking than the actual data. In this case, researcher one has a reason to discount the claims of the others, so (iii) is not satisfied, and researcher one would be reasonable to persist believing A is the best option for treatment. The problem,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. In light of his comments elsewhere (Feldman 2006, 2007), it is safe to extend this feature as follows: the religious believer must also ask herself what is most rational to do in the face of known religious disagreement. It seems that there is only one answer here: the most rational thing to do is to alter or adjust one’s epistemic stance towards her religious belief in light of the disagreement. It seems to me that Feldman understands “justification” and “rationality” to be interchangeable terms in the sense that what one is rational to do in the face of disagreement will depend on whether that person is justified to believe (or continue believing) as she does. After all, a person would be “irrational” (in the epistemic sense) to persist in believing P if she is in fact unjustified to believe P, or more weakly, if her justification has been reduced below the threshold that would make it rational for her to hold that belief. I say ‘more weakly’, because this reduction of justification might only require the person to suspend judgment about a belief while not requiring her to disbelieve the proposition altogether. This is made explicit in the “Uniqueness Thesis” (UT) below.

<sup>24</sup> I might also think (ii) is not met, for I may not grant that you have “equally good reasons.” Instead, I will only grant that you purport to have such reasons, but I will have some reason to not think they are equally good.

according to Feldman, is that neither Plantinga nor his religious studies students in have this sort of reason. This brings us to the next point.

*Second*, there's the notion of "parity of evidence" or "equally good reasons." Crucial here is that all parties to the table have both (a) similar evidentiary support for their divergent beliefs (i.e. scriptures, experiences, "internal markers"), and (b) the ability to weigh the relevant evidence for and against the religious beliefs in question. This makes them 'epistemic peers'. But if you and I each have such evidence for our religious beliefs, then it would seem that we are *aware* of this fact. Here we find the initial remnants of the idea that the awareness of disagreement is a new kind of evidence (a point discussed in more depth below) that must be considered in our overall assessment of what is most rational to do in the face of religious disagreement. What Feldman has in mind here is that each of us must weigh this 'new evidence' (i.e. the fact that we disagree about P) equally when considering what is rational to do in the face of disagreement. When we do that and condition (iii) is met, that is, if I lack a reason to weigh my response to our evidence pool heavier than I do your response to the same pool, then I should assign equal weight to our responses as a new kind of evidence. Here we might state the Equal Weight View (EWV) provisionally as follows:

**(EWV):** When two intellectual or epistemic peers disagree, each should give equal weight to the attitude of his peer as he does to his own.<sup>25</sup>

To see that this provisional definition captures the general idea behind the EWV, let us consider what a couple of its proponents have to say. Richard Feldman, for example, had this to say in his earlier writings:

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Kelly's definition in "Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence," in *Disagreement*. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 111-174.

Consider those cases in which the reasonable thing to think is that another person, every bit as sensible, serious, and careful as oneself, has reviewed the same information as oneself and has come to a contrary conclusion to one's own. . . . An honest description of the situation acknowledges its symmetry. . . . In those cases, I think, the skeptical conclusion is the reasonable one: it is not the case that both points of view are reasonable, and it is not the case that one's own point of view is somehow privileged. Rather, suspension of judgment is called for.<sup>26</sup>

Here the first sentence is really the definition of an "epistemic peer." The second sentence talks of "symmetry" which is Feldman's way of saying that there's an epistemic parity between our respective responses to whether some body of evidence E support a proposition P or not. Since there's this symmetry or epistemic parity in our responses to E, we should give equal weight to our peer's response that we give to our own. When we do, rationality will lead us to suspend judgment, because we cannot both be reasonable. If we give each other's responses equal weight and our dispute is still unresolved, we must suspend judgment. Now the reason I did not include *suspending judgment* in the definition of the EWV surrounds the fact that not all proponents of the view share this latter move. They all agree that we must give equal weight to our peer's attitude with respect to P, but proponents of the EWV differ on what happens next.

Consider how EWV-proponent David Christensen defines the view after considering the case where two weather forecasters disagree:

. . . It seems to me doubtful that one can invoke a permissive notion of rationality to dismiss the significance of the opinions of otherwise rational people with whom one disagrees. . . . It seems obvious to me that, absent some special reason for thinking that I had some advantage over her in making this forecast, I should revise my belief. Even when the evidence does not entail the answer to the relevant question, disagreement of an epistemic peer provides reason for belief revision.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Feldman, "Epistemological Puzzles About Disagreement." *Epistemology Futures*. S. Hetherington, editor. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 235.

<sup>27</sup> See David Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News." *Philosophical Review*, 116, No.2 (2007): pp. 192, 194.

Here the first sentence rejects the seemingly intuitive approach of both my Introduction to Philosophy students and Feldman's Religion students, namely, two intellectual peers can think that their opponent is wrong about P but rational to believe as they do. In brief, peers can reasonably disagree about P. Christensen demurs. Like Feldman, he finds an epistemic symmetry to our differing weather forecasts. Symmetry entails epistemic parity, and parity requires us to give each other's response "equal weight." But the next move for Christensen differs from Feldman, because he thinks we must "revise" in the direction of our peer's belief while not being required to "suspend judgment." EWV-proponent Adam Elga echoes this same general line when he opines: "Suppose that you and a friend independently evaluate a factual claim, based on the same relevant evidence and arguments. You become confident that the claim is true. But then you find out that your friend. . . has become just as confident that the claim is false. Should the news at all *reduce your confidence* in the disputed claim? Conciliatory Views on disagreement answer "yes" (italics added).<sup>28</sup> Christensen and Elga's call for confidence reduction as opposed to suspension of judgment in light of known peer disagreement will become significant later on. For now I will leave the EWV defined as stated: When you and a peer disagree, you must give equal weight to your peer's doxastic attitude.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See his "Reflection and Disagreement." *Nous*, 41 (2007): 478-79. It's worth pointing out that Elga's name for the Equal Weight View is "Conciliation." These are two names for the same species of view in the disagreement literature, but I will stick with the label "Equal Weight View" throughout this work. As far as I can tell, there is nothing of import riding on this choice.

<sup>29</sup> Besides the fact that EWV-proponents disagree about what to do after giving "equal weight" to a peer's doxastic attitude with respect to P, there is another reason not to include suspension or revision in the EWV's definition. My reason here is that the some non-EWV's are consistent with Christensen and Elga's revisionist or reduced confidence move. For example, some Total

Bringing the EWV and PP to bear on both the Plantingian Exclusivist as well as my and Feldman's classes of philosophy and religious studies students, we can highlight their epistemic mistake. Plantingian exclusivists are epistemically at fault because they have violated both principles. The exclusivist has privileged his own response to the evidence without any seemingly good reason to not give his peer's response "equal weight." If he did give his peer's response "equal weight," he would see that the most rational thing to do here is suspend judgment on his belief. With respect to Feldman's students (and mine), their error is similar in that they have not given any weight to the fact of disagreement with their classmates. If they did, some adjustment in their doxastic attitude toward their religious belief would be in order.

But why think that EWV is true? Why think it is the correct response to religious disagreement? Here Peter van Inwagen has rightly pointed out that, "Discussions of 'exclusivism' began with discussion of religious exclusivism. It was soon recognized, however, that if there was such a thing as religious exclusivism, there were also such things as philosophical, political, and scientific exclusivism (and no doubt other forms as well)."<sup>30</sup> Quite rightly, then, if the EWV is the correct view of how to respond to religious disagreements, then it will apply *mutatis mutandis* to all other kinds of known intractable intellectual peer disagreements as well. The epistemological implications of the EWV are rather significant, so we need to get clear on why Feldman, et. al. think it is true. To do this,

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Evidence View proponents agree that reduced confidence is in order in some cases of disagreement.

<sup>30</sup> Peter van Inwagen, "We're Right. They're Wrong." *Disagreement*. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 10-28.

it is fitting to turn to other examples/cases of disagreement in order to fill out precisely what the EWV amounts to.

One kind of case that seems to support the intuitions of the EWV are perceptual cases. Consider the following perceptual case, which we'll call Case 2.

**Case 2: Dean in the Quad.** Suppose you and I are looking out at the quad on a relatively clear day. We are chatting about some of the recent literature on an area of philosophy when you say, "Look, there's the dean walking in the quad wearing a blue suit." I turn to you with a curious look, because for all I can tell the dean is not walking in the quad wearing a blue suit. So I let you know that I think you are mistaken.<sup>31</sup>

What are we supposed to do at this point? Feldman thinks that both of us should be struck by our disagreement in a certain way. If each of us has had our perceptual experience and subsequent belief about the dean being in the quad in *isolation* (perhaps while sitting in our own office alone), then it would be perfectly reasonable to believe as we do. However, given that our disagreement is *known*, I should do something of an epistemic "double take." Since I have no good reason to think that you are lying to me about what you do or do not see, and since I have a good record of you being equally competent in such matters (perhaps we have disagreed before and you turned out to be correct about what the evidence supported), you are my *epistemic peer*. And if you are my epistemic peer, I have every reason to take what you claim about the visual evidence's support of your belief as seriously as I do my own differing claim about that same evidence's support of my belief. Therefore, it would be

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Feldman, "Epistemological Puzzles about Disagreement," *Epistemology Futures*. S. Hetherington, editor. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 223.



unreasonable for me to dismiss your reaction to the evidence here in privilege of my own. I should give your reaction equal weight. Giving your reaction equal weight (and you doing the same) will then require both of us to suspend judgment on our differing beliefs until we have more conclusive evidence to adjudicate between our conflicting claims. For Feldman the moral here is this: in cases of known peer disagreement you should give equal weight to your peer's response to the evidence; and when you do, you will need to "split the difference" in doxastic attitudes with your 'peer', which means you should *suspend judgment* on your belief until further evidence can "settle the score" between you.

Another kind of case that seems to support the intuitions of the EWV is computation cases. Consider the following, which we'll call Case 3.

**Case 3: Restaurant Case.** Suppose that five of us go out to dinner. It's time to pay the check, so the question we're interested in is how much we each owe. We can all see the bill total clearly, we all agree to give a 20 percent tip, and we further agree to split the whole cost evenly, no worrying over who asked for imported water, or skipped desert, or drank more of the fine wine. I do the math in my head and become highly confident that our shares are \$43 each. Meanwhile, my friend does the math in her head and becomes highly confident that our shares are \$45 each.<sup>32</sup>

How should I respond after learning that we disagree? The EWV proponent thinks the answer is obvious. I should "revise my belief" or "adjust my level of confidence" that I am correct about the total amount I computed until we look into the matter further, perhaps by pulling out our nifty cell-phones and re-calculating what the total should be. This reaction

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<sup>32</sup> Christensen, David. "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News." In *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 116, No.2, 187-217 (2007): p. 93

seems right if we add in a few more details to the story. For example, suppose that for all you know, your friends are equally able to compute basic math problems. We might add that you have even seen them do such basic computations accurately on other occasions when you have been out on the town. Given this track record along with the fact that their judgment seems to be intact (it is not as though they had too much wine on this occasion), you really have no reason to weigh your computation as ‘better’ than theirs.<sup>33</sup>

According to EWV-proponent David Christensen, “It seems obvious to me that, absent some special reason for thinking that I had some advantage over [my peers in concluding that my computed total is accurate and my peers’ totals are not], I should revise my belief. Even when the evidence does not entail the answer to the relevant question, disagreement of an epistemic peer provides reason for belief revision.”<sup>34</sup> Christensen’s point here is at once similar to and different from Feldman’s. It is similar by not only finding the EWV to be true, but in thinking that it is so in virtue of there being no good reason in such cases to privilege one’s own view over that of one’s ‘peer’. It is different in the sense that he construes the right response in terms of what I like to call “incremental belief revision.” Revision of a belief is not an “all or nothing” matter for Christensen as Feldman thinks it is. Rather, disagreement requires that you revise your belief “at least some” in the direction of your ‘peer’ due to known disagreement (and they should do the same). Put differently, beliefs come in degrees, so there is a range in between where you and a peer initially

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<sup>33</sup> Equal Weight and Conciliation-proponents utilize computations often to defend the plausibility of their view of peer disagreement. See for example, Jonathan Matheson’s, “Conciliatory Views of Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence.” In *Episteme*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2009): 269-279. Here he begins defense of the view with a computation case (p. 269), a case that shows the EWV/Conciliatory views to be the “intuitive view on this matter.”

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 194.

believed or not prior to disagreement, so upon learning of your disagreement, you could theoretically move somewhere between the two, perhaps without having to suspend judgment.

For Feldman, the moral would be the same here as in Case 2: in cases of known peer disagreement, you should give equal weight to your peer's response to the evidence that you give to your own; and if your responses conflict, you are both required to adjust your beliefs in the direction of your intellectual peer. You both are required to "split the difference" epistemically and *suspend judgment* about your respective beliefs in P and not-P. The important difference between Feldman's "all-or-nothing" response and Christensen's "incremental revision" response will become more evident below when we consider objections to the EWV.<sup>35</sup>

Another case that supports the intuitions behind the EWV is inanimate measuring devices. Consider the following case, which we'll call Case 4.

**Case 4: Thermometer.** Suppose that you and I are each attempting to determine the current temperature by consulting our own personal thermometers. In the past, the two thermometers have been equally reliable. At time  $t_0$ , I consult my thermometer, find that it reads '69 degrees', and so immediately take up the corresponding belief. Meanwhile, you consult your thermometer, find that it reads '72 degrees', and so

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<sup>35</sup> Here I must note that Feldman has also defended a version of the Equal Weight View that is not of the "all-or-nothing" variety in two places. See for example his "Plantinga on Exclusionism." *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (2003): 85-90; and "Reasonable Religious Disagreements." *Philosophers Without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, Louise Antony, editor. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 194-214. Other philosophers sympathetic to the Equal Weight View have done the same. See for example Adam Elga, "Reflection and Disagreement." *Nous*, 41 (2007): 478-502; and Roger White, "Epistemic Permissiveness." *Philosophical Perspectives* 19 (2005): 445-59.

immediately take up that belief. At time  $t_1$ , you and I compare notes and discover that our thermometers have disagreed. How, if at all, should we revise our original opinions about the temperature in the light of this new information?<sup>36</sup>

Once again the EWV proponent thinks that it is obvious what either party to this exchange should do. Since neither party has a reason to think that the other's thermometer is unreliable and subject to an erroneous reading of the temperature, both parties should revise their beliefs about the rightness of their thermometer's reading. And it would not do for either party to cite as a reason for persisting to believe their thermometer got it right "well, it is my thermometer, and it tends to be reliable." Such a reason seems arbitrary. The fact that it is your thermometer has no bearing on the reliability of its reading. So, either thermometer-owner should give equal weight to the opinion of the other divergent reading of the temperature and suspend judgment on the matter until they can determine which thermometer is getting it right. Other cases of known peer disagreement are analogous to this whether they are religious, political, or philosophical. Merely citing the fact that you believe P as a reason you are rational to persist in the face of disagreement will not do, because it is an arbitrary reason.<sup>37</sup> For Feldman and the EWV proponent the moral seems conclusive: In

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<sup>36</sup> I owe this example to Thomas Kelly, "Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence," in *Disagreement*, Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 111-174. A similar example is found in David Christensen "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News." *Philosophical Review*, 116, No. 2 (2007): 196, 234. Here he makes use of 'Acme wristwatches' that two peers have and tell different times. Richard Feldman also references a similar kind of example in replying to Plantinga's externalist proper functionalist account of knowledge as a potential response to his argument for the EWV and against "reasonable disagreements" in his "Epistemological Puzzles About Disagreement." *Epistemology Futures*. S. Hetherington, editor. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 216-36.

<sup>37</sup> I owe this insight to Jack Lyons who first brought it to my attention in my dissertation proposal defense.

cases of known peer disagreement, we should give equal weight to the response of our peer to the evidence for a given belief. When we do, we will see that the most rational epistemic response here is to revise our original beliefs: either radically in the direction of one's peer (Christensen, et.al.) or by suspending judgment (Feldman).

### *1.1 Assumptions Underlying the Equal Weight View*

The above kinds of cases seem to motivate the EWV quite well. But underlying the general EWV are a set of core assumptions that must be drawn out and discussed. These assumptions are two: the Uniqueness Thesis and the Evidence Principle. Let us take these in order.

A theme that was present in the above cases is that epistemic peers should “suspend judgment” or meet their opponent half way by revising their doxastic attitude when they knowingly disagree about whether E supports P or not. This theme brings to light an assumption underlying the EWV that runs as follows:

**Uniqueness Thesis (UT):** Given some total body of evidence E and some proposition P, there is one unique doxastic attitude that is rational (or justified) for a subject S to take towards some proposition P.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> While there's no one agreed upon definition, this is quite close to how early Feldman defines the UT in his interesting paper “Reasonable Religious Disagreements.” He says, “The Uniqueness Thesis. . .is the idea that a body of evidence justifies at most one proposition out of a competing set of propositions. . .and it justifies at most one attitude toward any particular proposition. . .The Uniqueness Thesis says that, given a body of evidence, one of these attitudes is the rationally justified one.” See p. 205. Equal Weight View proponent Roger White says he is “following Feldman” when he defines it as follows: “Given one's total evidence, there is a unique rational doxastic attitude that one can take to any proposition.” See his paper “Epistemic Permissivism”, p. 445.

What the UT tells us is that there is only one rational doxastic attitude to take towards a proposition. If we are operating on an “all-or-nothing” Feldmanian schema, there are three such attitudes: belief, disbelief, or suspension of judgment. Before disagreement, E either supports P, not-P, or suspension of judgment on the matter, so it remains the case after our disagreement is known that E supports only one of those three doxastic attitudes. Since we currently have no way to “settle the score” about either the religion case or the perceptual Case 1, we are most rational to adopt the third doxastic attitude—suspension of judgment. This attitude is in the ballpark of agnosticism about P, because it says that, since we have conflicting evidence about E’s support of P, we do not know whether we should believe P or not-P. So, suspension of judgment is in order, but this is not the same as believing the falsity of P.<sup>39</sup>

Of course, on Christensen’s incremental belief revision EWV, the moral of the UT is very similar but different. Similarly, there is one uniquely rational stance for a believer to take after disagreement with a peer is known. But that stance need not be all the way from belief that P to suspension of belief. Instead, the believer might only be required to move somewhere closer to his opponent’s view. Below when I consider criticisms of the UT, this will become more obvious and significant. Still I will argue that neither form of the EWV escapes the problems that the UT faces. For now, the moral is that if the UT is true, there cannot be *reasonable disagreements* among epistemic peers. If our shared body of evidence

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<sup>39</sup> Christensen and other EWV proponents share Feldman’s commitment to (UT), although they may work it out a bit differently. David Christensen, for example, says “My term ‘Rational Uniqueness’, referring to the assumption that there is a unique maximally rational response to a given evidential situation, is intended to echo Feldman’s ‘Uniqueness Thesis’, which is essentially the same idea applied to all-or-nothing (as opposed to graded) beliefs.” See his “Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News.” *Philosophical Review*, 116, No.2 (2007): p. 211.

supports only one doxastic attitude toward P, it is not the case that I can find you reasonable to conclude not-P while thinking I am reasonable to conclude P. One of us must be mistaken. Since we don't know which one is mistaken, we must either suspend judgment about P or move in the direction of our peer. That is the most reasonable doxastic response given the UT. Moreover, there are implications of the UT for disagreement in isolation, namely, there cannot be reasonable disagreement even in isolation. Since a body of evidence E supports only one doxastic attitude (whether of the Feldman or Christensen sort), two peers who disagree in isolation cannot both be rational to believe as they do prior to disclosure. If the UT is true, only one doxastic attitude or level of confidence is justified towards P given E.

Perhaps this point is made with a bit more force if we consider the second assumption underlying the EWV. It is an assumption about evidence that was operating beneath the surface of Feldman's criticism of Plantinga above. In a more recent paper, Feldman has this to say about disagreement as a form of evidence, "A point about evidence that plays a role here is this: evidence of evidence is evidence. More carefully, evidence that there is evidence for P is evidence for P. Knowing that the other has an insight provides each of them with evidence."<sup>40</sup> Let us call this the Evidence Principle.

**Evidence Principle (EP):** "Evidence of Evidence is Evidence." Disagreement is a form of evidence, so the fact that we disagree must be added to our original body of evidence E to constitute a new body of evidence E\*.

To understand the significance of this principle, it will help to consider an explicit case of how this looks and then inquire into the relationship between the EP and 'epistemic peers'.

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<sup>40</sup> Richard Feldman, "Epistemological Puzzles About Disagreement," in *Epistemology Futures*. S. Hetherington, editor. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 223.

For Feldman, a person's evidence is what they have at a time T to consider in support of some proposition P. So in a perceptual case (perhaps like Case 1), you might say that Susan had her body of evidence E at T1 prior to disclosing to Jenny what she saw in the quad, and this body of evidence E seemed to support her belief P: that the dean is in the quad. Now Susan talks with Jenny, and she comes to discover that Jenny does not see the dean in the quad, and this claim that not-P conflicts with Susan's own belief that P. Call this time T2. So, at T1, things looked to Susan like this:

E: Her available evidence E supports P, namely, that P is true. E includes not only Susan's perceptual evidence but her nexus of background beliefs about the dean, etc.

But at T2, Susan discloses her purported experience to an 'epistemic peer' who holds a mutually exclusive belief from her own, so at T2, Susan has a new body of evidence that looks like this:

E\*: Includes all of E from time T1 plus Susan's awareness of the fact that her epistemic peer who believes not-P disagrees with her.

Notice here that E\* is a new and expanded body of evidence that bears on the rational acceptability of P according to Feldman. It includes all of Susan's original evidence plus the fact of disagreement, and that fact evidentially counts for something in Susan's deciding whether she should continue to believe P or not. But we might ask: how much does the fact of disagreement count for? It seems to me that the answer is that it counts for quite a lot for Feldman. It is an epistemic rationality game changer, so much so, then at T2 Susan's new body of evidence E\* fails to support P. So, Susan is irrational to persist believing P given E\*. She is now rationally required to suspend judgment on P.



But why think that this is what rationality requires? It seems to me that the answer surrounds how Feldman and the EWV-proponent understand the relationship between evidence and ‘epistemic peer-hood.’ Recall that an epistemic peer is stipulated as someone of equal (a) intelligence, (b) ability to weigh the evidence you both share, and (c) interest in the truth of what the evidence supports. If that’s granted, then disagreement with an epistemic peer is evidentially weighty. Epistemic peers are something like a source of evidence. In the literature, this evidential understanding of epistemic peers has been called “higher-order” evidence,<sup>41</sup> so the difference between E and E\* above is that the latter contains “higher-order” evidence that is sufficient to call into question the rationality of Susan’s persisting in her belief that P.

Here, however, I think it is fitting to recast this point in terms of ‘defeaters’ and their relationship to the *prima facie/ultima facie* distinction with respect to justification. There are generally understood to be two kinds of defeaters: undercutting and rebutting. An undercutting defeater provides a *prima facie* reason to think that your evidence is misleading. A rebutting defeater provides a *prima facie* reason to think that your original belief is false.<sup>42</sup> Now we might ask: what kind of defeater does Feldman and the EWV proponent think Susan obtains via known disagreement? In other words, what kind of defeater is the fact of known disagreement, what has been called “higher-order evidence?”

On the one hand, one might think Feldman believes that known peer disagreement provides an undercutting defeater for Susan. That is, the difference between E at T1 and E\*

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas Kelly, “Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence,” in *Disagreement*. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 111-174.

<sup>42</sup> For a more fine-grained discussion of defeasible reasoning and these two kinds of defeaters, see John Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1986), pp. 38-39.

at T2 for Susan is that the latter contains an undercutting defeater for her belief in P, because the quality of her evidence for P has been called into question by the fact of disagreement. This strikes me as a plausible reading, because Susan's interlocutor would be saying there's something wrong with evidence E. The set of reasons that E consists of are really not good ones for P. On the other hand, one might think Feldman is suggesting that known disagreement now provides Susan with a rebutting defeater for believing P, because the fact of known disagreement is evidence that P might not be true as Susan thinks it is. This reading is likewise plausible, because it would see the fact of known disagreement as casting doubt on the truth of P for Susan. The fact that Susan's peer finds not-P to be the more salient reaction to E provides Susan with a reason to doubt that P is true given E. In my view, Feldman and the EWV proponent have the former reading of defeaters in mind. Feldman thinks that peer disagreement, which is part of Susan's new body of evidence E\*, provides an undercutting defeater for her. It does so by implying that her original evidence E, from which she concluded P, was misleading evidence and failed to support P. But if she has a reason to think her evidence does not support P, then she at least should suspend judgment on P until she can either counteract this defeater or until she has conclusive evidence to believe not-P.

But is Feldman right to think that Susan has an undercutting defeater? If so, would she be irrational to continue believing P in the face of known disagreement? The EWV-proponent here seems to want to say that Susan would be irrational to persist believing P precisely because disagreement is an undercutting defeater for P. Susan now has a reason to suspend judgment about P (or radically modify her stance towards P in the direction of her peer who concluded not-P), so she cannot rationally persist in believing P. Or put differently, remaining *steadfast* in her belief is outside the bounds of rationality as it were.

## Section 2

### *Analysis and Criticism of the EWV: Why I think We Should Reject the EWV*

With all of the pieces in place, it is now time to explain why I think the EWV is unsatisfying as a response to known epistemic peer disagreement. It seems to me that there are several lines of objection that can be raised to both the underlying assumptions of the EWV and to the core thesis itself. My strategy here will be two-fold: supply objections in order of relatively increasing strength, and build a cumulative case against the EWV. So, objection two is not as ‘severe’ perhaps as the latter objections are, but it still contributes to my overall case against the merits of EWV. As such, each objection matters and highlights a reason for rejecting the view, but taken together, I think we have an even more powerful case against the EWV. It is to these criticisms I now turn.

The *first objection* has to do with the Equal Weight View being self-undermining or self-defeating. Feldman and friends tell us that when known disagreements between intellectual peers arise, the rational response is to either suspend judgment or revise our level of confidence. Presumably this applies to any area of disagreement, including disagreement about responses to epistemic disagreement. If this is right, then the EWV is downright self-defeating. It tells not only its dissenters but also its proponents that they should suspend judgment or revise their confidence on the EWV itself. But surely this is an unwanted result. I tend to think that this objection is not philosophically coy but actually raises a legitimate problem. Logically speaking, if a view cannot meet its own criteria (i.e. is self-referentially incoherent), then it seems we have a reason to reject it as a sound view. That’s precisely the issue facing the EWV.

In his paper, “How to Disagree about How to Disagree,”<sup>43</sup> EWV proponent Adam Elga admits this is a real problem for his view (what he calls “conciliatory views”) and attempts a defense on its behalf. He admits that the problem is real and not apparent when he says, “The trouble is this: In many situations involving disagreement about disagreement, conciliatory views call for their own rejection. So conciliatory views on disagreement are incoherent.”<sup>44</sup> So put, what way out of this objection is available to the EWV proponent? In his own words, Elga admits, “One might try to avoid this result by adding a special restriction to one’s conciliatory view. For example, one might say that one should in general be moved by disagreement, but not when the disputed topic is disagreement itself. But such a restriction seems objectionably arbitrary and ad hoc.”<sup>45</sup> I couldn’t agree more. It would seem inconsistent to provide a standard response to disagreement only to argue (conveniently) that it fails to apply when people disagree about that. This reeks of wanting to have one’s cake and eat it to. Can Elga meet the challenge?

Elga asks us to consider a magazine like *Consumer Reports*. Part of their being successful as a magazine requires them to give consistent (and accurate) advice. Part of giving “consistent” advice on products requires them to assume that they are actually doing that, and even doing it better than competing magazines who offer the same sort of service. In other words, they need to be dogmatic about their own consistency and correctness as a magazine. That is simply part of the game. Analogously, “And views on disagreement give advice on how to respond to evidence. So in order to be consistent, views on disagreement

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<sup>43</sup> Adam Elga, “How to Disagree about How to Disagree.” in *Disagreement*. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 5

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

must be dogmatic with respect to their own correctness.”<sup>46</sup> The point here is that there is a general operational principle that guides the magazine’s work: we are the best at what we do and right in our evaluations. This is a “general constraint” that applies to all policies, rules, or methods. The issuer of them must assume their correctness, accuracy, aptness, or whatever other term you prefer. In so doing, there is nothing arbitrary or ad hoc going on. It is simply what must happen to get work done. Elga thinks the same applies to the EWV, namely, they must assume (and rightfully so) the veracity of their own position in order to get along discussing the epistemic significance of disagreement. If that is right, they can escape the charge of self-defeat, because they are operating on a generally accepted methodological principle that any competitive practice must operate on: “So partly conciliatory views need no ad hoc restrictions in order to avoid the self-undermining problem. They only need restrictions that are independently motivated.”<sup>47</sup>

Now suppose that we grant Elga’s response as something of a way out of the self-undermining objection, although I must admit that I find it to be a stretch. It seems to me that a problem remains for Elga and the EWV-proponent, because the threat of self-defeat only plagues the EWV and not the other views of what one should do when peer disagreement occurs.<sup>48</sup> To see this, we might consider those views that think reasonable disagreement between two or more peers can occur. Here if we apply one’s view of known peer disagreement to the issue of disagreement itself (i.e. disagreement about what to do when peers disagree), we will see that there is no threat of self-defeat for such views. There is no threat of self-defeat precisely because both parties already think that two parties to a dispute

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 11

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 11

<sup>48</sup> I must thank Thomas D. Senor for pointing this out to me in conversation.

can reasonably disagree about some proposition P after disclosure. If two intellectual peers can reasonably disagree about some proposition P after disclosure, then where P is what view of disagreement is the most salient, it will be possible for two peers to reasonably disagree about that target proposition as well. As such, non-Equal Weight views can avoid the rather damning threat of self-defeat, and this strikes me as something that counts in favor of the others views and against the EWV in principle.

A *second objection* has to do with the “modest” skeptical conclusion that is implied by the conjunction of the EP and the stipulated notion of peers.<sup>49</sup> In my view, the skepticism is more than modest, because there are whole domains of inquiry where it seems that we would be required to either suspend judgment or *radically* revise our beliefs. These areas include philosophy, politics, ethics, religion, and even science. But I think the first four are really what Feldman and friends have in mind. For most thoughtful persons, however, these sets of beliefs encompass a host of beliefs that we would be required to be skeptical about if disagreement with an intellectual peer is an undercutting defeater (i.e. higher order evidence). This strikes me as much too high a price to pay for the Equal Weight View.

A *third objection* to the EWV I would like to raise comes from what seems to be a questionable connection it has to doxastic voluntarism. The EWV has argued that there is something for us to *do* when known peer disagreement happens, namely, to adjust our doxastic attitude in some direction or other. If the EWV is prescriptive, that suggests that we

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<sup>49</sup> Richard Feldman. “Epistemological Puzzles About Disagreement,” in *Epistemology Futures*. S. Hetherington, editor. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 235. He has recently changed his view to a Total Evidence View, and it seems that this skeptical worry was at least a partial contributor that prompted this change. For his more recent view in light of this change, see his “Evidentialism, Higher-Order Evidence, and Disagreement.” *Episteme*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2009): 294-312.

have an obligation to alter our doxastic attitudes as it so prescribes.<sup>50</sup> But such an obligation implies that I can make such an adjustment by choosing to do so. However, it's not at all obvious that I can just decide to adjust my doxastic stance. Hence, the EWV is too demanding and thereby unsuccessful as a view of how to handle peer disagreements. My argument against the EWV might be run more formally as follows:

### **An Argument from Doxastic Voluntarism**

- P1. If the EWV is true and we ought to adjust our original belief or doxastic stance when known disagreements arise, then doxastic voluntarism is true (i.e. I can choose my new doxastic stance accordingly).
- P2. Doxastic Voluntarism is not true (i.e. I cannot choose my new doxastic stance).
- C. Therefore, EWV is false.

I think Premise 1 reflects how friends of the EWV talk about evidence, disagreement, and rationality. They argue that, in cases of peer disagreement, epistemic rationality requires of us to first give *equal weight* to both my response and that of my *peer*, and then I ought to *revise* my original belief/doxastic attitude. But this implies that I can voluntarily move from believing to revision or suspension, or so it seems. Alvin Plantinga and William Alston have raised a similar concern about deontological theories of justification more generally— that they presuppose doxastic voluntarism.<sup>51</sup> In Alston's words, “. . .this conception of epistemic justification is viable only if beliefs are sufficiently under voluntary control to render such

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<sup>50</sup> I need to thank Thomas D. Senor for the wording of this sentence.

<sup>51</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant the Current Debate*, Chapter 1; and William Alston, “The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification,” *Philosophical Perspectives*, 2 (1988): 257-99. For a worry about the connection between deontological theories of justification and internalism, see Alvin Goldman, “Internalism Exposed,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 96 (1999): 271-93.

concepts as requirement, permission, obligations, reproach, and blame applicable to them. By the time honored principle that “Ought Implies Can”, one can be obliged to do A only if one has an effective choice of whether to do A.”<sup>52</sup> So, by extension, the question before us is whether we have such a choice with respect to choosing the purportedly rational doxastic stance the EWV requires.

Many philosophers have pointed out that doxastic voluntarism is suspect, for we do not have direct voluntary control over our believing or choice of doxastic stance. It’s simply not the case that we can “will ourselves to believe” (or disbelieve or suspend). Instead, our beliefs are formed in response to our environments, contexts, or bodies of evidence. At most, we are able to decide to pursue further evidence in order to rethink or reform a belief or set of beliefs. But what we cannot do is choose to believe or fix any other doxastic attitude with respect to P.<sup>53</sup>

Crucially, this means that it is possible that both parties to the dispute may not be able to do as the EWV recommends. There may be no way for me to “revise” or “suspend” my original belief. But does this make me irrational? I cannot see why ‘yes’ must be the answer. There may be other features of the epistemic situation here that simply disallow me from altering my belief or level of confidence. For example, there may be other beliefs that serve to sustain the one formed prior to disagreement that simply will not allow it to be given up that easily. Perhaps a coherentist could say that the coherence relation between P and his other beliefs serves to sustain belief in P in a way that is not easily abandoned in the face of disagreement. Or a reliabilist might think that there are belief forming processes responsible

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<sup>52</sup> William Alston, “The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification,” p. 259.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Section III, pp. 263-268.



for initiating and sustaining the original belief that continue to do so even after disagreement is known. Or, as I will argue in Chapter 4, there may be diachronic features that make a difference to epistemic evaluation. And if this is right, then perhaps what we would need in the face of disagreement is defeaters not just for P but for these other cognitive/epistemic supports or features.

In my view, if a thinker has weighed the original evidence for P as best as she can; and if she has taken into account the fact that her thoughtful counterpart disagrees (and more strongly, she has taken into account the reasons *why* her counterpart disagrees beyond the ‘mere fact’ that she disagrees), then I see no reason to suppose that she is not reasonable to *persist* or remain *steadfast* in her original belief. There is simply nothing left for her to *do* here, at least anything that is under her doxastic control. She has done all that is epistemically required of her to do: has been responsible with the evidence, exercised the virtues of care, discernment, and being humble enough to consider challenges to her belief that P. My point here has affinities with some of Richard Foley’s comments on ‘epistemic rationality’ in his book *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others* (2001):

. . . the notion of epistemically rational belief is my principle concern . . . is to be understood in terms of a distinctively epistemic goal, that of now having an accurate and comprehensive belief system, and the individual’s own perspective on reflection. An individual’s belief is rational in this sense if on reflection she would think that her belief effectively promotes the goal of her now having accurate and comprehensive beliefs. On the other hand, if she herself would be critical of the belief, insofar as her goal is now to have accurate and comprehensive beliefs, her belief is irrational.<sup>54</sup>

Notice that I am not saying my account is identical to Foley’s, but only that it has ‘affinities’.

This is best seen by the claim that one can be epistemically rational provided that she has

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<sup>54</sup> See Richard Foley. *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), especially chapters 1-2. This quote is from pp. 31-32.

done what I am calling her “epistemic best” with respect to P, where “epistemic best” is understood by Foley here as achieving one’s epistemic goal of “having accurate and comprehensive beliefs” as much as possible. And this strikes me as similar to my claim that, from my point of view, if I have been responsible with the evidence and exemplify the relevant intellectual virtues, then there’s no good reason to think that I am being irrational. I have done all I can do to have accurate and comprehensive beliefs.

Feldman and the EWV-proponent might have a reply here. In an earlier work, “The Ethics of Belief,”<sup>55</sup> Feldman takes on the objection that epistemic oughts (i.e. deontologism) entail doxastic voluntarism as I have suggested. He argues that this is not the case, or in other words, that Premise 1 of my argument above is mistaken. He makes his case first by arguing that epistemic oughts are to be understood as “role oughts.” In his words, “. . .forming beliefs is something people do. That is, we form beliefs in response to our experiences in the world. Anyone engaged in this activity ought to do it right. In my view, what they ought to do is follow their evidence (rather than wishes or fears). I suggest that epistemic oughts are of this sort.”<sup>56</sup> So we are believers and we ought to believe rightly, and when we fail to believe what our evidence supports we believe wrongly; yet it does not follow from this, according to Feldman, that we can choose our beliefs. He continues, “Even in cases in which a believer has no control at all, it makes sense to speak of what he ought to believe and ought not believe.”<sup>57</sup> In short, we can make good sense of our epistemic oughts/obligations even if we cannot choose our beliefs. Hence, ought doesn’t imply can; and this means that Feldman and

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<sup>55</sup> In his co-authored book w/Earl Conee, *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004): pp. 166-195.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p. 175.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

the EWW-proponent can say that the EWW does not entail voluntarism. The EWW along with its demands may be true while it may be false that we can choose to adjust our doxastic stances.

While I find this reply interesting, I do not find it satisfying. Suppose it's right that we can have epistemic oughts even if we cannot act to fulfill them. You might think that this brings us theoretical solace in a few unordinary cases where persons, for whatever reason, cannot do what epistemologists think the demands of intellectual life call them to do. If we are only talking about a few marginal cases here or there, then perhaps the above reply would give us solace. However, the situation with intractable peer disagreements is quite broad-spread and severe. There are many bright, well-informed persons in numerous domains of inquiry that disagree; and they all seem to be playing their role as believers quite well—or at least as good as we can expect of them. They “follow their evidence”, and still they find themselves believing different from their intellectual peers on a host of issues in their domain of inquiry. In addition, they find themselves (and perhaps their peers) rational to continue believing what they think the evidence supports without having to suspend judgment about P. If the EWW reply to my argument is correct, then all persons involved in these areas of pervasive disagreement are not fulfilling their roles well; and this means they are irrational if they fail to suspend judgment about their beliefs in those domains. This strikes me as wrongheaded, because I think a person can follow her evidence as the Feldman demands, yet be reasonable to continue believing what her total evidence supports even if this means she does and cannot lower her level of confidence at all. Why I think this will be made most explicit in Chapter 4 where I look at the crucial role diachronic epistemic features play in our evaluation of beliefs as rational.

A *fourth* line of *objection* highlights a problem for the Evidence Principle (EP) and its relationship to related notions like “peer”, “defeaters”, etc. Recall that the EWV-proponent holds to the EP. It says that disagreement is a form of evidence, i.e. “higher order evidence.” Above I went into a substantive discussion about what the EWV-proponent has in mind with this principle. I concluded that they think that peer disagreement is not simply a kind of evidence, but it provides either party to the dispute with an undercutting defeater for their P-relevant evidence. If this is right, on their view, they think that your shared undercutting defeaters cannot help but require you to either suspend judgment or radically modify your doxastic stance about P or not-P. But there’s a problem that arises here even if it is granted that disagreement is a kind of evidence and provides one with a defeater. The problem is that one’s awareness of peer disagreement—their newly obtained undercutting defeater—seems to “count for everything” or “swamp” their original evidence. However, it’s not at all clear that disagreement is this evidentially weighty, even if initially it does provide such a potential undercutting defeater.

In his paper, “Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence”, Thomas Kelly has offered what might be called the “Swamping Objection” to the EWV.<sup>58</sup> It runs as follows: At T1 you have your original body of evidence E, you weigh it, and you form a doxastic attitude with respect to it. For all you know, you are doing your epistemic best, are interested in the truth, etc. As such, it would seem that you are rational to conclude as you do regarding E’s support of P. Let’s suppose you conclude P is true. Now at T2 you meet a peer who weighs “the same body of evidence E,” does his epistemic best, and concludes not-P. The EP tells us

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<sup>58</sup> See Thomas Kelly, “Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence.” *Disagreement*. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.111ff.

that you now have a new body of evidence  $E^*$ , because disagreement counts as “evidence of evidence.” So put,  $E^*$  includes all of your original evidence plus the fact that your peer disagrees.<sup>59</sup> The EWV says that this new body of evidence  $E^*$  supports neither  $P$  nor not- $P$ , because neither party to the dispute has a much needed further reason to privilege his doxastic response over that of his peer’s. But this means that the presence of disagreement “counts for everything” here. That is, the fact of disagreement “swamps” the original evidence in such a way that it makes us irrational to believe what we did previously. But it’s surely difficult to grant that disagreement counts for everything at  $T_2$ .

To make this objection more explicit, we might consider a case along Bayesian lines instead of the “all-or-nothing” lines of the older Feldman view. Let us stipulate a schema where .1 is almost certainly false (so  $P$  would be irrational to believe) and .9 is almost certainly true (so  $P$  would be rational to believe). Suppose that at  $T_1$   $E$  *actually supports*  $P$ , and you believe  $P$  with .8 degree of confidence. Now you would be rational, because you lack defeaters for  $P$ . But at  $T_2$ , you meet a peer who thinks  $E$  supports not- $P$ , and he believes not- $P$  with .3 degree of confidence. The EWV tells us that known disagreement supplies you and your peer with undercutting defeaters for your beliefs, so you both should “split the difference” and move closer to each other in your levels of confidence.

I cannot help but see a problem here. Let me explain. It is not clear why the fact of disagreement should require the person who is actually rational in light of the evidence to adjust his confidence this much. This strikes me as requiring him to do the wrong thing

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<sup>59</sup> Kelly calls this fact “psychological evidence” which he distinguishes between “non-psychological evidence” (i.e. your original body of evidence that stands in a relation to  $P$  or not). I have avoided that terminology here, because I do not think it is necessary to make my objection.

epistemically. It's odd that the person who is actually rational should now gain a defeater for that level of rationality. After all, if he is actually far above the threshold of rationality in believing P, why should his rationality be lowered here, i.e. be defeated? Likewise, why should the person who is actually below the threshold of rationality (his .3 confidence is not near high enough, so he's not rational but should increase) be able to obtain a level of confidence above the threshold of rationality with regard to his belief that not-P simply by disagreeing with an intellectual peer? It seems to me that he is in fact unjustified (and hence irrational) to begin with. If he is, then his confidence that not-P is irrational. He should not be able to change his epistemic situation to a rational one simply by disagreeing with an intellectual peer. In other words, the awareness of peer disagreement should not here get him rationality *for free*.

This latter point regarding one party to the disagreement getting a rational belief "for free" has been highlighted by Thomas Kelly as a more severe consequence of the EWW than the fact that it leads to a broad-reaching skepticism as mentioned in objection two above. Kelly opines:

What has thus far not been adequately appreciated about the Equal Weight View is to my mind a much more damning consequence—namely, that, if the Equal Weight View is true, then there will be cases in which rational belief is too easy to come by. That is, views for which there is in fact little good evidence or reason to think true can bootstrap their way into being rationally held simply because two irrationally overconfident peers encounter one another and confirm each other's baseless opinions.<sup>60</sup>

As will be noticed, Kelly's point here regards a different kind of case than mine strictly speaking, for he is imagining a case where both parties to the dispute have actually

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<sup>60</sup>Kelly, "Peer Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence", p. 128.

misjudged the evidence and have overconfident doxastic attitudes above the threshold of rationality already. Given their shared commitment to the EWV, they both get a rational belief out of the dispute when in fact the evidence supports neither level of confidence that either party has after disclosure (imagine that E supports .3, but after averaging their overly confident misreading of E, they each are rational to believe with .6 confidence). Even though this highlighted case is more extreme than mine, I think the point is the same, because in my case, one person to the dispute “gets lucky.” He gets a rational belief “for free” as I claimed by simply disagreeing with the actually rational belief holder to the dispute. Kelly’s worry of “bootstrapping” for the one side to the dispute is the point we share.

A *fifth* criticism takes aim at the EWV’s assumptions regarding evidence, sharing and weighing it, and the beloved Uniqueness Thesis. This objection is argued in two stages or steps and runs as follows: There is no one way for all parties to a dispute to weigh either our first-order P-relevant evidence or the higher-order evidence of peer disagreement, but this is just what the EWV needs to be plausible. If there’s no one-way to weigh either first-order or second-order evidence, then the UT (or at least one version of this principle) is false. If the UT is false, then we have good reason to think that two intellectual peers can reasonably disagree about E’s support of P.

Step one: is there one-way to weigh one’s P-relevant evidence, including the fact of disagreement with one’s peer? I think not. Recall that the EWV argues that when two peers “share all the same evidence” and disagree, they should give equal weight to each other’s opinions. When they do this, the Evidence Principle (EP) says that each party to the dispute obtains a defeater for their respective beliefs; so, rationality requires each to either suspend judgment about P (or not-P) or to radically adjust his doxastic attitude toward that of his

peer's. The problem is that this line of thinking assumes both (a) that we share the same evidence and (b) that we ought to weigh the pieces of evidence the same. But even if we grant (a), which is questionable,<sup>61</sup> it would not follow that we ought weigh the pieces of evidence the same. The reason this does not follow is that the Evidence Principle (EP) is unclear on how to weigh bits of evidence. Our evidence pool might consist of perceptual, testimony, background, or many other sorts of evidence, but the EP does not tell us how to weigh these different kinds either individually or collectively when our pool consists of multiple kinds of evidence. But this is what the EP would need to do if it is to supply the EWV with its desired results after disclosure of all relevant evidence: suspension of judgment or radical belief revision. That is, the EP must not only tell us that disagreement is higher-order evidence (or an undercutting defeater); it must also tell us how to weigh it as a piece of evidence and why we should weigh it that way. Unless the EP can do this, it's not at all obvious that the EP is strong enough to get us from full disclosure of evidence to the EWV (esp. its recommendation to either suspend judgment or radically modify one's doxastic stance towards P) when two intellectual peers disagree.

Now the EWV proponent might reply here that we should privilege certain evidence-pieces in one way and other pieces in another. But the problem is that we have no principled way of determining how to weigh bodies of evidence in general or their constitutive parts in

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<sup>61</sup> For some time, I have found it a stretch to suppose that any two persons ever really "share all the same evidence". Edward Minar has made this point explicit in conversation by pointing out to me that *evidence sets/pools are complex*. They include not only different kinds of evidence relevant to P as noted above, but they include (a) what is going on in each agent, (b) certain contextual factors that might contribute to belief formation of P or not-P, (c) certain background frameworks and assumptions that each agent brings to the epistemic situation with him, etc. Therefore, I do not see how any two persons can really "share the same evidence". If this is right, and I think it is, then it seems to me that we have another reason to suppose that two 'peers' can rationally disagree about some E's support of P.



particular. Neither the EP nor the EWV offers us the fine-grained epistemic principles necessary to defend such a claim. Therefore, it is epistemically too demanding to expect peers to weigh every bit of their evidence the same, even if they do share the same body of it. To make this point by way of illustration, we might consider evidence and the EP (as the EWV-proponent seems to be using it) in terms of weights and measures. Here the EWV-proponent seems to think that the EP should be read as follows: “If I know you have a pound of evidence for P, I know that gives me a pound of evidence for P.”<sup>62</sup> This rather strong reading of the EP would then understand both your weighing of the original evidence plus the fact of known disagreement to give us both a pound of evidence, which all things considered, would seemingly move us to a place of agnosticism or somewhere in between each other’s original doxastic stances with respect to P. However, it’s not at all obvious to me that the EP must be read this strongly. In particular, I fail to see how party 1 knowing that he has a pound of evidence for P should count as a pound of evidence for party 2 when the both parties come together and compare notes/share evidence.

For example, each party may have non-doxastic evidence with respect to P that neither can possibly give a pound of weight to after disclosure (even if they have done their best to disclose such evidence to their intellectual peer). Not only do I think this is psychologically impossible, I find it epistemically impossible. When a theist says to a non-theist that he has experiential grounds for belief in God, he cannot possibly think that this purported “pound of evidence” for P (i.e. that God exists) constitutes a pound of evidence for the non-theist. And adding to this the fact of disagreement hardly seems to change things.

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<sup>62</sup> I am indebted to Jack Lyons for this suggested strong reading of the Evidence Principle (EP) and the counterexample to it.

Instead, it seems reasonable for the atheist to remain steadfast in believing the evidence supports not-P. Hence, it seems to me that the EWV's understanding of the EP is either implausibly strong, or too weak to get the EWV proponent what he wants.

Step two: If there's "no-one-way-to-weigh" the P-relevant evidence, then it is unlikely that the UT is true. And if the UT is false, then we can see how two persons could reasonably disagree about E's support of P. This step cuts to the heart of the EWV by taking aim at its beloved thesis: the Uniqueness Thesis (UT). The centrality of UT to the EWV cannot be underestimated, because an acceptance of UT carries with it a denial of "reasonable disagreements", a desideratum the EWV earnestly seeks. EWV proponent Roger White highlights this centrality when he says that one way to resist UT is to endorse a view that two thinkers with the same evidence can disagree and "needn't display any failure of rationality" by disagreeing.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, Richard Feldman says of the UT: "If the uniqueness thesis is correct, then there cannot be any reasonable disagreements in cases when two people have exactly the same evidence."<sup>64</sup> So put, if the EWV is true (and with it the claim that reasonable disagreements cannot happen), then it would seem that some version of UT must be true. Remember, EWV requires both parties to "split the difference", "revise their beliefs", or "suspend judgment" depending on the proponent's other epistemic commitments. But any of these actions entail that there's some one uniquely rational stance that all parties to the dispute are to move towards in light of their disagreement. That is, giving your peer's response to the evidence equal weight entails us moving towards some one uniquely rational

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<sup>63</sup> Roger White, "Epistemic Permissiveness." *Philosophical Perspectives* 19 (2005): 446.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements." *Philosophers Without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, Louise Antony, editor. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 205.

stance, hence UT. So put, if we can call into question the veracity of UT, we can thereby do the same for EWV.

This can be done through two different lines of argument. The first line of argument shows that there is not one UT, so let us distinguish two different ways of reading the Uniqueness Thesis (UT). They are as follows:

**Evidential or E-Uniqueness:** for any body of evidence E and proposition P, E supports P or not, so E warrants one unique doxastic attitude toward P.

**Rational or R-Uniqueness:** for any body of evidence E and proposition P, E fixes only one uniquely rational attitude towards P.<sup>65</sup>

According to E-Uniqueness, one's doxastic attitude must be proportioned to what the evidence actually supports, and what the evidence supports regards the evidential relation between a body of evidence and a proposition. Some might like to say that E supervenes on P. Crucially the relationship between E and P is objective in that E either supports P or it does not. In my view, this is how both the EWV-proponent and the rest of the literature seem to understand the UT, even when writers refer to the principle by calling it "rational uniqueness."

But it seems to me that we can grant, for the sake of argument, the truth of E-Uniqueness while arguing that R-Uniqueness is false. Suppose that I'm correct to argue that there is no in-principled way to weigh one's total body of evidence (which includes doxastic and non-doxastic evidence). It is plausible that two or more parties to a dispute could share the same evidence yet, for whatever reason, weigh the bits of evidence differently. And after weighing (and perhaps re-weighing) their total evidence, each party finds himself sticking

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<sup>65</sup> I am indebted to Thomas D. Senor for this crucial distinction.

with his original belief. Are these persons being irrational to persist believing if they have done everything within their cognitive power to be epistemically responsible or virtuous, etc.? If R-Uniqueness is *true*, then we must say ‘yes’ to the question. That is, if a body of evidence fixes one uniquely rational attitude towards a proposition, then two persons cannot reasonably disagree about P. But in my view, it is plausible to answer ‘no’ to the question, because I do not think there is one uniquely “rational” response to a body of evidence. In other words, I think R-Uniqueness is *false*. Two intellectual peers can share roughly same evidence and reasonably disagree about what proposition it supports.

The second line of argument considers some further problems for the Uniqueness Thesis (UT). *First*, there are oddities that arise for probabilistic versions of the UT and the EWV like Christensen’s that understands beliefs to come in degrees. Remember, these versions think that beliefs cover a range or spectrum and are not an “all-or-nothing” matter like Feldman does. The oddities are best seen if we consider his view along Bayesian lines. Again, let us stipulate that .1 is almost certainly false and .9 is almost certainly true on our Bayesian schema. Now suppose that prior to our meeting, my level of confidence in some hypothesis H being supported by a body of evidence E is .7, and I think that any person whose level of confidence is just below that is equally as rational as I am in their belief. Now suppose that we meet, and I find out that your level of confidence is something like .68 that E supports H. Given the EWV, we are required to “split the difference” in order to achieve rationality, because given the UT, there’s just one rational place to land with respect to E’s support of H. Now if we do this, we land somewhere between .68 and .7, but I find this to be an odd result. It’s odd to think that either one of us was “less rational” prior to meeting when both of our beliefs were above the threshold of rationality to begin with, not to mention, we

were practically Bayesian kissing cousins in this regard. It's odd further to think that rationality need be this precise. Why think that our known disagreement really makes that much difference here? Why think there is one unique probability we can have towards H given E? UT seems much too strong a thesis to suppose that there's some one point of rationality here.<sup>66</sup> And insofar as the EWV depends on the UT, we have a reason to find it to be too strong as well.

*Second* (and perhaps more problematic), "all-or-nothing" EWV views like early Feldman's lead to a number of difficulties given their commitment to UT. In particular, the UT seems to rest on an implausibly strong version of Evidentialism, and as such, the UT seems to rule out any alternative view of rationality and evidence. But if UT does this, given its strong Evidentialism, then it fails to provide many other epistemologists with a good reason to accept it. If this is not down right question-begging, it is at least a curious result. Recall the **(UT)**: Given some total body of evidence E and some proposition P, there is one unique doxastic attitude that is rational (or justified) for a subject S to take towards some proposition P. According to Feldman, there are three doxastic attitudes: belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment. So put, the significance of UT for Feldman is that it rules out

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<sup>66</sup> A similar yet different line of argument against the UT here might be made by means of phenomenal conservatism. Roughly, phenomenal conservatism says: if it seems to me that P, then I am justified in believing P. In terms of the prima/ultima facie distinction utilized above, we might say that if it seems to S that P, then S is prima facie justified in believing P. Supposing that this is plausible, we can argue that two equally intelligent and reliable perceivers could view the same perceptual evidence, yet it would seem to one that P and to the other not-P. Since seemings, on this view are sufficient to ground prima facie justification, both perceivers would be "prima facie rational" as I argued above. If that's right, then two results follow. One is that two 'peers' could share the same evidence and reasonably disagree. The other is that there could be multiple rational doxastic responses to one body of evidence, and this means that the UT is false. Of course, we can add that the prima facie justification (rationality) had by the perceivers could be defeated upon further evidence, but that is beside the point at hand.

rational disagreement, but it does this in virtue of the (supposed) fact that any “total body of evidence E” fixes that one uniquely rational doxastic attitude for one to take. That is, given some evidence-type that is sharable by multiple persons, there is some one uniquely rational doxastic attitude that is fixable by that evidence-type.<sup>67</sup>

But this view of the evidence-type-to-epistemic-rationality relation is stronger than Evidentialism itself. Consider the following definition of Evidentialism by two evidentialists, Feldman and Conee:

**Evidentialism:** Doxastic attitude D toward proposition P is epistemically justified for S at T if and only if having D toward P fits the evidence S has at T.<sup>68</sup>

To see that the UT is stronger than Evidentialism itself, consider first how other epistemologists might view what it means for P to “fit one’s body of evidence.” Some have pointed out that that phrase is compatible with a reading of “relative fit”, according to which, for some proposition P and type of total body of evidence, P fits E relative to one thinker but not some other thinker.<sup>69</sup> For example, Plantinga (1993) or Bergmann (2004, 2006) might hold that it means the “proper function of one’s cognitive faculties”. Or someone like Dretske (1981) might understand it in terms of “reliable indication of the truth”. So put, what this “relative fit” rendering of “fits one’s total body of evidence” entails is that you could have two cognizers with the “same available evidence” who are rationally quite different (i.e.

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<sup>67</sup> I am indebted to Nathan Ballantyne and E.J. Coffman for this ‘type’/‘token’ language. See their “Uniqueness, Evidence, and Rationality.” *The Philosopher’s Imprint*, Volume 11, No. 18 (2011): 1-13.

<sup>68</sup> Earl Conee and Richard Feldman. “Evidentialism,” in *Philosophical Studies* 48 (1985): 15-34. See also their chapter titled “Evidentialism” in their book *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), chapter 4.

<sup>69</sup> I have rewritten the definition in terms of “relative fit” as offered by Nathan Ballantyne and E.J. Coffman in “Uniqueness, Evidence, and Rationality.” *The Philosopher’s Imprint*, Volume 11, No. 18 (2011): 1-13.

what is rational for each to believe given E is relative to each individual cognizer). And this would admit of the possibility of “rational disagreement” among cognizers. If this is right, then it seems there’s a rendering of Evidentialism that is inconsistent with the UT, for the UT rules out just this result. If the UT rules out this result, then it would seem that the strand of Evidentialism entailed by the UT is quite strong indeed. In fact this shows that the UT entails Evidentialism but not visa versa. If so, the UT is stronger than evidentialism. More exactly, it requires the strongest form of evidentialism in order to undergird its view of evidence-type-to-epistemic-rationality.<sup>70</sup> What exactly does this “strong evidentialism” amount to?

Given some of our above discussion, the answer seems plain. Strong Evidentialism amounts to the claim that one’s total body of evidence *fixes* the most rational doxastic attitude (of the three) all by itself. But for Feldman this amounts to the evidence you have at a time, and also what internal mental states you are in at the time of weighing one’s total evidence. This means that there cannot be *other* factors in the mix that make a rational difference to what one is epistemically in the clear to believe, because if there were such difference-making factors in the mix, then it would be possible for two persons to reasonably come to differing conclusions.

Consider this point in light of other evidentialist and non-evidentialist views of evidence-to-rationality. Coherence views might be seen as *evidentialist views* of rationality, because it is the sum total of one’s beliefs along with their cohering with one another that fixes what is most rational to believe. If so, “there can be thinker-proposition pairs such that multiple attitudes toward P cohere with that thinker’s evidence. So, a standard coherence theory of rationality allows cases in which a thinker’s evidence makes rational multiple

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

attitudes to P.”<sup>71</sup> But this evidentialist view surely conflicts with the Strong Evidentialism entailed by the UT.

Likewise there are a number of *non-evidentialist* factors that could be figured into the mix when attempting to determine what the most rational attitude(s) toward P one might take given her total evidence. Here we might consider reliability factors;<sup>72</sup> deontological factors;<sup>73</sup> proper function factors;<sup>74</sup> or as I will argue in Chapter 4 of this work, there are virtue factors and diachronic factors that make an evaluative difference regarding one’s attitude towards P as rational or not. Now if these non-evidentialist factors were figured into the discussion of evidence-to-rationality (as the weaker rendering of ‘evidentialism’ allowed for), then we would have more cases where two persons could be in the same evidential situation and meet all the requirements for rationality but have different conclusions regarding P. If so, we would have further construals of epistemic rationality that conflict with the Strong Evidentialism entailed by the UT.

In light of the last two paragraphs, we have a problem then, because the only evidence-to-rationality view that is supported by UT is the strongest version of evidentialism. That is, there are no alternative evidence-to-rationality views open to the person committed to the UT, only the strongest reading on evidentialism on the market; and this is due to the fact that any alternative we might consider would likely conflict with the UT—would

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 6

<sup>72</sup> Alvin Goldman, “What is a Justified Belief?” in *Justification and Knowledge: New Studies in Epistemology*, G. Pappas, ed. (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979): 1-23.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Foley. *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>74</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Michael Bergmann. *Justification Without Awareness*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).



‘permit’ multiple rational responses to disagreement. But the further problem is that persons sympathetic to any of these alternative views of evidence-to-rationality will not have a reason to accept the UT. What reason do I have to accept the UT if I must abandon my convictions regarding evidence and rationality (whether they be of the proper functionalist, virtue, or a combination of the two)? The only persons who would likely accept the UT are those who share the commitment to Strong Evidentialism already, yet this has an air of begging the question against all non-strong versions of evidentialism.

In sum, then, I do not think the UT is plausible. I think there are many reasons to reject it whether in the degreed variety or the all-or-nothing variety. On the one hand, I fail to see that Strong Evidentialism is true, and if the UT entails it, I am inclined to reject the UT, because I think some weaker version of Evidentialism is more plausible. On the other hand, I think there are many plausible versions of evidence-to-rationality—whether they include evidentialist or non-evidentialist factors—that allow for two persons with the same evidence to vary in their response to the evidence and still be deemed rational.

My *sixth* and final line of objection takes aim at the EWV itself. Given the aforementioned comments regarding the UT, I think we are now in a good position to explain why the EWV itself can be rejected. There are two objections I have in mind: one that builds off my objections to the UT, and a second that arises from the requirement to “split the difference” in the face of disagreement. Let us take these in turn.

First of all, there are significant connections between the UT and EWV, so if the UT is unreasonable and should be abandoned, the EWV should follow suit. Suppose that I am right that the UT only allows us to accept one evidence-to-rationality view: given a strong view of evidence, our evidence must *fix* the one rational position for you to hold. If this is

right, and being committed to the EWV commits one to the UT,<sup>75</sup> then it would seem that the EWV requires us to be committed to the one and only one view of evidence-to-rationality. But, as the objection goes, we have already provided numerous alternative accounts of evidence-to-rationality that are inconsistent with the UT; and insofar as the EWV commits one to the UT, I will have similar reasons to reject it. In other words, having no good reasons to accept the UT leaves me barren of reasons to accept the EWV.

To get a better picture here, recall the case at the beginning of my critique of the UT. There we imagined two persons, let's call them Tom and Jerry for ease of keeping things straight. Imagine that prior to meeting at T2, Tom and Jerry each have good reasons to think that P is true. So at T1, let us say that Tom believes P with credence .7 and Jerry believes P with .68. Given our Bayesian schema, both persons are above the threshold of rationality prior to meeting, and let us suppose that the total body of evidence actual supports P. Now, the EWV says that Tom and Jerry are rationally required to "split the difference" when they meet at T2, compare their notes, and discover that they disagree on the appropriate level or confidence warranted by the evidence E.

Above, I noted that this is certainly an odd result, because it seems to make no difference to rationality which miniscule percentage is the right one. But that's not the whole thrust of the problem. According to the objection here, the EWV itself faces a dilemma. Either this is a possible case or it is not. If the EWV-proponent agrees that it is, then it seems that we have a counterexample to the EWV, because it is not at all obvious that we really should give equal weight to our peer's response to E. In fact, we could put Jerry's confidence

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<sup>75</sup> See Thomas Kelly, "Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence." *Disagreement*. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 118ff.

at .55 just to widen the gap, and it seems to me that we still have a counterexample to the EWV precisely because both men are above the threshold of rationality. But Feldman and Friends could “stick to their guns” (pun intended) and suggest that this is a possible case but it is not a counterexample, because Tom and Jerry are rationally required to revise. To borrow Thomas Kelly’s wording here, this move strikes me as overly “heroic.”<sup>76</sup> In an effort to save their view, the EWV-proponent requires that we deny that Tom and Jerry are rationally permitted to do what they already know is reasonable—believe P given E. But this just seems wrong.

Perhaps the EWV-proponent takes the other horn of the dilemma, namely, argue that this case is not possible. Here I agree with Kelly that this is probably the best route for the EWV-proponent. But if Feldman and friends take this route, then a new problem arises. They could deny this case by insisting on the truth of the UT.<sup>77</sup> Insisting on the truth of the UT, however, brings back all the problems raised for it above. So, insofar as we have reason to reject the UT, given that the EWV depends on the UT, we have good reason to reject the EWV. We need not rehash all of those reasons here, but suffice it to say that until the UT can be shown to be plausible, those sympathetic to a permissive (what I’m calling ‘steadfastness’) view of rationality need not accept the EWV.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p. 120. I owe this example to Kelly, but I have modified it.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

I have argued that the Equal Weight View offers a deficient response to known peer disagreement. It tells us that when two (or more) intellectual peers disagree, the rational response is for each person to the dispute to give equal weight to their peer's response to the body of evidence E under consideration for some proposition P. When you do that, you will see that you should "split the difference" with them doxastically, because you lack any further reason to dismiss their response and privilege your own. In the end this will require you to either suspend judgment on your originally formed belief or to radically adjust your confidence in the direction of your peer. While there are a number of cases that seem to favor the EWV, I argued that there are a series of six objections that can be raised both to the EWV and its two underlying assumptions: the Uniqueness Thesis and the Evidence Principle. This cumulative case, in my view, is sufficient to reject the EWV as a viable response to epistemic disagreement. Perhaps the Total Evidence View will be better option. It is to that view we now turn.

## Chapter 2

### Thomas Kelly's Total Evidence View

*"I suppose that the conflict in most cases [of philosophical controversy] concerns intuitions—what is self-evident to one mind is not so to another. It is obvious that in any such conflict there must be error on one side or the other, or on both. The natural man will often decide unhesitatingly that the error is on the other side. But it is manifest that the philosophic mind cannot do this, unless it can prove independently that the conflicting intuitor has an inferior faculty of envisaging truth in general or this kind of truth; one who cannot do this much reasonably submit to a loss of confidence in any intuition of his own that thus is found to conflict with another's."*

*-Henry Sidgwick<sup>78</sup>*

*"Will the debates about the morality of abortion, euthanasia, or capital punishment ever be resolved? Probably not. People have been disagreeing with each other about ethical matters ever since there were people around to disagree with. It's possible that things will change in the future. But not very likely."*

*-Russ Shaeffer-Landau<sup>79</sup>*

### Introduction

Many philosophers have considered the Equal Weight View as an account of how to handle disagreements among intellectual peers, and they have found it wanting. Reasons for this dissatisfaction range from finding some of the Equal Weight View's test cases (esp. perceptual cases) to not support the intuitions of the view, to finding the underlying assumptions objectionable. Moreover, some philosophers (myself included) have found the Equal Weight View is itself mistaken due to counterexamples where one party to the disagreement has reasoned correctly via the evidence to the claim under review. It seems

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<sup>78</sup> Henry Sidgwick. *Essays on Ethics and Method*, Marcus G. Singer, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 168.

<sup>79</sup> Russ Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 67.

plain wrong to suppose that rationality demands of this party to “give equal weight” to his interlocutor’s mistaken reasoning and thereby either suspend judgment or radically modify (i.e. “split the difference”) his doxastic stance towards the claim. If this kind of case is correct, then we dissenters need to pursue an alternative account of how to handle disagreements.

Recently Thomas Kelly has developed a view of epistemic disagreement he calls the Total Evidence View (TEV hereafter). While he is not the only one who defends this the TEV genus of view<sup>80</sup>, I will treat him as being its best representative. The TEV differs from two other genus of views in the literature. *Equal Weight Views* (see Chapter 1) hold that when two intellectual peers knowingly disagree about some proposition P, rationality requires each party to give “equal weight” to the response of her peer. When they do this each party will be required either to radically revise her belief in the direction of her peer or to suspend judgment about P.<sup>81</sup> *Steadfastness Views* (to be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4) hold that it is rational to “stand one’s epistemic” ground with respect to P after disagreement with one’s peer is known.<sup>82</sup> Kelly finds Equal Weight Views too demanding in cases where

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<sup>80</sup> For example, Richard Feldman’s view has recently changed from the Equal Weight View discussed in Chapter 1 of this work. His mature view is a Total Evidence View much like Kelly’s, and it can be found in “Evidentialism, Higher-Order Evidence, and Disagreement.” *Episteme*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2009): 294-312.

<sup>81</sup> What I’m calling “Equal Weight Views” are often called “Conciliatory Views.” There is nothing riding on this difference in terminology, so I will stick with the former name. Proponents of this kind of view include David Christensen (2007), “Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News.” *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 116, No.2, 187-217. Richard Feldman. (2007), “Reasonable Religious Disagreements,” in *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, ed. Louise Antony. New York: Oxford University Press. See also Feldman (2006), “Epistemological Puzzles About Disagreement,” in *Epistemology Futures*, ed. S. Hetherington, New York: Oxford University Press, 216-36.

<sup>82</sup> “Steadfastness” is my name for a kind of view that includes “permissive” and “stick-to-your-guns” views. Some representatives include Gideon Rosen (2001), “Nominalism, Naturalism,

one party has reasoned impeccably. That party should not be required to radically modify or suspend judgment on his belief in light of known disagreement. Kelly finds Steadfastness views too lenient, because they permit both parties to remain highly confident in their mutually inconsistent beliefs. This marks a change in view for Kelly, for his earlier work defended a species of the Steadfastness view.<sup>83</sup>

In this chapter, I first consider Kelly's Total Evidence View according to which cases of disagreement with a consensus require an impeccable reasoner to reduce his confidence in P.<sup>84</sup> Kelly defends this claim by means of what I will call an *Argument from Consensus*. Cases where an intellectual disagrees with a consensus of his peers are interesting for at least two reasons. *First*, the literature has typically focused on the significance of disagreement with a single peer. *Second*, it may be that it is reasonable to stand firm when one disagrees with a single peer but not when she disagrees with the consensus of her peers. While I think it is reasonable to stand firm when one disagrees with a single peer (see Chapters 3 and 4 of this work), I argue for the stronger claim here: disagreement with a consensus of one's peers is not sufficient to warrant the reduction in one's level of confidence in P. I will argue this by means of a counterexample from moral disagreement. Given the nature of intuitions and the role they play in belief formation, it is reasonable for an impeccable reasoner to stand firm even when he disagrees with a consensus of his peers.

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Epistemic Relativism." *Philosophical Perspectives* 15 (Blackwell), 69-91. Peter van Inwagen 1996 (1999), "It is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything upon Insufficient Evidence." In *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Michael J. Murray. New York: Blackwell.

<sup>83</sup> For his "earlier view", see Thomas Kelly (2005), "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement." *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* 1: 167-96.

<sup>84</sup> See Kelly (2010), "Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence." In *Disagreement*, eds. R. Feldman and T. Warfield. New York: Oxford University Press.

## Section 1

### *Kelly's Total Evidence View (TEV)*

#### *1.1 Reasoning Impeccably and Disagreement with a Single Peer*

Consider a case where you and I have evaluated the evidence for some claim P, and as it turns out, I have actually reasoned correctly about P. The evidence actually supports P. However, you have reasoned by means of the same body of evidence, but you have concluded not-P. We get together and compare notes, and discover that we disagree. As the story goes, I am actually right and you are actually wrong, yet we both lack this sort of second-order information. Regardless, Kelly thinks that rationality should not require of me that I give your handling of the evidence equal weight to my own.<sup>85</sup> That is, even though we lack the second-order evidence to adjudicate who has in fact got the reasoning process correct, we should not require of the one party who has reasoned correctly (me in this case) to give the party who has reasoned incorrectly (you in this case) equal weight. Much less should rationality require the second step that the Equal Weight View requires, namely, suspension of judgment or radical belief revision in the direction of one's peer. Why should I be required rationally to move towards the more irrational position in this case? If I am not required to move in your direction, then what other options are there?

Kelly invites us to suppose that you and I are intellectual peers, according to which, "you regard me as in general a competent evaluator of evidence"<sup>86</sup> and I regard you in the same way. So put, according to Kelly, one answer to the questions might be that in some

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<sup>85</sup> Thomas Kelly. "Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence," in *Disagreement*. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 135.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* This is Kelly's definition of 'peer'.



cases of peer disagreement, one might be perfectly reasonable even if one gives *no weight* at all to the opinion of one's peer.<sup>87</sup> And the case I used to open the chapter seems to support this intuition. If I have reasoned correctly about P given the body of evidence E, then not only is my belief reasonable, it is reasonable for me to give *no weight* at all to your response. You have in fact reasoned incorrectly, so it makes no sense to suggest that I am rationally required to adjust my doxastic stance in light of our disagreement.

While this much is consistent with the Uniqueness Thesis (UT), the UT still limits how many persons to any dispute can reasonably give no weight to the opinion of his/her peer. Only those who have reasoned correctly may give no weight to the opinion of their peer. If that's right, then one might be attracted to the following alternative view of epistemic disagreement:

**The Asymmetrical No Independent Weight View.** In cases of peer disagreement, it is reasonable to give no weight to the opinion of a peer as long as one's own opinion is the reasonable response to the original evidence.<sup>88</sup>

So cases in which one has in fact reasoned *impeccably* about P given the said body of evidence will constitute cases in which she is reasonable even if she gives no weight to the response of her peer, because the peer will have in fact reasoned incorrectly. That strikes me as right on the mark, but Kelly finds my enthusiasm mistaken. He opines, "Even if one responds to the original evidence in an impeccable manner and one's peer does not, the fact that one's peer responds as he does will typically make it rationally incumbent upon one to move at least some way in his direction."<sup>89</sup> How might Kelly argue for this claim, i.e. the

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 136

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 137

falsity of the Asymmetrical No Independent Weight View? He does so by considering the significance of disagreeing with a consensus.<sup>90</sup>

### *1.2 Reasoning Impeccably, Disagreement with a Consensus, and Inebriation*

Suppose that you and a group of other thinkers are peers in some theoretical domain. Now suppose that you get together and compare notes about whether some body of evidence E supports a given proposition P. Let's say you think E supports P, but all of your peers think not-P. As it turns out, you have reasoned impeccably. E actually supports P. However, neither you nor the consensus of your peers knows this higher-order evidence. Now one might think that if you have reasoned impeccably about P, then not only is your belief reasonable, it is reasonable for you to give no weight at all to the response of the consensus of your peers. Since each of them has reasoned incorrectly, you are not rationally required to adjust your doxastic stance in light of the disagreement. But Kelly thinks this line is wrongheaded.

To explain why Kelly thinks this, let us consider what I will call an *Argument from Consensus*.<sup>91</sup> It runs as follows: Disagreeing with a consensus is a form of higher-order evidence. As such, it must count for something in a genuine peer disagreement. If it counts for something, then regardless of your impeccability in reasoning, a consensus will affect what level of confidence is reasonable for you to maintain. According to Kelly, you ought to reduce your level of confidence in P even when you have reasoned impeccably and a

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<sup>90</sup> This is my title for the argument not Kelly's.

<sup>91</sup> To be clear, this argument name and formalization is my representation of Kelly's argument as articulated in his Conjecture case and the aforementioned work.

consensus or one lone peer has reasoned incorrectly. My formulation of Kelly's argument runs as follows:

### **Argument from Consensus**

1. Consensus is a form of higher-order evidence that should be weighed when determining whether P is reasonable to believe or not.
2. If (1), then your level of confidence regarding P should be reduced when the Consensus disagrees with you—even if you've reasoned impeccably.
3. Therefore, even if you've reasoned impeccably, disagreeing with the consensus warrants a reduction of confidence in your belief that P.
4. If (3), then your peer's disagreeing with you warrants a reduction in confidence in your belief that P even if you've reasoned impeccably.
5. Therefore, disagreement with a peer warrants reduction in confidence, even when you've reasoned impeccably.

Here's a case Kelly believes supports this argument, especially premise (2). Let us call this case the *Mathematical Conjecture*.

**Mathematical Conjecture.** You are a professional mathematician. Within the mathematics community, there is substantial and long-standing interest in a certain mathematical conjecture. If forced to guess, some members of the community would guess that the Conjecture is true, others that it is false; all agree that there is no basis that would justify a firm opinion one way or the other. Then, one day, the unexpected happens: alone in your study, you succeed in proving the Conjecture. On the basis of your proof, you become extremely confident, indeed practically certain, that the Conjecture is true. Because your high degree of confidence is based on a genuine

proof that you correctly recognize as such, it is fully justified. Later, you show the proof to a colleague whose judgment you respect. Much to your surprise, the colleague, after examining the proof with great care, declares that it is unsound. Subsequently, you show the proof to another colleague, and then to a third, and then to a fourth. You approach the colleagues independently and take pains to ensure that they are not influenced by one another in arriving at their judgments about the status of your proof. In each case, however, the judgment is the same: the proof is unsound. Ultimately, your proof convinces no one: the entire mathematical community is united in its conviction that it is unsound, and thus, that the status of the Conjecture remains very much an open question.<sup>92</sup>

Interestingly, Kelly thinks that, even though our mathematician has reasoned impeccably, it would be unreasonable for him “to remain practically certain”<sup>93</sup> in his belief that his Conjecture is true in the face of peer consensus. Why? Well, peer consensus is evidence of a sort sufficient to warrant reduction in confidence. This remains salient even though the entire mathematical community has reasoned incorrectly, and regardless of the fact that they constitute “misleading evidence” for our lone impeccable reasoner.<sup>94</sup>

Now if misleading evidence can be sufficient to require reduction in confidence when consensus is the source, then it’s plausible (according to Kelly) to think that an individual peer’s disagreement with you can rationally require you to reduce confidence even when she is the source of misleading evidence. After all, neither of you are privy to the second-order

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 137.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

fact about her being misleading evidence. You both lack that “God’s-eye” point of view. So the moral here is this: even though our lone mathematician is impeccable, he can have a reason to reduce his confidence in the Conjecture. This reason comes not only when the whole community finds it to be unsound. One peer disagreeing with it is reason enough, for a single peer is “higher-order” evidence in as much as consensus of the community is. If so, then the Asymmetrical No Independent Weight View is false, because to not give weight to a peer’s differing response “is in effect to treat it as certain that one’s peer is the one who has misjudged the evidence. But it would be unreasonable to be certain of this, even when it is true.”<sup>95</sup> Thus, rationality requires me to reduce my level of confidence in the Conjecture’s truth even though I have reasoned impeccably.

In an effort to make this point even more compelling, Kelly asks us to consider contextual factors operating in cases of disagreement even where one party has reasoned impeccably. Suppose Stan is trying to decide between going to college at Stanford or Yale. As he weighs the reasons for and against each place, he also realizes that he may not be entitled to a high level of confidence in his conclusion. As it turns out, he has been polishing off a few brews at the pub with a bunch of friends to celebrate his acceptance to these two great schools. Who can blame the guy? Nevertheless, it is well known that being inebriated skews one’s judgment, so if Stan knows he is inebriated, he has a reason to be less confident in his reasoning about where to attend. More exactly, being “under the influence” generally causes cognitive impairment, and knowledge of one’s cognitive impairment furnishes a higher-order reason to be less confident (if not-wholly skeptical) about one’s first-order reasoning. Even if it turns out that Stan has reasoned impeccably about which school to

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 138

choose, cognitive impairment seems to be sufficient to warrant reduced confidence in his conclusion about which school is the better one to attend. Being inebriated is a contextual factor that must be figured into one's total evidential situation when deciding how much confidence is permissible to have in P given that context.<sup>96</sup>

By analogy, then, in the context where all of your colleagues (or a single colleague at that) find the Conjecture to be unsound, you should be less confident in your first-order response to the Conjecture that you had after writing it and reviewing it in your office. Your colleague's disagreeing with you makes a difference in the total evidential situation here even though you have reasoned impeccably, because it provides you with higher-order evidence that cannot easily be dismissed. That is, peer consensus provides you with evidence to the effect that you should "think twice" about the deliverances of your own reasoning in that context, because a consensus is like cognitive impairment in the alcohol case. According to Kelly, "On the present view, cases in which one in fact responds impeccably to one's evidence, but one's peer responds inappropriately, are much like cases in which one engages in a flawless piece of practical reasoning despite being inebriated. The fact that a peer has responded to the evidence differently should lead one to temper one's confidence in one's own response, just as the fact that one is inebriated should lead one to temper one's confidence in the conclusion of one's practical reasoning, despite the actual flawlessness of one's performance. Again, in both cases, it is the fact that the status of one's performance is not perfectly transparent that opens the door for higher-order considerations to make a difference."<sup>97</sup> In other words, higher-order considerations—e.g. the fact that a consensus

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p. 140

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.p. 141.

rejects the Conjecture or even that one intellectual peer does—signal that your reasoning may not be trustworthy.

### *1.3 Kelly's Total Evidence View: Some Proposed Payoffs*

Where does this leave Kelly in providing a different theory of handling disagreements among peers? Well, supposing that the Uniqueness Thesis is true, he thinks this brings him to two provisional conclusions. *First*, there are some cases (i.e. the Conjecture) where you are rationally required to reduce your level of confidence even if you have reasoned correctly. This means that a blanket application of the Asymmetrical No Independent Weight View (what he also calls “stick-to-your-guns”) in all cases will not work. To give no weight to the higher-order evidence in all cases is too strong in the direction of privileging one’s own responses to bodies of evidence over that of a peer or group of peers. In one sense, then, Kelly stands with the Equal Weight View against the Asymmetrical No Independent Weight View: higher-order evidence (here in the form of a Consensus) must not only be considered, it must make a difference in one’s doxastic stance towards P.

*Second*, since his view only recommends a reduction in confidence and not that you “suspend judgment” or “split the difference,” it does not collapse into the Equal Weight View. There will be cases where it is still reasonable for you to maintain a high-level of confidence in the face of peer disagreement (even the Conjecture case reveals this), and there will be cases where you are reasonable to remain steadfast—really, give no weight at all to your peer’s response to the evidence.

An example of the latter that Kelly provides is a restaurant calculation case (similar to my Case 3 in chapter 1 of this dissertation) where we both independently calculate what each

individual in our group owes towards the combined tab in our heads. Suppose I figure the total that each person owes to be \$43 and you figure it to be \$450. Kelly agrees with the No Independent Weight View that it's obvious that the person who calculated \$43/per person is rational to remain steadfast and not reduce confidence at all. But what explains this, according to Kelly, is one's "total evidence" not a blanket principle that one is under no epistemic obligation to take the opinion of his peer into account. Part of my "total evidence" here will be my knowledge of the fact that the total bill does not register at \$450, so one person cannot owe that much. This further bit of knowledge weighs in heavier than the fact that we disagree and makes it rational for me to remain steadfast in my belief that \$43 is what each person owes. In the end, this explanation is straightforward and avoids the contortions that EWV-proponents resort to in order to accommodate this case.<sup>98</sup> So, in cases like this, the TEV echoes the intuitions of a Steadfastness View.

According to Kelly, what distinguishes his TEV from these other two views is this: what you do in response to disagreement has to do with one's total evidence which includes both (a) one's initial first-order response to the evidence and (b) one's higher order evidence; but cases of disagreement are too variegated to allow for a standard response in every case. The Equal Weight View mistakenly gives greater weight to (b) in all cases, and the Steadfastness Views mistakenly gives greater weight to (a) in all cases. What we need is a view that tells us what is reasonable to believe in light of peer disagreement when it seems

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<sup>98</sup> See, for example, David Christensen's "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News." *Philosophical Review*, 116, No.2 (2007): 199-203; and Adam Elga's "Reflection and Disagreement." *Nous*, 41 (2007): 478-502. I agree with Kelly that their attempt is unsatisfying and ad hoc in light of their Equal Weight View.



like neither (a) nor (b) is to be weighted heavier, i.e. that neither the first-order nor the higher-order evidence has the evidential upper-hand.

The TEV proposes that we take peer disagreement on a case-by-case basis and consider the “total evidence” involved. When we do that, we find that some cases warrant (a), others (b), or still others (c) neither first-order or second-order evidence gets the evidential upper-hand. The Conjecture claims to fall in that latter kind of case, for requiring the mathematician to give (a) the upper hand (and hence split the difference) is too strong, because it means he must be agnostic when in fact he holds the actually reasonable view. However, it is equally too strong to allow him to give no weight to the higher-order evidence in the form of a consensus or that of one peer disagreeing.<sup>99</sup> The higher-order evidence should make some difference in his doxastic stance, and that difference is a reduction in confidence. Given these two conclusions then, it is fitting to call his view a “Total Evidence View”, because what you should do in cases of peer disagreement must be considered on a case-by-case basis, and will depend on your total evidence not merely one level of evidential consideration.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 141-144

## Section 2

### Analysis of Kelly's Argument from Consensus

#### *Moral Intuitions, Consensus, and Epistemic Trust*

While the Conjecture case is interesting, I fail to share the intuition Kelly thinks it supports here, and subsequently, I find his *Argument from Consensus* to be unsound. More specifically, I think premise 2 of the argument is false. I simply do not find consensus to be sufficient to rationally demand that our impeccable mathematician reduce his level of confidence. Hence, I am unconvinced that this case demonstrates that he has a rational obligation to modify his belief at all even though he fails to have the second-order surety that he is right and his opponent(s) wrong. In fact, I think counterexamples can be generated to show that there are cases where you need not reduce your confidence even if the masses hold the opposing view. One kind of counterexample I have in mind comes from moral cases where the reasoner in question forms a reasonable belief about some moral issue, but the consensus of his peers runs in the opposite direction. I think our moral lives are pregnant with such examples, but I will utilize a well-worn historical example: the Nazi treatment of Jews.<sup>100</sup>

**Nazi Treatment of the Jews is Morally Wrong.** Imagine that you were a German living during the reign of the Nazi party. Perhaps you might stoke your moral imagination by supposing yourself to be like Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, the military official played by Tom Cruise in the film *Valkyrie*. You are a high-ranking

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<sup>100</sup> Some moral philosophers might see this as a case of a moral reformer. I think that's right, but I fail to see much riding on that nuance for our purposes here. However, it is worth pointing out that "moral reformer" cases like Martin Luther King, Jr. and women's suffrage could just as easily serve to make my point here.

official who has been indoctrinated with Nazi ideology, in particular, you have been taught and subsequently formed the belief that the Jews were an inferior people group who needed to be wiped out. For years you have believed this and acted consistent with this belief, which included the ordering of whole platoons to round up and imprison, even mass-exterminate those of Jewish decent. Then one day, suppose after a series of reflections on your beliefs and actions in this regard, you reason to the conclusion that what you and the Nazi party are doing is morally wrong. You come to (justifiably and rationally) believe that all persons are intrinsically valuable, and as such, they should be treated with dignity and respect. As a result of this argument, you can no longer accept the Nazi view of the Jews. Much less can you condone the harsh treatment of Jewish persons, because you now have a (justified) level of confidence that such treatment of any people group is morally reprehensible. Given what you take to be a salient moral discovery, you subtly begin to advance your argument to other Nazis, beginning with some of your closest military peers. One after the other, every fellow Nazi you bring your moral argument before finds it unsound. And we might add, that even though you have reasoned impeccably (Nazi thinking about and the subsequent actions towards the Jews is in actuality objectively wrong), neither you nor the majority who disagrees with you knows which party to this dispute is right.

Now the intuition regarding what you (the impeccable reasoner) should do, even though all of your Nazi peers are unconvinced by your argument, seems obvious to me. You are reasonable to remain *steadfast* in your newly formed moral belief regarding the Nazi

treatment of the Jews, even with the peer consensus to the contrary. But what do I mean by “your newly formed moral belief is reasonable?”

*First*, we might understand it in a *global* way, whereby, what the Nazi Colonel has come to believe is this: “I have been brainwashed by these Nazis to think that their view of the world (which includes their view of the Jews and justification for how they can be treated) is true. But I now see that Nazism is crazy. The whole world picture is mistaken, so I am rational to remain steadfast in my belief that the Nazi treatment of the Jews is immoral even if the consensus of my Nazi peers says otherwise.” Reading my counterexample this way leads to a problem, namely, peer-hood is compromised or *falls out*. Since the whole doxastic framework of the Colonel’s peers is being called into question, the Colonel should no longer count them as equally intellectually competent and reliable evaluators of the evidence regarding most matters, especially those of a moral nature. As such, the Nazis would no longer be seen as peers, and this means that we fail to have a case of intellectual *peer* disagreement. So, it is a mistake to read my counterexample this way, for it intends to keep peer-hood intact.

A *second* reading of the counterexample is more *local* in nature. Here the Colonel’s newly formed moral stance would be understood as follows: “Today in our high-level military officials meeting, I was given the orders to take a large group of captured Jews to the gas chamber. After much reflection this evening, it seems to me that this particular event-treatment of the Jews is morally wrong. I have put together an argument for this newly formed belief, which I have subsequently shared with my Nazi peers. Even though all of them rejected it, I am rational to continue believing that this particular instance of killing a group of Jews is morally wrong.” This reading avoids the problem of the previous reading,

for it does not entail that the whole Nazi doxastic system is false, and this means peer-hood is still intact. Since we are only talking about an isolated particular instance of applied Nazism, we have a genuine peer disagreement about this instance. If that's right, then one might think that in localized cases, disagreement does warrant a reduction in confidence.<sup>101</sup> This may or may not be right, however, for my purpose here, I will forego any further discussion of this point.

Instead, I propose a *third* reading or middle-way between the previous two readings. Here the Colonel's newly formed perspective runs as follows: "I have come to believe that the Nazi treatment of the Jews is wrong. This includes first and foremost our coordinated mass extermination of them as a people (i.e. genocide) as well as some of the other harsh actions we perform towards them, including women and children." Notice here that peer-hood is still intact, because, the whole Nazi ideology or world-view is not being called into question. What the Colonel's new belief regards is the moral expression of that ideology toward one people group. And this leaves intact other features of Nazism that he might find salient. Moreover, he might still consider his Nazi peers to be morally in the clear on a host of other issues. He might find his peers to treat their wives and children well. He might even praise their compassion toward other Germans. The point is this: there are a host of other moral issues and actions on which he could still agree with them, but on the issue of the Nazi treatment of the Jews, he has a newly formed belief that it is wrong. This is what he disagrees with the consensus of his peers about.

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<sup>101</sup> I am indebted to Thomas D. Senor for helping me articulate these three distinct readings of my counterexample.

Read this way, I think the intuition of what is rational for our impeccable Colonel to do in the face of disagreement with his Nazi peers is clear. He is reasonable to maintain his same level of confidence in his newly formed moral belief even when the consensus of his peers demurs. I fail to see that it is “rationally incumbent” upon him to reduce his confidence at all. Since he has reasoned impeccably, and since it seems to him that he has done so, that the consensus leads in the other direction fails to support Kelly’s claim that he ought to reduce his level of confidence.<sup>102</sup>

To see this, consider how odd it is that a person who has reasoned correctly is rationally obligated to utilize misleading information to the extent of reducing confidence in his belief that Nazi treatment of Jews is immoral. On the one hand, it is strange to think that an impeccable reasoner is rationally obligated to succumb to the faulty reasoning of a consensus (or a single peer) and thereby forfeit what seems like an epistemic right to his originally reasonable level of confidence. Perhaps my reaction here can be explained by considering that there is no obvious *prima facie* reason to think that a view is more reasonable simply because the majority affirms it. Does epistemic might constitute epistemic rationality? Kelly seems to think so when he reports how he now thinks that what makes skepticism about other minds unreasonable is the fact that very few philosophers hold that view. He says, “Consider also those philosophical questions with respect to which there is consensus, or near consensus. Suppose, plausibly, that there are very few if any genuine skeptics about other minds. . . . [Previously], I had too a dim view of the suggestion that this fact would suffice to make it unreasonable to embrace skepticism about other minds. . .

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<sup>102</sup> It is worth noting that I picked this moral example due to its resembling Kelly’s Conjecture the best.

.However, in light of the present view, a reversal of this judgment might seem to be in order. Could it really be that the unreasonableness of skepticism about other minds consists in the *unpopularity* of such skepticism among the relevant class of people?” Notice, it’s not that the first-order arguments for or against other minds skepticism make it reasonable, but its reasonability resides in its lack of popularity among intellectual philosophical peers.<sup>103</sup>

Now this strikes me as wrongheaded. That a view is popular, even among one’s intellectual peers in a given domain, is hardly sufficient to make it rational. It may be a good reason worth taking into account in determining what is reasonable, but I have a hard time seeing that a view’s reasonability resides wholly in its being popular among one’s intellectual peers. And it seems like we can generate counterexamples in this regard. I’ll have more to say on this below, but suffice it to say that I do not see Kelly’s point here as obvious. That a view is the majority view or popular or the consensus is not obviously reason enough to make it the reasonable view.

On the other hand, Kelly’s requirement that our impeccable Nazi Colonel reduce his confidence flirts with a kissing cousin to the bootstrapping objection. According to one version of that objection, we imagine two intellectual peers disagreeing about P. Prior to disclosure of their evidence and known disagreement, party A to the dispute believes P to degree .4, and party B believes P to degree .8. As it turns out, party B has actually reasoned correctly in this case, although this second-order information is unknown. Some Equal Weight Views require both parties to “split the difference” after disclosure. When they do, an oddity arises. The person who has actually reasoned incorrectly can bootstrap her way to

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<sup>103</sup> On page 145, Kelly highlights how this is a change for him from his previous view in his 2005 paper entitled “The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement”.

rationality simply by disagreeing with a peer who has reasoned correctly and by modifying her belief in a specific way. Recall, for example, by disagreeing with a peer and splitting the difference she will move above the threshold of rationality. But, as the objection goes, the cognizer with the unreasonable belief should not be able to pull herself up by her epistemic bootstraps. She should not be able to acquire rationality this easily.

Now in the Nazi Colonel case, the impeccable thinker is not exactly pulling himself up by his epistemic bootstraps. Instead, if Kelly is correct, the faulty consensus has purchase on his epistemic boots. Our impeccable thinker really loses a boot when he disagrees with the consensus of peers who have in fact reasoned incorrectly. And it seems plain wrong that the flawless thinker should lose his boots this way.

Kelly is likely to respond: misleading evidence is evidence nonetheless. And if following misleading evidence leads to losing one's epistemic boots, then perhaps we need to let the boots fall where they may. Besides, our moral reformer isn't privy to the second-order evidence that his Nazi peers are in fact providing him with misleading information.

I think we can grant that misleading information is part of our total evidence worthy of consideration, but it does not follow that the moral reformer has a rational obligation to figure in misleading information so much so that it warrants reduction of confidence. All that follows is that our moral reformer should consider the fact that his peers find his anti-Nazi argument to be unsound. If he has considered the fact of consensus disagreement and reflected on his argument again, perhaps he has done all that is epistemically required of him. Having done all that's required of him, we could then conclude that he is reasonable to be steadfast in his newly formed moral belief without having to reduce his confidence.



Why think that our moral reformer has done all that is epistemically required of him? Well, here it may be helpful to utilize Richard Foley's distinction between the following two kinds of disagreement among intellectual peers

(D1) Mere (known) peer disagreement

and

(D2) Peer Disagreement with an argument

In cases of kind (D1), known disagreement between peers is sufficient to warrant either suspension of belief or splitting the difference. In chapter one of this work, I raised the worry that the EWV at times sounds committed to this and makes it vulnerable to certain objections. As such, what we need is a more robust kind of disagreement that actually challenges either my evidence for P or P itself. This is where (D2) comes in. In cases of kind (D2), one party to the dispute (let's say the one who concludes not-P) needs to offer an argument for why he or she rejects the evidence for P in order for disagreement to have epistemic significance. Richard Foley calls this "Socratic Influence."<sup>104</sup>

Now let us suppose for the sake of argument that the significance of consensus for our moral reformer Nazi Colonel is understood along the lines of (D2). I actually think this is the best way to understand Kelly here, because each peer is said to call into question the soundness of the argument. This would mean at least that our moral reformer has received reason(s) to reject one or more of his premises for the claim that Nazi treatment of the Jews is immoral. If understood this way, and if we add that each Nazi-peer reviewed the argument

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<sup>104</sup> See Foley's *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 86-89 and 110-111.

without others there to influence him,<sup>105</sup> then it would seem that our moral reformer would have reason to reduce his level of confidence in his belief that his newly discovered argument is sound. And he would be rationally required to do so even if the evidence is misleading. This is Kelly's desired result, and this would mean that I am wrong to claim (as I did above) that Kelly's conclusion does not follow.

But there is a way to resist Kelly's argument given Foley's distinction. We can say that being given a reason to think the argument is unsound is insufficient to warrant the reduction of confidence. Instead, what's needed for the moral reformer is an argument strong enough to persuade him to think that his moral *intuitions* are mistaken. In other words, we need a third distinction among kinds of disagreement

(D3) Peer Disagreement with Socratic influence that *persuades* the opposition that her argument is unsound, i.e. that her intuitions based thereon are mistaken

In my view, (D3) would be sufficient to warrant reduction in confidence, or more exactly, it would probably bring the confidence reduction all by itself.<sup>106</sup> Since the intuitions would be

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<sup>105</sup> Kelly distinguishes between (a) consensus where each member of the majority has arrived at his/her view independently of influence from others in their group and (b) consensus where the majority has influenced each other along the way. He thinks that the former is more evidentially significant than the latter (Ibid. pp. 144ff). I tend to agree with him on that much, but it seems to me that this idealized scenario is hardly ever a reality. Most often in our social epistemic practices (e.g. medical community), it seems to me that when consensus opinion is invoked as a reason to believe P the relevant community on the subject matter has had more than a bit of interaction on that particular issue. There has been an exchange of arguments and ideas for and against competing hypotheses. So, wouldn't beliefs based on consensus opinion be subject to the same worry that Kelly raises to religious belief? That worry is this: the fact that some religion R all believes P is hardly a reason for some non-believer to accept P (Ibid. 146-7). What would be epistemically salient is the reasons one is offered for thinking R is true. By parity of reasoning, consensus opinion on a medical issue (or what have you) is epistemically weighty insofar as the arguments that are offered on behalf of their favored position are convincing or persuasive.

<sup>106</sup> What I have in mind here is that doxastic involuntarism (DI) is correct regarding belief formation, i.e. that our beliefs happen upon us. But if (DI), then plausibly, after I run through an

challenged in a momentous way for our moral reformer, he would be in a new mental state where his intuitions on the matter have changed in some way. At the very least, this momentous challenge would lead to a reduction in confidence, although it is possible that a stronger revision could be in order.<sup>107</sup>

This understanding of (D3) is consistent with what I said above regarding what follows from Kelly's Consensus Argument. Our Nazi Colonel turned moral reformer may take into account every reaction to his moral argument against the Nazi treatment of the Jews, yet he may not find himself *persuaded* by the consensus. This might be explained by his simply finding their reasons for rejecting one or more of his premises to be weak, ad hoc, or simply unconvincing. This phenomenon of argumentative discourse, it is worth pointing out, would not be unique to the moral or mathematical disagreement cases. Philosophical disagreements often find differing sides with good arguments for and against P, yet each side retorts "I see your point, but I just don't find it that compelling. I just don't share your intuitions on that."

What strikes me as the deeper issue here is this: our moral reformer's newly formed *moral intuitions* on the matter strike him as more salient and vivacious than those of his Nazi colleagues, and no matter how many of them tell him that his argument is unsound, his intuitions are for some reason unshakeable. His intuitions figure in more heavily when the evidence for his moral argument is considered than the response of the consensus, and this

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argument that persuades me to think my intuitions are mistaken, I will have come to a new intuition or set of intuitions. And the formation of these new intuitions will be the basis upon which my new level of confidence or entirely new belief would be based. That is why I think that disagreement of kind (D3) would "do the work all by itself." Strictly speaking, all I have done is made the decision to consider the evidence and follow it where it leads so to speak.

<sup>107</sup> It is possible for (D3) to lead to suspension of judgment or even disbelief.

strikes me as perfectly reasonable for our moral reformer even if he lacks the second-order knowledge that he has in fact reasoned impeccably.

I think his reasonability can be further explained by considering the role that *trust* plays in our formation of beliefs and weighing of evidence. Recently, some epistemologists have argued that being a thinker at all requires a sort of fundamental intellectual self-trust. For example, Richard Foley opines, “Most of us have prima facie trust in our own faculties even though we cannot give a non-question-begging defense of their reliability.”<sup>108</sup> If that’s right, the Nazi Colonel’s rationality might be partially explained by a fundamental trust he has in his moral intuitions which is a species of a fundamental epistemic disposition of self-trust we have as cognizers. Even so, a few further questions arise: does this sort of fundamental self-trust warrant trust in *all* of one’s own intellectual capacities and dispositions? Does this sort of self-trust commit every thinker to a fundamental trust in the opinions, reflections, or Socratic influence of his/her peers?

Some epistemologists say “yes” to both of these questions. For example Allan Gibbard has argued that we need to have “fundamental trust” in *all* of our “judgments” or beliefs even without an independent reason to think that our judgments or beliefs are in fact reliable; and this fundamental self-trust commits us to a fundamental trust in others.<sup>109</sup> He argues for this claim by first considering two kinds of sources from which we acquire information:

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<sup>108</sup> Richard Foley, *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), Chapter 4. Allan Gibbard has argued similarly that it is not possible to lead life as a cognizer without having a fundamental trust in one’s own cognitive capacities and dispositions. See his *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 176-81.

<sup>109</sup> See his *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 178-179.

(S1) Information that derives from sources it is rational to have fundamental trust in—to be disposed to form beliefs on the basis of—even without any further independent reasons to think that these sources are reliable; and

(S2) Information that derives from sources that we trust and are disposed to form beliefs upon the basis of, yet we find it rational to do so *only because* we have further independent reasons for regarding these sources to be reliable.<sup>110</sup>

Sources of information in (S1) are important (e.g. background beliefs as well as non-doxastic mental states like experience, apparent memories, moral intuitions, etc.), because without them, we would lack the information necessary to form beliefs about the world. So, in general, we have a fundamental trust in the informational sources of kind (S1) from which we form beliefs, and we do this without first needing an argument for their reliability. Thus far, self-trust consists in being disposed to utilize (S1) to form beliefs about the world without first needing an argument for (S1)'s reliability.

Of course, it would not follow from this that there are no circumstances under which this fundamental trust in the sources of kind (S1) might be undercut or defeated. Recall Kelly's inebriation case mentioned above. This sort of cognitive impairment provides our prospective college student with a defeater for the reliability of the source of his belief-formation about which college is best to attend in the coming year. As such, he should not trust himself or the informational sources that lead to his belief in that circumstance.

Crucially here, the point is that we generally form our beliefs via a fundamental self-trust in informational sources like (S1), and this is the reasonable approach to belief formation.

Moreover, it is rational to form beliefs on the basis of these sources except in those cases where one has a reason to think that she is not so trustworthy given the circumstances.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid. pp. 178-9, and cf. with Ralph Wedgwood, "The Moral Evil Demons" in *Disagreement*. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): pp. 216-246. His summary inspired this distinction.

If we should generally have a fundamental trust in *all* of our judgments, beliefs, and intellectual capacities (in the absence of a defeater), Allan Gibbard continues, then this self-trust entails a fundamental trust in the beliefs, intellectual capacities, and dispositions of others—i.e. *all* minds (unless I have a special reason not to). Since I have accorded some trust in myself and in others in the past, “I must accord some fundamental authority to others” both now and in the future as well.<sup>111</sup> Richard Foley expresses this same idea when he says, “But if [we are fundamentally committed to self-trust], might not we be rationally compelled to have prima facie trust in others as well? I argue that the answer is ‘yes’.”<sup>112</sup> If Gibbard and Foley are correct, then one has a rough and ready way to argue that a fundamental trust in *all* minds, especially peers, requires her to give weight to a peer’s or group of peers’ beliefs. And giving weight to a group of peers’ beliefs entails confidence reduction. The only way to fortify one’s own belief from the confidence-reducing affect of disagreement is to have some further reason to discount the individual or peer, or so Gibbard (and Foley) thinks. I think this is precisely the line Kelly’s argument from consensus is committed to, and it would be one way for him to resist my counter-argument thus far.

Unfortunately, I think this argument from self-trust to trust in others is vulnerable to criticism. On the one hand, it supposes that one has a fundamental trust in *all* of one’s own beliefs (and belief-forming capacities), and one should continue to have this kind of self-trust unless she has a special reason not to. This in turn provides grounds for thinking one should trust the beliefs of others in the same way. But it is not the case that we should trust *all* of our own beliefs, even if we don’t have a reason to discount one or more of them. As Ralph

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<sup>111</sup> Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 176-180.

<sup>112</sup> Richard Foley, *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 101.

Wedgwood has pointed out, “Perhaps one only need to have this sort of fundamental trust in a certain *subset* of one’s beliefs (such as certain pivotal entrenched background beliefs) . . . and in certain non-doxastic mental states, such as one’s sensory experiences, one’s apparent memories, one’s moral intuitions, and so on.”<sup>113</sup> So, if we need not trust all of our own beliefs (only a subset), then we need not trust all of the beliefs of others.<sup>114</sup>

On the other hand, let’s suppose that the Gibbard and Foley line of argument is narrowed to say that if one has a fundamental trust in of one’s own moral intuitions, then this commits one to having a fundamental trust in the moral intuitions of others. This would seem to be what’s going on in the Nazi-treatment-of-Jews case above. If Kelly’s Consensus Argument is right, then the moral intuitions of the consensus really ought to carry epistemic weight equaling the Colonel’s own moral intuitions precisely because he is fundamentally committed to trusting their moral intuitions by trusting his own.

But there is a problem with this potential reply by the Gibbard and Foley line of argument. Even though it is rational to have a fundamental trust in one’s own moral intuitions, it does not follow that he is rationally obligated to have that same sort of trust in the moral intuitions of others.<sup>115</sup> What explains this rational difference in the weighted role the Nazi Colonel’s moral intuitions are given compared to the intuitions of his colleagues? It is the fact that his current moral intuitions can contribute to the formation of his moral beliefs about Nazi-treatment-of-Jews in a way that his Nazi peers’ intuitions cannot. His peers’

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<sup>113</sup> Ralph Wedgwood, “The Moral Evil Demons,” in *Disagreement*. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 238-9.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* p. 239

moral intuitions do not and cannot play the role in moral belief formation that his own moral intuitions can and do. Ralph Wedgwood articulates this point nicely when he says:

It does not seem possible for me currently to form a moral belief *directly* on the basis of *your* moral intuitions. At best, I can only directly base my current formation of a belief on my beliefs *about* your moral intuitions. On the other hand, it *is* possible for me currently to form a moral belief directly on the basis of *my own current* moral intuitions. Moreover, it seems that we are disposed to be guided by our moral intuitions towards forming the corresponding moral beliefs: if I currently have a moral intuition, that moral intuition will immediately incline me to accept the corresponding moral belief (unless I have some special reason for doubting that intuition). On the other hand, there is no such immediate tendency for *your* moral intuitions to incline me to accept the corresponding moral beliefs; even my own *beliefs* about your moral intuition do not seem immediately to incline me to accept the corresponding moral beliefs.<sup>116</sup>

So what makes it reasonable for our moral reformer to remain steadfast in his belief that the Nazi-treatment-of-Jews is wrong is that his moral intuitions furnish the basis for the formation of that belief. Notably, his moral intuitions play a very distinct and unique role in the formation of his newly formed moral belief. They have an immediate tendency to “incline him to accept the corresponding moral belief”<sup>117</sup> where the intuitions of a group of his peers do not have such a tendency to initiate a moral belief for the Colonel on this issue. If that’s right, then we have at least one way of showing how it could be reasonable for both the Nazi Colonel and our Conjecture Mathematician to remain steadfast in their beliefs that their newly formed arguments are sound even if the entire community of their peers disagrees and finds their arguments unsound. Each thinker has trusted his intuitions on the matter in a way that is perfectly reasonable given both the nature of one’s intuitions themselves and the role those intuitions play in belief formation.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid. p. 239-40.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.



### *Clarifications and Applications*

Here it is important for me to draw some clarifications and point out some things in order to avoid misunderstanding. *First*, while my intuitions might be more heavily weighted than my peer's, it is not merely because they are *my* intuitions. Instead, it has to do with the nature of intuitions and the roles they play in belief formation. Perhaps a similar point could be made about one's conscious experiences in general and sense perception in particular.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, my religious experience(s) might seem to count as a pound of evidence for me on the God question, but it does not follow that my telling you about it furnishes you with a pound of evidence to believe in God. The evidential weightiness for me then has to do with experience itself, namely, that my religious belief can be based directly on (or grounded/anchored in) such an experience in a way that your coming to religious belief cannot be so based on my experience of God. Evidential weight of this sort for my religious belief does not arise from the simple fact that it's my experience but from the nature of experience as such and the role it plays in belief formation.

Might this line of reasoning be applied to sense perception cases as well? I think the answer is 'yes'. There is something evidentially weighty about having a sense perception that generates a belief P for me. There is not this same evidential weight when I hear you claim not-P on the basis of a similar experience. As such, your testifying to your sense perceptual experience, which constitutes part of my total evidence, need not require a reduction of confidence on my part. Consider a perceptual case where you and I are at the horse track, and we both watch as horses A and B cross the finish line.<sup>118</sup> The finish is so close that you

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<sup>118</sup> I have borrowed this case from Kelly's "Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence." *Disagreement*. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press,

conclude A won while I conclude B won. Why not say that it is reasonable for me to remain *steadfast* in my belief about which horse won, because there's something about sense perception qua sense perception that makes it so reasonable? That is, we can say that having a sense perception of that sort grounds the rationality of my belief in a way that my beliefs about your perceptual astuteness cannot. My sense perceptions can directly and immediately ground a perceptual belief in a way that your perceptions cannot. As such, I still figure in your response when I weigh the Total Evidence, but after reconsidering, I remain steadfast in my original belief. This is rational, contrary to Kelly,<sup>119</sup> because of the nature of sense perception itself, not because it's my sensory perception.

This, I believe, is the point about moral intuitions here, namely, there's something about my moral intuitions qua intuitions that makes them evidentially more weighty for me than yours or than those of a consensus. It is that they can immediately and directly supply the basis for the corresponding moral belief.

*Second*, while I am saying that intuitions can rationally count for more than a peer's or than the consensus' intuitions given the nature of intuitions as such, it does not follow (as Kelly argued) that I have not given any weight at all to the consensus of my peers. In other words, the Asymmetrical No Independent Weight View would not follow from what I have

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2010), p.150ff. But I think my point here could just as easily be applied to the Dean-in-the-Quad Case (see my Chapter 1 of this dissertation).

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. On pp.151-152 he argues that the Equal Weight View actually renders the correct verdict in cases like this: both parties view the horse race should suspend judgment due to the total evidence they have after disagreement is known. After disclosure, we both have new evidence among our total evidence suggesting we're wrong about which horse won the race. Hence, we should suspend judgment. Clearly I disagree with Kelly on this, and have offered a provisional case for why above. Granted, my argument needs to be worked out further, but I hope to do that in the coming chapters. Here I simply needed to argue for a way in which Kelly is mistaken, and I think that much has been done.

argued. Recall, that view says: In cases of peer disagreement, it is reasonable to give no weight to the opinion of a peer as long as one's own opinion is the reasonable response to the original evidence.<sup>120</sup> It is plausible to say that our Colonel, while presenting his argument to each Nazi-peer, would be taking into account each peer's reason(s) for finding his argument unsound. After all, he would be considering their moral intuitions and subsequent beliefs on the matter. From there, he would be considering what epistemic ramifications their intuitions have for his own moral belief. In other words, he would be considering which kind of disagreement (D1)-(D3) their stated moral intuitions fall under. Suppose our Colonel's and Mathematician's view doesn't change. The explanation in part is this: we have a disagreement of kinds (D1) or (D2). The other part of the explanation has to do with the role my intuitions play.

If I'm right about this, then what I'm calling a Steadfastness View is not identical to what Kelly calls the Asymmetrical No Independent Weight View.<sup>121</sup> More specifically, from my claim that the Colonel or the Mathematician is reasonable to remain Steadfast in their initial belief, it would not follow that the No Independent Weight View is correct. Rather, Steadfastness is logically consistent with "giving weight to" or "considering" what the consensus or one's lone peer thinks, or so I have been arguing. Perhaps the rub with Kelly has to do with how to understand what giving weight amounts to. He seems to think that giving weight logically entails reduced confidence. I have argued that this is false. In my view, all that giving weight requires is to actually take into account or consider what all the evidence is for some claim. And in our Conjecture and Nazi Colonel cases, this amounts to

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid. p. 137.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

considering the each member of the consensus finds the relevant argument to be unsound. As such, giving weight is logically consistent with Steadfastness, and that's why the latter does not entail the Asymmetrical No Independent Weight View. I think this is a rather attractive consequence of my line of argument thus far. Of course, more must be said, and it will be in Chapters 3 and 4.

*Third*, contrary to Foley, disagreement of kind (D2) offered is insufficient to rationally demand a reduction in either man's confidence. More exactly, even when one peer or a consensus of one's peers has provided "Socratic Influence" (i.e. disagreement with argument for why) this may not be epistemically momentous enough to demand that one reduce his confidence. What is needed is something more, an argument of the (D3) sort that will evidentially push the intuitions of either thinker in the other cognitive direction. Again it must be emphasized that I am not saying that Socratic influence *counts for nothing* or is not at all considered when our Colonel considers his total evidence. All I am saying is that his moral intuitions can reasonably initiate and sustain his belief through the consideration of one or more peers who influence him in this way. This possibility is explained by the direct role one's intuitions play that cannot be played by the intuitions of a peer or the consensus.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> I wonder if the same point could be made by reference to reliable belief-forming processes. Roughly, when disagreement of kinds (D1) or (D2) is instantiated, the reliable process that formed the initial belief will not be defeated or overridden by another belief-forming process. Instead, the initial process which led to our Colonel believing that his argument against the Nazi treatment of the Jews is sound would sustain that even when "Socratic Influence" has been offered, i.e. (D2). But when disagreement of kind (D3) is instantiated, what explains the reduction in confidence or suspension of belief would be that another reliable process has initiated the new belief that is formed thereby supplanting the initial one. Put in terms of rationality, then, it's reasonable for either thinker to remain Steadfast, because the reliable process that initiated the belief sustains it even when consensus runs counter to one's belief. And this is explained in part by the nature of that process itself. However, what we need to alter or

*Fourth*, I am not saying that it is impossible for disagreement of kind (D3) to ever occur. More to the point: I'm not saying that consensus never warrants or leads to the reduction of confidence or the suspension of beliefs. In fact, my account is entirely consistent with (D3) taking place frequently in our epistemic practices, because there will be many cases where one's initial intuitions are faced with a momentous challenge, and as a result, those intuitions are altered or supplanted. When this happens, one of these responses could be warranted or take place after the weighing of evidence: (1) reduction of confidence or (2) suspension of belief. Crucially, though, what explains either of these responses is not that Consensus is sufficient all by itself to warrant one of these responses. Rather, it will be in virtue of the arguments or counterarguments that the Consensus has put forth that those in the minority will find themselves persuaded to a new doxastic stance. It will be in virtue of the arguments helping them form new intuitions on the matter.

*Finally*, recall that Kelly's argument moves from a claim about consensus to a claim about individual peer disagreement, namely, if one should reduce confidence in the consensus case, then one should reduce confidence in the single peer case. But I am not convinced this follows. Having undercut his premise (2) above serves to undercut this secondary conclusion. Since disagreement with a consensus of one's intellectual peers is not sufficient to warrant confidence reduction, then I see no reason to think that rationality demands reducing confidence when one disagrees with a single mathematician peer or Nazi-peer.

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supplant that initial process is an argument of kind (D3) which will be momentous enough to trigger a different belief forming process.

## Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have considered Thomas Kelly's Total Evidence View for how to respond to disagreement among intellectual peers. I have argued that his main argument, what I've dubbed an Argument from Consensus, is unsound. In particular, consensus is insufficient to warrant a reduction in confidence in cases where I have in fact reasoned impeccably. This is true even though I lack the God's eye view of that fact. Moral cases, I think, provide the strongest kind of support to my claim. What these kinds of cases reveal is that there's something unique about one's moral intuitions. Moral beliefs can be formed immediately and directly on their basis where this is not the case for the moral intuitions of a single peer or the consensus of one's peers. As such, a person can be rational to remain steadfast in the face of disagreement with a peer consensus or a single peer.

### Chapter 3

#### Steadfastness and Disagreement: A First Look

*We're right and they're wrong. It's as simple as that. . . .Moral relativism does not have a place in this discussion and debate.*  
—New York City Mayor Rudolph Guiliani<sup>123</sup>

*It should be obvious that reasonable people can disagree, even when confronted with the same body of evidence. When a jury or a court is divided in a difficult case, the mere fact of disagreement does not mean that someone is being unreasonable.*  
—Gideon Rosen<sup>124</sup>

#### Introduction

We began this work by asking a couple of questions. Among them is this *core question*: what is required of a person when he/she disagrees with an intellectual peer about whether some body of evidence E supports a given proposition P? As was pointed out, an answer to this question intersects at least two others: Can epistemic peers who have shared their evidence have reasonable disagreements? and Can epistemic peers who have shared their evidence reasonably maintain their own beliefs yet also think that the other party to the disagreement is also reasonable? I have argued that two kinds of answers to the core question are unsatisfying. Equal Weight Views are subject to a number of objections, chief of which is that it leads to an undesirable sort of skepticism with respect to a large portion of our beliefs, e.g. philosophical, political, moral, and even scientific. Moreover, I argued that Kelly's Total Evidence View failed as a good alternative for how to weigh bits of evidence, especially

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<sup>123</sup> Mayor Guiliani made this statement in his address to the United Nations General Assembly on October 1, 2001, less than a month after New York City's twin towers were destroyed by Islamic militants flying planes into them.

<sup>124</sup> Gideon Rosen, "Nominalism, Naturalism, Epistemic Relativism" in *Philosophical Perspectives*, 15, *Metaphysics*, (2001): 71.

higher-order evidence that comes from disagreement with a consensus of my peers. But if these two kinds of views fail, what other options are we left with to guide our epistemic lives in the face of disagreement?

Up to this point I have hinted at a third kind of view that seeks to answer the core question. In the literature, this view has been given a variety of labels, some more pejorative than others. Some have dubbed it “Permissivism,”<sup>125</sup> others “Stick-to-your-guns,”<sup>126</sup> and still others “Stubbornness.”<sup>127</sup> I have called it “Steadfastness.” But what precisely does this view amount to? How does it answer the core question? How does it answer the two further questions mentioned above? Well, the time has come to answer these and related questions. In this chapter, I will begin to explain what the Steadfastness view amounts to by first considering a generic version of the view. By looking at William Rowe’s work that predates the literature on epistemic disagreement, we find a version of Steadfastness that is attractive but runs into a problem. But there are remedies to the problem that transform Rowe’s Steadfastness into different varieties of the view. In the end, I argue that proponents have a number of options open to them, and choosing an option will depend on the case at hand.

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<sup>125</sup> Roger White, “Epistemic Permissiveness”, in *Philosophical Perspectives*, 19, *Epistemology*, 19 (2005): 445-459.

<sup>126</sup> For example Richard Feldman refers to Peter van Inwagen’s and Gideon Rosen’s views (both proponents of something like Steadfastness) as “The Hard Line” or “Stick to his guns” view in his article “Reasonable Religious Disagreements.” in *Philosophers Without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, Louise Antony, editor. New York: Oxford University Press, (2007): p. 210-212.

<sup>127</sup> See for example Catherine Z. Elgins “Persistent Disagreement.” in *Disagreement*. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Here she considers one type of the Steadfastness view I am defending and refers to it as “resoluteness,” yet what is problematic about this view is its implicit *stubbornness*. She says, “Resolute epistemic agents seem stubborn, simply insisting, that there must be something wrong with the opponent’s reasoning, since there is plainly nothing wrong with their own (*italics added*).” See pp. 57ff.



## Section 1

### *A Few Preliminary Remarks*

What I think makes the epistemology of disagreement at once both interesting and pressing is the presence of *persistent* and even *intractable disagreement* in a range of domains. Here I have in mind disagreements in philosophy, religion, morality, politics, law, and even science. That is not to suggest that examples from other domains are uninteresting or unhelpful, only that I think what's most pressing is widespread disagreement in these other areas that affect our lives in significant ways. So put, the examples utilized most often in this chapter will come from disagreement in domains like philosophy, religion, etc. This is fitting, because, as I understand them, proponents of what I'm calling "Steadfastness" often build their case for the view via examples from these pressing domains.<sup>128</sup>

While proponents of Steadfastness make use of examples from similar areas of disagreement, it's not the case that they utilize the examples the same. Steadfastness proponents differ markedly in their use of examples employed to serve their desired ends. In fact, the differences among Steadfastness views can be cashed out by understanding the different views to be answering the following question: *Why* is it reasonable for a cognizer to

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<sup>128</sup> Some representative examples of philosophers who are sympathetic to what I am calling the Steadfastness view and argue for that view as I indicate include: Robert Audi, "Intuition, Inference, and Rational Disagreement in Ethics." in Springer, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 11 (2008): 475-492. Gideon Rosen. "Nominalism, Naturalism, Epistemic Relativism." *Philosophical Perspectives* 15, Blackwell (2001): 69-91. "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism." *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*. Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Peter van Inwagen, "We're Right. They're Wrong." in *Disagreement*. Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 10-28; and also his "It is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything Upon Insufficient Evidence", in *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality* Jeff Jordan, Daniel Howard-Snyder, eds. (Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), pp. 137-153.

remain steadfast in her original belief after disagreement is known? I will argue that in answering this “why” question, we are able to say what Steadfastness amounts to. For starters, we might offer the following construal of Steadfastness that does not answer the “why” question:

**Generic Steadfastness:** When known disagreement occurs between you and an intellectual peer, you are reasonable to stand your epistemic ground. You need not suspend judgment or reduce confidence in what you originally believed.

This view is consistent with what I said at the end of chapter 2 where I argued that it is reasonable for our lone Mathematician and Nazi Colonel to remain steadfast in their respective beliefs even though a consensus of their peers disagree with their conclusions. However, this generic statement is not identical to what I said about these two lone rangers, and this will become obvious as we go along. Let us now turn to some representative examples of philosophers who hold the Steadfastness view of disagreement in order to better understand the view and its many incarnations.

## Section 2

### *William Rowe, Disagreement, and the G.E. Moore Shift*

Prior to the current explosion of literature on the epistemology of disagreement, philosophers of religion were discussing the significance of disagreement as it relates to questions about God's existence and the significance of Religious Pluralism.<sup>129</sup> One key philosopher in these religious discussions is William Rowe. In his now famous paper, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,"<sup>130</sup> Rowe articulates one variety of what I'm calling Steadfastness. Let us stipulate for the sake of discussion here that the proposition P being disputed is this: God exists. So, the disagreement is about P. Theists think P, and Atheists think not-P.

Rowe argues that atheists have a good *evidential argument* from evil for the conclusion that an omnipotent, omniscient, and maximally good God does not exist—i.e. not-P. That Argument from Evil runs as follows:

#### **Argument 1: Evidential Argument from Evil**

1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

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<sup>129</sup> Of course, we can add that discussions about the significance of moral disagreement have been around for some time.

<sup>130</sup> William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (October 1979):335-41.

Therefore,

3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.<sup>131</sup>

This argument is valid, so the question is whether its premises are both true. Let us grant that (2) is true, for both theists and non-theists can accept that it captures a general moral principle about what a perfectly good being would/would not allow with respect to evil and suffering.<sup>132</sup>

The premise for theists to dispute then is (1). Before doing that, however, consider how the atheist may defend the truth of (1). Rowe has become noteworthy for his defense of this premise by means of the Fawn Case. Here we are to imagine a fawn that lies injured in the forest after a tree is struck by lightning and topples onto the fawn causing it to lie there in misery for some period of time. Surely, Rowe argues, this is an instance of suffering that an omni-God need not permit to achieve some greater good. An omni-God “could have prevented [the fawn’s suffering] without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.”<sup>133</sup>

But this defense of (1) might be called into question. While it pumps our intuitions in favor of Rowe’s premise (1), and subsequently his atheological argument, Rowe has not

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid. p. 336

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. p. 337. Here I must register my knowledge that many theists would not grant the truth of (2). This is evident by the significant body of literature on the evidential problem of evil. Consider, for example, the volume edited by Daniel-Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument From Evil*, (Indiana University Press, 2008). For our purposes here, however, dealing with that whole discussion is unnecessary. Hence, I will grant the intuition behind (2).

<sup>133</sup> William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism”, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (October 1979): 337.

*proved* the truth of (1). It could be the case that there are reasons and goods beyond our cognitive grasp that an omni-God has for allowing the fawn to suffer. Call these inscrutable reasons. The possibility of such inscrutable reasons is sufficient to block *establishing* the truth of (1). In Rowe's words,

The truth is that we are not in a position to prove that (1) is true. We cannot know with certainty that instances of suffering of the sort described in (1) do occur in our world. But it is one thing to know or prove that (1) is true and quite another thing to have rational grounds for believing (1) is true. We are often in the position where in the light of our experience and knowledge it is rational to believe that a certain statement is true, even though we are not in a position to prove or to know with certainty that the statement is true.<sup>134</sup>

Notice here a couple of key features of Rowe's line of thought that pertain to our discussion of disagreement. *First*, he grants that he cannot establish the truth of (1), because "establish" is a very strong epistemic requirement. It requires knowing a proposition with "certainty". Even though the Fawn Case affords the atheist with powerful evidence, it is not necessarily decisive. Theists still might find a way to resist the proposed veracity of (1). *Second*, a person may be *rational to believe* (1) even though that proposition *cannot be known* for certain. Crucial here is that rationality is not contingent on certainty. One's belief can be reasonable, arguably, if it is evidentially well supported even when the evidence is not decisive.

But how might it be reasonable for the atheist to believe (1)? Rowe's answer is this: in light of our every day experience, there's no good reason to think that an omni-God can

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

achieve some good only by means of permitting the fawn to suffer in such a way.<sup>135</sup> It seems to me that Rowe's answer relies on the following epistemic principle:

**Rowe's Principle:** S is reasonable to believe P if S has rational (i.e. evidential) support for P.

Instances of suffering like that of the fawn provide Rowe and the atheist with no good reason to believe that an omni-God exists and permits this instance of suffering for some greater good. If that's right and (2) is granted, then Rowe has an argument for the conclusion that God does not exist. And this means that the atheist satisfies Rowe's principle. She is reasonable to believe not-P, viz., God does not exist.

What is the theist to do? Must she abandon her theism in light of Rowe's evidential argument from evil? Not necessarily. Abandoning theism would be hasty, according to Rowe, because there are a few ways for the theist to resist the argument. In particular, theists can reject (1) in at least two ways. One way is by means of what Rowe calls a "direct attack."<sup>136</sup> Direct attacks would argue that (1) is false by pointing to some greater good that is brought about or preserved by God's allowing what appears to be gratuitous evil to occur. For example, John Hick thinks that God permits evil and suffering for the good of personal

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid. Rowe inquires: "Is it reasonable to believe that there is some greater good so intimately connected to that suffering that even an omnipotent, omniscient being could not have obtained that good without permitting that suffering or some evil at least as bad? It certainly does not appear reasonable to believe this."

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. p. 338.

character formation.<sup>137</sup> Other theists think that evil and suffering are permitted in order to preserve significant human freedom.<sup>138</sup>

Now what's important for our discussion here is that either kind of direct attack response aims to show that (1) is false by pointing to a reason for which God permits suffering, namely, to achieve one of the named greater goods. But Rowe finds both answers impotent in demonstrating the falsity of (1). Hickian responses fail, because it's difficult to see how certain kinds of apparently gratuitous evil contribute to our character formation. Free Will Defense responses fail, because it's not at all clear how free will is related to the Fawn Case. Hence, just like the atheist cannot *prove* (1) with certainty because he *does not know* that God fails to have a greater good for which he must permit the fawn to suffer, similarly, the theist is not privy to *knowing* that these are in fact the greater goods that God is in fact seeking to obtain by allowing what appears to be gratuitous suffering in cases like that of our fawn.<sup>139</sup> And if the theist lacks this sort of knowledge, then she is in no better an epistemic position with respect to (1) than Rowe.

But she is in no worse of a position epistemically than Rowe either, for just as Rowe and the atheist can employ Rowe's Principle in reasoning about (1) to (3), so also might the theist make use of the principle in her rejection of (1). Put differently, just as Rowe was able to furnish rational grounds for accepting (1), the theist might do the same in order to reject

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<sup>137</sup> See his book *Philosophy of Religion*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Prentice Hall: 1963), pp. 40-46.

<sup>138</sup> See Alvin Plantinga, *God Freedom and Evil* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, December 1977); and Peter van Inwagen, *Problem of Evil* (Oxford University Press, June 15, 2008).

<sup>139</sup> William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (October 1979): 338. Moreover, some religious traditions accept a further principle, namely, that God's ways are vastly different from our own, and this means we cannot understand them in this life. If this principle is accepted, the theist has one more reason to think that we cannot know the greater good(s) that are preserved or promoted by God's allowing apparent gratuitous evil.

(1). How might the theist proceed? Well, she needs to embark on an “indirect attack” of (1). This way of attack is called the “G.E. Moore Shift.” Here is how it works.

Our initial Evidential Argument from Evil for Atheism went as follows: (1), (2), therefore, (3). If the theist applies the G.E. Moore Shift, she can reason as follows: not-(3), (2), therefore, not-(1). When the theist does so, her argument looks like this:

**Argument 2: Indirect Argument Against Gratuitous Evil (the “G.E. Moore Shift”)**

(Not)-3. An omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being exists.

2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

Therefore,

(not)- 1. It is not the case that there exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

So, if theists have reason to think that not-(3) is true—perhaps they have a cumulative case for this premise from cosmological, teleological, moral arguments, etc.—then they have an indirect argument to the conclusion that (1) is false. According to Rowe, “It is a truth of logic that if [argument 1 for atheism] is valid [indirect argument 2 against evil] must be valid as well. Since the arguments are the same so far as the second premise is concerned, any choice



between them must concern their respective first premises.”<sup>140</sup> In sum, the theist has as much of a *rational ground* for maintaining theism in the face of apparent gratuitous suffering as Rowe does for atheism. Since either party has rational grounds for accepting or rejecting (1), each side can argue that his/her belief is reasonable because each party has satisfied Rowe’s Principle.

All of this leads to this question: how should either side to this (or any) dispute view the other party given that all parties involved have satisfied Rowe’s Principle? Rowe’s favored answer is that atheists should view *some* theists as “rationally justified” in believing that God exists, even though atheists must view theists as having a false belief regarding P.<sup>141</sup> If that’s right, then we have a situation where all parties to a dispute have arguments for their belief regarding P and the belief that their peer holds a false belief about P. With all of this in mind, I think we are in a good position to state Rowe’s version of Steadfastness as follows:

**Argument-Egalitarian Steadfastness (AES)<sup>142</sup>:** When intellectual peers disagree about P they are reasonable to stand firm in their beliefs about P if each has a relatively good argument for or against P (via the “G.E. Moore Shift”).

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 339

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. P. 340. Of course, this raises the further question of whether it’s plausible to view a person who holds a false belief as rational in believing this purported false belief. Rowe thinks the answer is ‘yes’, because there are cases where a person is “rationally justified” in believing a false proposition. Rowe asks us to consider a case where you have left on a plane for summer vacation. Due to violent storms in flight, your plane goes down. Your family learns of the crash along with further data that, after a 24 hour search, no survivors have been found. In this case, your family is rationally justified to believe that you are deceased. However, you are in fact alive yet undiscovered by rescue teams. As you float there waiting for help, you would be within your epistemic rights to believe that your family is reasonable to believe that you are dead when in fact you are alive.

<sup>142</sup> It is worth noting that this rendering of Steadfastness is in the spirit of Rowe’s “Friendly Atheism”, but it is not identical to it.

Notice how Argument-Egalitarian Steadfastness (AES hereafter) brings together Generic Steadfastness and Rowe's Principle. It tells us that standing firm in one's belief is reasonable if he has an argument. By "having an argument", I think Rowe means at least that the argument is valid and defensible. Not any old argument will do. That would be too weak a demand. But it would be too strong to demand that the argument persuade everyone. Clearly the G.E. Moore Shift discussion above implies persuading everyone is *not* required for an argument to be valid or defensible or good. So, AES says that having an argument is necessary for reasonably standing firm in one's belief. Also, it says that viewing one's peer as reasonable requires that peer to have an argument for his belief. Surely, you won't find their argument persuasive, but you might grant that it's at least a plausible line of argument.

The moral here is that intellectual peers ought to view each other as equally reasonable because you recognize that both have an argument, viz. propositional evidence, i.e. an argument, for their stances towards P. When your peer has such a valid and potentially sound argument for her doxastic stance, it is more epistemically "friendly" to find them as equally rational as oneself than to assess them as beyond the epistemic pale as it were. Notice further how AES might answer Feldman's questions about the epistemology of disagreement. To the question of whether two (or more) "intellectual peers" can reasonably disagree, (AES) says "yes." And to the question of whether two (or more) peers can reasonably maintain their original beliefs in the face of disagreement, (AES) says "yes" so long as you have an argument for your belief. Now if it turns out that one's peer has an argument for her differing doxastic stance, but she either (a) has made a cognitive mistake while reasoning or (b) is not acquainted with all of the same grounds for belief/disbelief, then AES will evolve into a different variety of Steadfastness.

### Section 3

#### *A Problem for AES, Proposed Solutions, and New Renditions of Steadfastness*

Initially the proponent of Steadfastness might find AES quite attractive. It seems like everyone comes out an epistemic winner in the end. With such a positive outcome, proponents of steadfastness might resonate with John Greco's response to Rowe's conclusion: "With friends like these, one wants to say, who needs enemies?"<sup>143</sup> Or, if we consider our opponents to be 'enemies' in some sense, then perhaps the more appropriate retort is this: "With enemies like these, who needs friends?"<sup>144</sup> Regardless, given a choice between making intellectual friends or philosophical foes, certainly I'd opt for the former. However, even if AES is initially attractive, we must ask ourselves if it can withstand scrutiny.

To begin our analysis of AES, recall that "evidence" here is propositional or doxastic, so what makes belief or non-belief rational on AES is having an argument for one's belief. Also, one's evidence for and against P is both (a) shareable and (b) evaluable by all parties to the dispute. With all of this in mind, AES seems to run into a problem. If both parties to a dispute have shared their evidence, then surely they would be aware of the reason(s) their opponent has for his contrary belief. But how can both parties be so aware of all reasons for/against P and be rationally justified to remain steadfast in their respective beliefs? Is it not the case that the evidence supports either P, not-P, or neither prior to disclosing the evidence to his peer? If so, how can AES be correct? These questions embody a principle

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<sup>143</sup> "Friendly Theism", in *Religious Tolerance Through Humility*, James Kraft and David Basinger, eds. (Ashgate Press, 2008), p. 51.

<sup>144</sup> I am indebted to Thomas D. Senor for suggesting to me that this is the more poignant quip.

that we first encountered when discussing the Equal Weight View—the Uniqueness Thesis.<sup>145</sup> It runs as follows:

**Uniqueness Thesis (UT):** Given some total body of evidence E and some proposition P, there is one unique doxastic attitude that is rational for a subject S to take towards that proposition on E.

So the objection says that AES is in direct conflict with the UT, because, if there is one and only one proposition that the evidence supports, then there is only one appropriate doxastic attitude that S can take towards that proposition. Those attitudes are belief, disbelief, or suspension of judgment; or if the UT proponent is a bit more Bayesian in his view, he might say that there are a small range of appropriate doxastic attitudes. Either way, what matters most here to the objector is that AES seems to grant the rationality of mutually inconsistent doxastic attitudes, attitudes that cannot both be rational given UT.

Rowe and the proponent of AES have a possible reply to this concern. *First*, they can admit that AES indeed seems “paradoxical”<sup>146</sup> if all the evidence relevant to P is shareable and mutually evaluable by all parties. That is, they can simply bite the bullet here and acknowledge that AES lands them in a paradoxical spot, but this need not force him to give up on AES. Of course, such a response is hardly illuminating. In fact, the response fails as a reply at all, because the relationship between AES and UT is more strained than “paradoxical.” The two principles are implicitly contradictory not merely paradoxical. The

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<sup>145</sup> This sort of objection is raised by Roger White. See his “Epistemic Permissiveness” in *Philosophical Perspectives*, 19, *Epistemology*, (2005): 445-447.

<sup>146</sup> William Rowe has admitted as much when he says, “Friendly Atheism becomes paradoxical, however, when the atheist contemplates believing that the theist has all the grounds for atheism that he, the atheist, has, and yet is rationally justified in maintaining his theistic belief.” See his paper “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Oct. 1979): p. 340.

UT as stated tells us that a body of evidence E only supports one rational doxastic attitude, whereas AES tells us that conflicting doxastic attitudes can both be reasonable given the same body of evidence. So, it seems like the proponent of AES faces the following challenge: either give up one of these two principles (AES or UT since both cannot be true) or figure out a way to make UT consistent with his Steadfastness.

The AES proponent may have way to argue that her view is consistent with the Uniqueness Thesis (UT) if she accepts the distinction I made in Chapter 1 between E-Uniqueness and R-Uniqueness. These two versions of the UT run as follows:

**Evidential or E-Uniqueness:** for any body of evidence E and proposition P, E supports P or not, so E warrants one unique doxastic attitude toward P.

**Rational or R-Uniqueness:** for any body of evidence E and proposition P, E fixes only one uniquely rational attitude towards P.<sup>147</sup>

Proponents of AES, then, might agree with me that E-Uniqueness is true while R-Uniqueness is false. If they do, they can hold that AES is consistent with E-Uniqueness, even if it is inconsistent with R-Uniqueness. They might say sure there is one proposition that E objectively and actually supports, but we just don't know with certainty yet which proposition that is. But this is not a problem for AES and the UT, because AES proponents think there are multiple rational attitudes that are permissible to have towards a proposition given the body of evidence offered for/against it. In short, AES proponents think R-Uniqueness is false. The upshot to this line of argument, then, is that AES is not inconsistent with the Uniqueness Thesis per se. It is only inconsistent with one questionable version of it, namely, R-Uniqueness.

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<sup>147</sup> I am indebted to Thomas D. Senor for this crucial distinction.

*Second*, proponents of AES may offer a few further ways to maintain that AES is consistent with the Uniqueness Thesis (either version). One way is to say that one side to the dispute does not really have all of the same evidence as the other party. Perhaps one side has different, better, or inscrutable evidence. Another way to meet the challenge is to argue that one side to the dispute has made a cognitive mistake or is cognitively defective in some way. Now it seems to me that if the proponent of AES chooses one of these options, then AES really gets transformed into another version of Steadfastness, but the upshot is that one can maintain a Steadfastness view while leaving the Uniqueness Thesis untouched.

*Possible Reply #1: All the Evidence is not Shared and Weighed the Same.*

I argued in both earlier chapters that it is unlikely that we ever really share all of the same evidence. When we consider whole bodies of evidence, it is apparent they are rife with complexity. This is true especially of evidence for claims made in domains of intractable disagreement like philosophy, politics, morality, religion, science, etc. Their bodies of evidence include evidence of many different kinds. It will include evidence from testimony, perceptual experience, memory, and the a priori; and one might think that bits of these kinds of evidence include both doxastic and non-doxastic evidence. And it seems to me that if either or both parties have experiential evidence that bears on P, this bit of evidence will not be weighed the same by both parties even if it is made known at the table of disagreement about P. This is especially the case where one party has had a particular sort of experience and the other has not but simply has a report of the experience. Something similar might be said about evidence from sources like testimony, namely, it will figure in differently to one's total evidence. Even if one's total evidence is *in some sense* shareable, certain kinds of

perceptual or testimonial evidence may not be wholly shareable, so all parties to the dispute will be unable to see how these bits of evidence are weighed as they are in favor of P. Let us consider some cases that support the intuitions that we never really share the same evidence and that this accounts for how peers weigh evidence for P differently.

**Case-Type 1: Inscrutable Evidence.** Before we consider the significance of perceptual or testimonial evidence, there's an interesting way for Steadfastness proponents to meet the above challenge regarding the alleged inconsistency of AES and the UT. In his paper, "The Epistemology of Disagreement", Ernest Sosa argues that a person can be rational to stand his ground after "comparing evidential notes" with his peer, because it is possible that not all evidence is shareable. Given the complex nature of bodies of evidence—which include arguments, context, background information, memory, etc.—it is possible that some evidence relevant to P is in principle incommunicable. Referring to the G.E. Moore's actual use of "the shift" with respect to philosophical skepticism, Sosa proposes

Moore takes his case definitely not to be one where he has no need of ulterior reasons or evidence. He is quite explicit that only based on conclusive reasons does he know himself to be awake and not dreaming. Take again the question whether one can know oneself to be awake. The skeptic answers this question in the negative as against Moore's own affirmative response. . . Moore does not claim it to be obvious that he is awake and not dreaming, so that he needs no ulterior reasons for so believing. On the contrary, he claims rather that he cannot expound his reasons fully, perhaps because they are too extensive and complex. His reasons are said to constitute "conclusive evidence" for believing as he does, that he is awake and not dreaming, despite his inability to expound them. Certainly he cannot cite them to an opponent. And Moore might also claim, or so I suggest, that he could not expound them even to himself. Those reasons seem conclusive, then, even if he cannot lay them out, one by one, perhaps even to himself in private.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ernest Sosa, "The Epistemology of Disagreement", in *Social Epistemology*, Adrian Haddock, Alan Millar, Duncan Prichard, eds. (Oxford: New York, 2010), pp. 278-296.

Here we do well to highlight a few important points about Sosa's understanding of Moore. *First*, when Moore and the skeptic disagree about knowledge of the external world, Moore agrees that his whole body of evidence must support his claim that he has hands or that he's awake and not dreaming. *Second*, Moore takes his evidence to be of this sort. His *total* or *conclusive* evidence supports his claims to know that he has hands, is awake and not dreaming, etc. *Third*, this means that his total or conclusive evidence must include bits/pieces of evidence that are strictly speaking not shareable. They're incommunicable precisely because they are "inscrutable." That is, Moore takes himself to have reasons among his total or conclusive evidence that support his claims to knowledge, but these reasons are opaque and at present not open to view either by Moore or the Skeptic. Understood as a response to the purported objection/challenge of inconsistency, I think we can articulate Sosa's version of Steadfastness is this:

**Inscrutable Conclusive Evidential Steadfastness (ICES):** When you and a peer disagree about E's support of P, you are reasonable to stand firm in your belief that P if there are substantial reasons among your conclusive evidence that are inscrutable.<sup>149</sup>

While different from AES, Inscrutable Conclusive Evidence Steadfastness (ICES hereafter) is consistent with AES. Where it differs is in its understanding of what constitutes "having equal arguments for" P. Proponents of ICES must hold that this means each party has equal arguments via the G.E. Moore shift plus some other bit of evidence that is inscrutable. By adding the inscrutability component, ICES responds to the objector (and meets the challenge) by saying that all of our evidence is not shared. If it's not shared, then strictly speaking, we will not be aware of all the reasons that our peer has for believing the opposite of us.

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<sup>149</sup> To be clear, this is my own rendering of what I find in Sosa. He does not call his view a Steadfastness view, but I think my ICES captures the spirit of what he's arguing.



Likewise, they will not be aware of all of our reasons for believing as we do, because we will be unable to obtain through reflection all of our relevantly substantial reasons.<sup>150</sup>

What does this mean for the proposed inconsistency between AES and UT? I think the answer is this: it removes the inconsistency by extending the account of Steadfastness and by showing that evidence sets are too complex to be entirely shared, and this means that UT is no longer at issue. Here's how the reasoning goes. If ICES is true in many or most cases of disagreement (esp. intractable disagreements in philosophy, ethics, religion, politics, etc.), then strictly speaking, no two persons ever share the *same* evidence. If no two people ever share the same evidence, then at most, what peers disagree about is whether *approximately similar evidence* supports P. But this means there is no single body of evidence under consideration that can be said to support a given proposition, i.e. each person will have among his evidence inscrutable reasons. In that case, the UT (either version) is not even an issue, because we're no longer talking about a single body of evidence that supports one and only one doxastic attitude toward P. It's not that the UT is false; rather, ICES entails

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<sup>150</sup> Invoking inscrutable or incommunicable reasons to explain why a person may be reasonable to continue believing P when an intellectual peer disagrees is not isolated to Moore and Sosa. Peter van Inwagen has made use of "incommunicable insights" to explain how religious persons, politicians, and philosophers can meet William Clifford's Principle to believe only what their available evidence supports even when they know of peers who disagree. He says, "How, then, can I maintain that the evidence and arguments I can adduce in support of my beliefs actually justify these beliefs? If this evidence and these arguments are capable of that, then why aren't they capable of convincing these other people that these beliefs are correct? Well, as with philosophy, I am inclined to think that I must enjoy some sort of incommunicable insight that the others, for all their merits, lack. I am inclined to think that "the evidence and arguments I can adduce in support of my beliefs" do not constitute the totality of my justification for these beliefs. But all that I am willing to say for sure is that something justifies me in rejecting political skepticism, or at least that it is possible that something does: that is it not a necessary truth that one is not justified in holding political belief that is controverted by intelligent and well-informed political thinkers." See his "It is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything Upon Insufficient Evidence", in *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality* Jeff Jordan, Daniel Howard-Snyder, eds. (Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), pp. 142ff.

that there are multiple rational attitudes regarding a proposition, because the same evidence is not shared. It cannot be shared if it is inscrutable. So, ICES preserves both steadfastness and reasonable disagreement without having to give up either principle.

**Case-Type 2: First-hand Perceptual Experience.** Suppose you and a peer are debating what the rim of the Grand Canyon is like and how breath-taking it is.<sup>151</sup> Suppose you have been there to “see it for your self”, but your peer only has the pictures you took. And these pictures constitute part of the purported “shared” evidence that is to resolve the dispute between you and her. Surely your first-hand experience of the Grand Canyon cannot be shared by your peer in a way that would constitute identical evidence for her. By simply viewing the pictures you have taken she has the best evidence *available* to her. While in some weak sense she “has similar evidence” regarding P, you hardly have “all the same evidence,”<sup>152</sup> because she “[cannot] reasonably be expected to be acquainted with the grounds for [belief that you possess].”<sup>153</sup> If you cannot be acquainted with the same grounds for belief that your peer has, then you don’t really have all the *same* evidence. This is true

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<sup>151</sup> I am indebted to Jack Lyons for this example.

<sup>152</sup> To further the distinction between “same” and “available” evidence, consider a woman and a man disagreeing about whether the experience of giving birth (her) or passing a kidney stone (him) is more painful. While both have experienced pain to a great degree, it’s not clear that either would be irrational to think that their experience of pain is greater than the other’s. Why? While they have disclosed and made *available* all of the relevant evidence about their pain-experiences, they have *different* evidence upon which they conclude that their own pain-experience is more painful than their peer’s. Simply put, there are different kinds of pain, and it’s quite difficult to measure which kinds are more or less painful than others. As such, we should not think that it is unreasonable for either party to continue believing that their pain is more painful than their peers. Disagreement here hardly undermines their rationality of belief. See John M. Depoe, “The Significance of Religious Disagreement”, in *Taking Christian Moral Thought Seriously: The Legitimacy of Christian Thought in the Marketplace of Ideas*, edited by Jeremy Evans (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2011), pp. 48-76.

<sup>153</sup> William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Oct. 1979): p. 340.

even if you both have disclosed and made *available* the relevant evidence. In the end, what explains the disparity of conclusions between you and your peer regarding E's support of P is that you lack the same evidence and, as a result, you have weighed bits of the total evidence differently. This is epistemically above reproach, because you have done all you can possibly be expected to do. You have considered all the available evidence for a given proposition.<sup>154</sup>

This example reminds us that we often have evidence of a non-doxastic sort.

Supposing that some beliefs can be immediately formed in our experiences, such beliefs are non-inferential. Their rational support does not come by means of an argument but by means of being directly anchored in experience. But if one can have rational support for a belief without an argument, and if that evidence is only partially shareable; then it seems like AES must be revised. Thus, another version of steadfastness runs as follows:

**Evidential Inegalitarian Steadfastness (EIS):** When intellectual peers disagree about P, it is reasonable for them to stand firm in their original beliefs about P if their beliefs are formed as an appropriate response to the *available* evidence.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Applied to the Atheism/Theism discussion in Rowe, we might say that either side could utilize this move. The atheist might have first-hand experience of the Fawn Case (perhaps while he was out hunting with Dick Cheney) or some similar horrendous evil that the theist lacks first-hand experience of even if he is made aware of the Fawn Case by means of the atheist reporting it to him. In this sense, the theist lacks the "same evidence" or is not "acquainted with the grounds of disbelief" that are salient to the atheist invoking the Evidential Argument from Evil. While the theist is surely aware of the bad stuff that goes on in the everyday world, he lacks acquaintance with the *exact* grounds that the Atheist has. Likewise, the theist might have as part of his cumulative case for (not)-premise 3 of the G.E. Moore Shift, religious experiences. These would provide a bit of evidence for the theist that the atheist lacks. So, both parties might cite the salience of first-hand experience as an explanation for why the other side does not come out at the same place with respect to P, but is still reasonable to believe as she does. That is, both parties can grant that the other is not privy to the *same* bits of evidence, even though they are aware of all the *available* evidence (which has been disclosed as best as possible). But were they to be so privy to the very same evidence, they would probably share the same belief about P. Unfortunately, however, Rowe intended his example to be unseen by both theists and atheists alike. So, perhaps the application here does not work.

<sup>155</sup> This version of Steadfastness is found not only in Rowe but also John Greco's paper "Friendly Theism," in *Religious Tolerance Through Humility*, James Kraft and

Notice that EIS highlights the important distinction I have been making between sharing *available evidence* and *same evidence*. Two or more intellectual peers might disclose all of their evidence for and against P, and this would constitute having shared evidence. Once evidence is shared, we can say that all parties to the dispute have before them the “available evidence.” Recall, it is possible to share all *available evidence* while not sharing all the *same evidence* precisely due to the nature of the kinds of evidence that make up our body of evidence. EIS thus captures this distinction and acknowledges that you can be rational to stand your ground with respect to P in virtue of having considered all the available evidence, but you find it supporting P while your interlocutor finds it to support not-P.

This disparity between you and your peer’s conclusions with respect to P is best explained by you not having the same evidence and by each of you weighing some pieces of that available evidence more heavily than others. In our Grand Canyon example, the first-hand perceptual evidence will figure in differently for the person who was there to see it for herself. John Greco makes this same point when he asks us to consider the following case:

It is taken for granted in your family that Uncle Joe is dead. Everyone knows the story of how his plane went down in the Atlantic, no survivors were ever found, and so on. But one day you are on a business trip in Chicago and you clearly see Uncle Joe crossing the street. The two of you make eye contact, there is a look of recognition on his face, then he gives you the slip in the crowd. Now suppose that you go back home and report to your family that Uncle Joe is alive—that you saw him in Chicago. It seems to me that it is perfectly rational for your family to think that you are somehow mistaken, while it is perfectly rational for you to believe that you are not. Depending on the quality of your perception and their contrary evidence, it may very well be irrational for you not to believe that Uncle Joe is alive, and irrational for your family to believe that he is.<sup>156</sup>

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David Basinger, eds. (Ashgate Press, 2008), pp. 53-56.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. pp. 53-4.

Greco claims that, on a “perceptual model”, it is reasonable for two people to disagree about P if one party to the dispute has first-hand perceptual evidence, but the other party does not. While the evidence regarding your Uncle Joe is in some sense shared and available, it is not shared and available in the same way by all parties involved. Plausibly then, one party might weigh the first-hand perceptual experience differently than the person lacking such an experience. Hence, his evidence will be “unequal” in virtue of being of a different kind and quality (i.e. evidentially inegalitarian). And insofar as either response is formed appropriately in response to the kinds and quality of evidence that’s available, then that response is reasonable.

As a response to the challenge posed above, EIS addresses the alleged inconsistency by arguing that our evidence is not really the *same or shared as the same and in the same way*. If our evidence is not the same, then strictly speaking, there is not a single body of evidence under consideration. At most, our available evidence is an approximately shared body of evidence. Proponents of EIS argue that *available evidence* is not sufficient to get you *sameness of evidence* like the UT assumes. So, again, the UT (either version) is not even an issue; and this means that Steadfastness of the EIS sort and the UT are not in conflict.

**Case-Type 3: Interpersonal Testimony.** EIS gains traction not only from perceptual cases. Consider cases where testimonial evidence is being weighed to determine the rationality of belief. In particular, consider cases of interpersonal testimony where we come to know a property or set of properties about a person by his/her disclosing certain things to us. Here are a few examples of interpersonal testimony

- (a) A man confesses love to his beloved, but to no one else.
- (b) A woman confesses her love to her best friend, but not to her beloved.

- (c) I tell you privately that you have hurt my feelings.
- (d) I tell someone else but not you, that you have hurt my feelings.<sup>157</sup>

In each case, there is a bit of information about oneself being disclosed to one party but not to others. Call this “selective self-disclosure.” Now we might say that interpersonal testimony is often like this. It selects which person or persons to reveal cherished information to (for whatever reason or reasons), and when such information is revealed, the recipient of the information could now be said to have knowledge about the one who has testified to her in a way that others do not.

Take example (a) above: a man confesses love to his beloved but to no one else. Suppose the beloved—to whom the lover has selectively testified of his love—tells her best friend that her man loves her with an undying love. While this evidence has now been shared and is so available both to the beloved and her friend, the beloved certainly knows of the lover’s love in a way that her friend does not. The beloved has been told first-hand of his love. What’s more is that the friend may reasonably doubt her friend’s testimony regarding this purported love, because she may have further reason to doubt the reliability of the beloved’s testimony. Perhaps the beloved has a history of embellishing. If so, it would be reasonable for the friend to not believe that the man loves the beloved with an undying love, for all she knows, the beloved has embellished the story. But surely it’s reasonable for the beloved to steadfastly believe her man loves her with an undying love, for he has disclosed himself to her in this selective way. Moral: it seems equally reasonable for two peers who share all the *available* evidence to weigh it differently given the nature of the testimonial evidence involved and how it bears on their forming a belief about P or not-P.

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<sup>157</sup> I have borrowed these examples and the notion of “interpersonal testimony” from John Greco. See his article “Friendly Theism,” pp. 56-57.

With all of this in mind, we can see again how EIS deals with the challenge of purported inconsistency between Steadfastness and the UT. As a response to the challenge posed above, EIS addresses the alleged inconsistency by arguing that the testimonial evidence in the above examples is not really the *same or shared as the same and in the same way*. If their evidence is not the same, then strictly speaking, there is not a single body of evidence under consideration. At most, our available evidence is an approximately shared body of evidence. So, proponents of EIS argue that *available evidence* is not sufficient to get you *sameness of evidence* like the UT assumes. And this means that Steadfastness of the EIS sort and the UT are not in conflict.

Meeting the objector's challenge to Steadfastness in this way need not put a stop to inquiry and discussion regarding topics of disagreement. Instead, EIS leaves open the possibility that one's peer could change her mind about P; for if she were to have a similar kind of experience or receive interpersonal testimony of the relevant sort, then she would probably change her mind. Richard Fumerton expresses this point when referring to a case of different or better evidence

This [kind of case] is interestingly different [from others], because it is not as if there is available to me evidence that wasn't available to those who disagree with me. Rather, there is a process which I now understand involving the appreciation of available evidence, a process that I have gone through and that I have good reason to believe. . .they have not gone through. Further I have good reason to believe that should those who disagree with me go through the process, they would end up agreeing with my conclusions.<sup>158</sup>

What Fumerton refers to as a "process. . .involving the appreciation of available evidence" is akin to what I've dubbed "weighing different bits of evidence more heavily.". Such

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<sup>158</sup> Richard Fumerton, "You Can't Trust a Philosopher", in *Disagreement*, Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 94.

“different” or “better” kinds of evidence that I *appreciate* in a certain way form part of my evidential base that renders my belief that P reasonable. Were my peer to have the same kind of evidence and appreciation of it, he too would be inclined to believe P.

In sum, then, our first reply to the objection against AES says that Steadfastness is not in conflict with the UT, because we do not share the *same* evidence even though we do consider the *available* evidence for P. The available evidence is, perhaps, a subset of the total evidence relevant to P: either there is some inscrutable bit of evidence in the mix (ICES) or there is some evidence that differs in kind and quality that is weighed differently (EIS). Since intellectual peers have different (or better) subsets of evidence, it’s plausible that they can reasonably disagree about P if their response to the available evidence is appropriate.

*Possible Reply #2: My Peer Suffers from a Cognitive Defect or is Mistaken*

Recall the objection to which the proponent of steadfastness (really AES) is responding—i.e. that there’s an inconsistency between AES and the UT. The objector questions whether two parties to a dispute who are intellectual peers can reasonably maintain their respective beliefs about P and not-P if they share the same evidence—if they are aware of the arguments for and against P. There’s a second reply available to Rowe and the proponent of AES: what preserves my rationality to persist believing P after full disclosure is a perceived error or mistake made by my peer. More exactly, I am reasonable to maintain my belief that P insofar as I have an argument for P (perhaps via the available evidence and the G.E. Moore Shift), and I have a reason to think that you are the one who has made a mistake in the reasoning process. Perhaps you have read the argument as a modus ponens when it’s in fact a modus tollens. Or the chain of reasoning is so long and complex that, plausibly, errors



in reasoning are easily committed. So, we might understand a “cognitive mistake” as error in moving from premises to conclusion.

But a “cognitive mistake” in reasoning may be distinguished from suffering from a “cognitive defect.” What counts as a cognitive defect? Some examples of cognitive defects<sup>159</sup> include bias, wishful thinking, stubbornness, intellectual competitiveness,<sup>160</sup> etc. All of these can lead to mishandling of the evidence that bears on P, where mishandling of evidence often manifests itself in the form of suppressing or ignoring evidence. In short, if a person is suffering from a cognitive defect, she will be unlikely to assess the evidence properly. And if she’s unlikely to assess the evidence properly, then there’s a good reason to think that her belief is not well grounded.<sup>161</sup> Moral: having a reason to think that one’s peer is either making a mistake or under the affliction of a cognitive defect is sufficient to safeguard one’s rationality in the face of disagreement. We might put this version of Steadfastness as follows:

**Cognitive Error or Defect Steadfastness (CEDS):** When intellectual peers disagree about P, if you have an independent reason to think your peer is making a mistake in her reasoning or suffers from a cognitive defect, you are reasonable to stand your cognitive ground with respect to P.

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<sup>159</sup>Here I am using the phrase “cognitive defect” rather broadly enough to include what some epistemologists call cognitive “dysfunction” or “malfunction” which is the converse of “proper function” of one’s cognitive faculties. See for example, Alvin Plantinga’s, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Michael Bergmann, *Justification Without Awareness*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>160</sup> Richard Fumerton, “You Can’t Trust a Philosopher”, in *Disagreement*, Richard Feldman and Ted Warfield, eds. (Oxford Press 2011), pp. 93-97.

<sup>161</sup> It’s not clear what the relationship between cognitive defects and cognitive mistakes are, but let me venture a rough proposal. Defects are often the source of mistakes, because if one is defective, the probability that she will make a mistake in her reasoning is pretty high. But one might argue that not all mistakes are the results of cognitive defects, because we are all fallible reasoners, so sometimes we simply work an argument wrongly. However, this error does not have its source in cognitive defects like wishful thinking, arrogance, etc.

To see how Cognitive Error or Defect Steadfastness (CEDS hereafter) might look in the context of peer disagreement, let us consider a few cases. I will focus my attention on cognitive defect cases.<sup>162</sup>

Consider the following example of disagreement where one peer to the dispute suffers from a cognitive defect. Suppose that you and a friend who are roughly equal with respect to your intellectual abilities and who share similar life backgrounds are hanging out for coffee one day. You are equally single, and both of you would like to see that social status change. Your conversation turns to love, romance, and related things; and you begin to discuss the ever-so-thorny issue of how to find the right love. After discussing life experience and conventional wisdom on the topic, you conclude that there's no tight knit formula for finding that love. Your friend, however, concludes that there is just such a formula: Astrology. In her view, there's something to the daily horoscope, so she's convinced that astrological signs will point the way to that right lasting love. Never mind that there's no good evidence to suggest that star alignment and so forth has anything to do with finding the love of one's life. Astrology is fun for her and she wants it to be her guide to lasting love.

Upon hearing this, you immediately form the belief that something is skewed in your friend's cognitive framework and belief formation. Perhaps you share Peter van Inwagen's intuition that astrology is "simply indefensible,"<sup>163</sup> because it's unlike interminable intellectual disagreements in other areas like politics, religion, economics, science, etc. There

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<sup>162</sup> Fumerton has offered a case of mistaken reasoning as follows: suppose my usually trustworthy peer comes and tells me that  $2+2=5$ . He will not back off this conclusion. The only explanation I have is that he is making a mistake in his reasoning. See, "Why You Can't Trust a Philosopher," pp. 95-96.

<sup>163</sup> Peter van Inwagen, "It Is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone to Believe Anything upon Insufficient Evidence", in *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality* Jeff Jordan, Daniel Howard-Snyder, eds. (1996), p. 33.

are no “. . . well-informed (indeed immensely learned) and highly intelligent men and women who adhere to the very highest intellectual standards [in astrology]. . . In fact, it is hardly possible to suppose that there could be very interesting debate about the truth-values of the claims made by astrologers.”<sup>164</sup> That is, you now have a reason to think that your friend suffers from a cognitive defect, namely, wishful thinking. She wants astrology to help her with her relational status; but it is an unreliable source of information on matters relational. The conjunction of her wishful thinking and reliance on an unreliable source gives you reason to think that she is cognitively defective. And such a defect is likely to skew her cognitive vision with respect to forming reasonable beliefs about meeting the love of her life. As such, the fact that she disagrees with you fails to undermine your belief about matters of love, because you have a reason to think her reasoning is defective. Moral: if I have a reason among my evidence set for P to think that my peer is suffering from a cognitive defect, then I am reasonable to remain steadfast in my original belief regarding P.

Rather than type a single case, I want to demonstrate how attributions of cognitive defect have been utilized in the philosophy of religion. Substantive disputes about the existence of God and the rationality of belief or disbelief in God abound in the literature, so what follows should be understood as a representative sample of how cognitive defect is utilized by both sides of this disagreement to explain why the other side is (a) unreasonable to believe as he does and (b) why oneself is reasonable to remain steadfast in his belief as a result.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

In his *The Future of Illusion*, Sigmund Freud is famous for invoking cognitive defect to explain the origin of belief in God. The specific kind of defect is wish-fulfillment. Here is Freud in his own words:

[Religious ideas] . . . are illusions, fulfillments of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind. The secret of their strength lies in the strength of those wishes. As we already know, the terrifying impression of helplessness in childhood aroused the need for protection—for protection through love—which was provided by the father; and the recognition that this helplessness lasts through life made it necessary to cling to the existence of a father, but this time a more powerful one. Thus the benevolent rule of a divine Providence allays our fear of the dangers of life; the establishment of a moral world-order ensures the fulfillment of the demands of justice, which have so often remained unfulfilled in human civilization; and the prolongation of earthly existence in a future life provides the local and temporal framework in which these wish-fulfillments shall take place.<sup>165</sup>

From this, I think we can understand Freud to be using the purported origin of religious belief to explain why it is not rational or justified. Since it arises from a desire to satisfy certain wishes regarding a father figure who can take care of us and right all wrongs, it is not a candidate for rational belief. It might help us get along in life, perhaps as a survival mechanism of sorts, but religious belief is not supported by evidence. Instead, religious believers suffer from the cognitive defect of wishful thinking with respect to that belief; so, we might add, Freud has no reason to think that his non-belief in God is called into question. His knowledge of religious disagreement hardly constitutes a defeater for his non-belief, so he is within the bounds of rationality to remain steadfast in his non-belief. Hence, at least someone like Freud would think that CEDS is correct.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The Future of Illusion” (1927), cited in Louis P. Pojman’s *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, (Thompson and Wadsworth), pp. 111-112.

<sup>166</sup> Another similarly famous passage that claims religious belief is simply misplaced longings of alienated persons is presented by Karl Marx: “Religion. . . is the self-conscious and the self-feeling of the man who either has not yet found himself, or else (having found himself) has lost himself once more. But man is not an abstract being. . . Man is the world of men, the State,

On the theist's side of this discussion, Alvin Plantinga has also employed "cognitive defect" to analyze and explain non-belief in God. According to his proper functionalist account of knowledge and rationality, belief in God has warrant (like any other belief) insofar as it arises from properly-functioning cognitive faculties, operating in the appropriate environment, etc. The *sensus divinitatis*, according to Plantinga is an innate faculty that allows humans to experience God directly and form properly basic beliefs about God. The reason some do not experience God's presence via the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is due to a defect in their cognitive faculties: "Were it not for sin and its effects, God's presence and glory would be as obvious and uncontroversial to us all as the presence of other minds, physical objects, and the past. Like any cognitive process, however, the *sensus divinitatis* can malfunction; as a result of sin, it has indeed been damaged. Our original knowledge of God and his glory is muffled and impaired: it has been replaced (by virtue of sin) by stupidity, dullness, blindness, inability to perceive God or to perceive him in his handiwork."<sup>167</sup>

Whereas Freud invoked a psychological reason to ground cognitive defectiveness with respect to belief in God, Plantinga invokes a theological reason. In the end, we all suffer from the problem of cognitive dysfunction (i.e. defectiveness) on some level. Pride, resentment, perceived guilt, etc. are all results of the human condition (i.e. 'sin'). These defects affect our ability (and perhaps willingness) to receive the truth about God and

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society. This State, this society, produces religion, produces a perverted world consciousness, because they are a perverted world. . . Religion is the sign of the oppressed creature, the feelings of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of unspiritual conditions. It is the opium of the people. The people cannot be really happy until it has been deprived of illusory happiness by the abolition of religion. The demand that the people should shake itself free of the illusion as to its own condition is the demand that it should abandon a condition which needs illusion." Cited in Ibid. Introduction, ix. See "Introduction to a Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right," in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975).

<sup>167</sup> See his *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 214-16.

ourselves. So put, if Plantinga or the theist has this reason to think that the non-theist is cognitively defective with respect to belief in God, disagreement about the God question will not provide Plantinga with a defeater for his belief in God. Instead, a reason to think that the non-theist is defective with respect to P is sufficient to preserve the rationality of Plantinga remaining steadfast in his belief that God exists.

A similar form of cognitive defect is present in the following passage by the eminent philosopher, Thomas Nagel

In Speaking of the fear of religion, . . . I am talking about something much deeper—namely, the fear of religion itself. I speak from experience, being strongly subject to this fear myself: I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope that there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that.<sup>168</sup>

Here Nagel admits how his non-belief remains intact out of “fear of religion.” He seems to find the possibility of reality including God disturbing and frightful, perhaps due to the kind of demand it would make not only on his cognition but also his action. More strongly, however, his fear of what the world might demand of him if there is a God is fortified by his desire/wish that reality never includes such a being. He doesn't want to get along in a “universe like that.” But notice that his non-belief is not grounded in some argument or other. It is not grounded in an experience of some apparently gratuitous evil (e.g. Rowe's Fawn Case). Rather, it arises out of fear and wishful thinking that the world might be one way and not the other.

Paul Moser, has responded to Nagel's self-revelation by pointing out that Nagel is subject to a cognitive defect with respect to his non-religious belief. Moser opines “Nagel's

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<sup>168</sup> Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 130.

position illustrates, if unintentionally, that some human attitudes towards God's existence aren't purely cognitive in their origin and sustenance, even if we pretend otherwise in some philosophical discussion. A human quest for moral independence sometimes looms large behind such important attitudes, and obstructs purposely available authoritative evidence of divine reality."<sup>169</sup> So, in Moser's view, Nagel suffers from cognitive defect with respect to belief in God, namely, the jointly defective attitudes of fear and wishful thinking. And cognitive defects come at cost. They cost us our being rightly acquainted with reality, in this case knowing the reality of God.

Crucial here is what all of this means for the epistemology of disagreement. Suppose that Moser and Nagel (or Freud and his peer) "get together and compare notes" on the God issue. Upon disclosing their evidence, they come to discover that they differ about P, and they also discover Nagel's admission. Prior to disclosure, Moser believes he is justified to believe in God. As the epistemologists would have it, known disagreement provides a putative defeater for his belief. However, once Moser considers the body of evidence for P (which includes arguments for and against God's existence let's say, the fact of disagreement, and Nagel's admission), Moser is reasonable to remain steadfast in his belief that God exists. Why? Well, his forming the belief that Nagel is under the influence of a cognitive defect provides him with a reason to dismiss Nagel's testimony with respect to P as salient. More exactly, perceived cognitive defect in Nagel provides him with a defeating defeater for the fact of disagreement. Moral: if you have a reason, among your evidence set, to think that your intellectual peer is suffering from a cognitive defect, you are reasonable to stand firm with respect to belief.

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<sup>169</sup> Paul Moser, *The Elusive God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 257.

It is worth noting that our goal here has not been to assess either Freud's or Moser's contention about believers and non-believers in God. For our purposes here, all we need to see is that perceived cognitive defect in one's intellectual peer provides you with a reason to dismiss the force of disagreement and to persist in your belief. One important question here is this: can both parties to the dispute in these areas of disagreement maintain CEDS? In other words, can there be "reasonable disagreement" on CEDS? One might think that there can be, for each party can think of the other that she has erred in her reasoning or is suffering from a cognitive defect with respect to E's support of P. Freud might find Moser to suffer from a cognitive defect and *visa versa*. Perhaps CEDS allows for reasonable disagreement due to its emphasis on the agent and not on the body of evidence *per se*. In particular, it is the epistemic performance of one's peer that undergirds steadfastness on CEDS; an epistemic performance that results from the kind of cognitive agent S is at T1. It may be replied here that if it appears to S that her peer is suffering from a cognitive defect, then the *total evidential situation* for S includes this purported fact. Proponents of CEDS can grant this without difficulty, because, again, there's not a shared body of evidence that is "permitting" multiple reasonable responses. Instead, it is one's *total evidential situation* that allows her to remain steadfast. Included in that total evidential situation is perceived peer defect.<sup>170</sup>

Now if all of this is correct, then CEDS runs into a conundrum. Defect is the salient fact in the evidential situation. It is what provides a defeating defeater for peer disagreement.

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<sup>170</sup> So put, we can note that CEDS is not the same as "permissivism", to borrow Roger White's phrase. For White, permissivism is the view that one shared body of evidence permits multiple rational responses. See his "Epistemic Permissiveness" in *Philosophical Perspectives*, 19, *Epistemology*, (2005): 445-459.



But if both parties claim defectiveness in the other, neither party would be counting the other as his “peer.” Peerhood drops out on this occasion, because your interlocutor is defective. Since most stipulated definitions of “peer” include something about being cognitively similar (if not equal), we cannot have reasonable “peer” disagreement if one or both sides are defective. Hence, there cannot be reasonable “peer” disagreement on CEDS after all. Here again we see that CEDS has both costs and benefits. Proponents gain the *benefit* of being reasonable to stand their ground epistemically in light of their peer’s defectiveness; but the *cost* is that peerhood drops out.

#### **Section 4:** **Temporarily Tying Some Ends Together**

Where does the aforementioned discussion leave us in the debate about how to respond to disagreement with an intellectual peer? There are a few things we can say in answer to this question and draw our discussion here to a temporary and incomplete conclusion. *First*, in my view, our discussion in this chapter has shown that Steadfastness can recommend itself as a live option among the kinds of responses to peer disagreement. Far from being a kin to stubbornness, Steadfastness is a substantive view that offers evidential considerations that count in its favor when applied to specific cases. In brief, when one takes into account her total evidential situation, she often finds reason(s) to think that it is reasonable to stand her ground with respect to P even after all the relevant evidence is disclosed.

*Second*, it seems to me that Steadfastness is not a single view but a genus (such as the Equal Weight View) that has many species. What I think all species have in common is the commitment to “generic steadfastness” according to which an epistemic agent S is reasonable to “stand her ground” with respect to P even after the relevant evidence is disclosed by her and her intellectual peer. Where the species of Steadfastness differ is in their account of *why* standing firm is so reasonable. AES says it’s reasonable to stand firm if one has an argument for his belief about P. ICES says that it is reasonable to stand firm because there are substantial reasons among one’s conclusive evidence that are inscrutable; EIS says that it is reasonable to stand firm if one’s belief is formed as an appropriate

response to the available evidence; and CEDS says that it is reasonable to stand firm if one has a reason to think that her peer is cognitively defective or erring in some way.

*Third*, it is worth highlighting why I wrote the latter three species in terms of a sufficient condition and not a necessary condition. Take ICES for example. Here I think it is likely that in cases of complex and intractable disagreement (like philosophy, ethics, science, religion, politics, etc.) there will be inscrutable reasons among one's evidence for what he thinks about P. Even if that's right and having inscrutable reasons is sufficient to ground the reasonability of standing firm, it is hardly necessary. We can imagine other cases of disagreement where steadfastness is reasonable but appeal to inscrutable reasons is unnecessary or really unlikely. Inanimate object cases and calculation cases come to mind here as possible examples.

Moreover, writing the views in terms of sufficient conditions allows the steadfastness proponent to cite multiple species in a given case of disagreement without being inconsistent. It could be that ICES is nearly always part of the picture, but the reasonability of standing firm in one's belief is strengthened by the fact that one's peer suffers from a cognitive defect (i.e. CEDS is in play). As I see it, this is a welcomed result because I am not inclined to think that one species of steadfastness is applicable across all cases. In my view, our epistemic practices and lives are much-to-complex and variegated to have one species apply to all cases.

*Fourth*, we might bring this chapter's observations to bear on one of the problems raised for the Equal Weight Views (see chapter 1). Equal Weight Views run into a difficulty when it is applied to disagreement itself. Roughly, since it requires intellectual peers to either (a) suspend judgment about P after all evidence is disclosed or (b) split the difference in the

doxastic attitude between oneself and his peer and incrementally revise the strength of one's own belief; the same would be required when the dispute is about views of epistemic disagreement. But three of our species of Steadfastness circumvent this problem. ICES avoids it because either side to the dispute may have inscrutable reasons as to why he thinks one view of disagreement is correct; and this is sufficient to ground the reasonability of divergent beliefs about Disagreement. AIS avoids the problem if one's total evidence with respect to Disagreement contains kinds and qualities of evidence that are not shareable. Likewise, CEDS avoids the problem if I sense that my peer is subjected to a cognitive error or defect in their reasoning about epistemic disagreement. Since these species of Steadfastness can avoid this problem, I think this is a reason to think Steadfastness (or at least some variety thereof) is more plausible as a response to disagreement than the Equal Weight View.

*Finally*, as I've explicated the different species of Steadfastness (ICES, AIS, and CEDS), one might well wonder if these sufficient conditions are much too easy for an epistemic agent to meet. I recognize that this is one among many potential worries for Steadfastness views, but I will need to postpone dealing with it until the next chapter. Provisionally, let me just say that I think this worry is misguided. There are ways to safeguard against flippancy with respect to standing one's epistemic ground, but understanding such safeguards will take us into a deeper discussion of Steadfastness. We need to ask the question: where is the line between Steadfastness and Stubbornness? And where is the line between Steadfastness and Spinelessness? In my view, to answer these related questions we must go beyond purely synchronic evidential concerns to consider diachronic concerns relevant to explaining how one might be rational (or not) to stand firm

after disagreement with a peer is known. As I will argue in the next chapter, Steadfastness, Stubbornness, and Spinelessness are all intellectual character traits of epistemic agents that are diachronic in an important sense, and they connect with other distinctly diachronic considerations that will help us understand Steadfastness and how it can respond to objections. With such promissory notes on the table, we shall move along.

## Conclusion

In this Chapter I have argued that there are a variety of options open to the proponent of Steadfastness. I have done this by beginning with William Rowe's work that pre-dates the explosion of literature on epistemic disagreement that we have seen over the past decade. His work on Atheism, Theism, and the G.E. Moore shift provided us with an impetus both for the variety of views and what each view faces as it encounters at least one core objection that dissenters put forth. The core worry surrounds how to understand the compatibility of Steadfastness and the Uniqueness Thesis. I argued that there are two distinct readings of this thesis, one that highlights the relation between evidence and rationality (Rational Uniqueness) and the other that highlights the relation between evidence and a proposition's truth (Evidential Uniqueness). Some Steadfastness views do well to go with the weaker thesis, namely Rational Uniqueness in order to deal with the objection. But the cost requires one to give up on "reasonable disagreement." Other steadfastness views don't require giving up reasonable disagreement per se, but that's because peerhood drops out of the equation.

Admittedly, there are many stones left unturned and a host of questions to answer. For example, I know that more needs to be said about what steadfastness is. Thus far, I have cashed it out simply in terms of "standing firm" in one's original response to the evidence one has for a given proposition. I think we can go further.

## Chapter 4

### “Steadfastness Matured: Keeping It Steady”

*Some men’s tempers are quickly weary of any one thing. Constancy and assiduity is what they cannot bear: the same study long continued in is as intolerable to them, as the appearing long in the same clothes or fashion is to a court lady.*  
—John Locke<sup>171</sup>

*The firm person is like Socrates, who has a definite viewpoint, but at the same time is eager and open to learn, approaching each new situation with a readiness to examine his own intellectual commitments (as well as others’) with the question, “What can I learn here?” rather than “Let me defend my position at all costs” or “How can I squash every objection?” It is the attitude of the perpetual student, and this attitude is a self-understanding: I do not have the final word on things; though I know a few things, my understanding is far less than in might be, and I have much to learn.*  
—Roberts and Woods<sup>172</sup>

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I roughly sketched the kind of view that I want to defend. Steadfastness is a kind of view of disagreement according to which an epistemic agent S is reasonable to “stand her ground” with respect to P even after the relevant evidence is disclosed by her and her intellectual peer. Perhaps most interestingly, “standing her ground” or “standing firm” was understood not only as continuing to believe P but also not having to reduce confidence in one’s doxastic stance at all in light of peer disagreement. Where species of Steadfastness differ, I argued, is in their account of why “standing firm” after disclosing evidence to an intellectual peer is reasonable. Crucial here is that each species differs in its proposed sufficient condition for the reasonability of standing firm.

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<sup>171</sup> See John Locke, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarcov, eds. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), section 17, p. 191.

<sup>172</sup> See Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*, (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2007), p. 206.

Differences in species to the side for the moment, it is worth highlighting how my kind of view differs from both the Equal Weight View (EWV, Chapter 1) and the Total Evidence View (TEV, Chapter 2). *Most obvious* is that my view requires neither suspension of judgment (EWV) nor reduction in confidence after disclosure. Perhaps *less obvious* is one reason neither of these actions is required after disclosure: I put less stock in the fact of disagreement in the total evidential situation being considered relevant to P. To be clear, it is not the case that I put *no* stock at all in the fact of disagreement. Instead, disagreement's net effect in one's total evidential situation is much less significant on my view than either the EWV or the TEV. Perhaps the *least obvious* reason my view differs from the others, one that must now be made more explicit and developed, is that I emphasize diachronic epistemic considerations whereas the other views emphasize synchronic ones in cases of peer disagreement. In Chapter 3, one key feature of cases that motivated my kind of view was that intellectual peers could share roughly the same synchronic evidence at T<sub>2</sub>, but once we brought in diachronic considerations, things changed significantly regarding what was reasonable for S to believe after disclosure.

Why this makes my view unique is at least two-fold. *First*, it allows for reasonable disagreement in a way that the EWV and the TEV do not. There may be diachronic considerations available to intellectual peers that grounds their reasonability to remain steadfast after the same set of synchronic evidence is considered. As I see it, my kind of view is unique because of its emphasis on diachronic considerations, so I will labor to get clear on precisely what this means. *Second*, my view is unique in the kind of evidentialism it espouses. In light of its emphasis on diachronic considerations, I will point out that my view rests on a form of diachronic evidentialism as opposed to the synchronic evidentialism that



the EWW and the TEV rest on. According to *synchronic evidentialism*, roughly, a belief is reasonable if and only if it is supported by good synchronic evidence. Here the whole rationality game is played at some time T or other. Whether or not a belief P is rational depends solely and wholly on one's P-relevant evidence at that time T. According to *diachronic evidentialism*, roughly, a belief is reasonable if and only if it is supported by good P-relevant evidence and there is some diachronic feature or other that (partially) explains why it's rational to believe P. The differences between these two will become clear as we go.

In this chapter, I will develop my Steadfastness view further by explaining the significance of diachronic epistemic considerations to “hard cases” of peer disagreement (that differ from those considered in Chapter 3). What I will argue is that the diachronic features present in these “hard cases” will help me further explain why it is reasonable for S to continue believing P without lowering his level of confidence at all. I will do this by first motivating my view with an idealized case of intractable disagreement. From there I will unpack what diachronic considerations amount to and how they might be utilized to analyze and evaluate agents in both the moral and epistemic spheres. What will emerge is that epistemic virtues connect to diachronic epistemic considerations in a way that can aid us in epistemic analysis and evaluation. This is a welcome result, because there is no substantive overlap in the disagreement and virtue epistemology literatures. Utilizing the virtues to defend my Steadfastness view will be unique, especially because this is a non-typical way to defend one's view of disagreement. I will explain what a virtue is, and I will argue that Steadfastness is a virtue that aids in the promotion and preservation of stability in a doxastic network, where both stability and virtues are diachronic notions. Not only is my view unique in these ways, it also has the upshot of preserving reasonable disagreement between peers.

## Section 1

### Motivating Steadfastness

Throughout this work I have said that what makes the epistemology of disagreement interesting to me is the presence of intractable disagreement in fields of inquiry that we care deeply about. Imagine a case of peer disagreement in one such field. Suppose that we have two subjects S1 and S2 who are intellectual peers in the relevant field of inquiry. Suppose further that they have yet to meet each other and discuss the relevant topic of disagreement where the target proposition is P. Suppose that, in isolation, S1 has compiled a body of P-relevant evidence. Call it E1. Not only has S1 come to believe that E1 supports P, he has believed this for a while, say five years. On the other hand, suppose that S2, in isolation, has compiled a different body of P-relevant evidence. Call it E2. Not only has S2 come to believe that E2 supports not-P, he has believed this for a while, say five years. Let us stipulate that this disagreement in isolation is time T1. The following schema represents the situation at T1:

S1 at T1 reasonably thinks his “total evidence” E1 supports P.

S2 at T1 reasonably thinks his “total evidence” E2 supports not-P.<sup>173</sup>

At time T2, our intellectual peers S1 and S2 meet at a conference specific to their field of inquiry and the target proposition P. They discover that they disagree about P and then proceed to disclose their P-relevant bodies of evidence. Not only does this exchange

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<sup>173</sup> I am indebted to Thomas D. Senor for this schema and some crucial insights on how to make this case better to suit my purposes here.

provide both men with expanded P-relevant bodies of evidence, they both come to *see the significance* of the other man's evidence set to P, although at T2 they have yet to fully *integrate* their newly acquired bodies of evidence with their initial P-relevant evidence. By "see the significance," I mean at least two things. *First*, S1 and S2 both recognize that the other person's evidence has bearing on P, so it cannot be easily dismissed as irrelevant. *Second*, I mean more strongly that they come to *accept* E2 and E1 respectively. In other words, each person comes to *believe* the other person's P-relevant evidence, and this means they now share the same P-relevant "total evidence" at T2. More exactly, S1 and S2 share and believe the conjunction of E1 and E2. Call this new expanded body of P-relevant evidence E3. Both subjects believe E3 as their new total evidence relevant to P even though they have yet to integrate all of this evidence into their doxastic systems. Moreover, neither person finds E3 to bring about a change in his doxastic attitude with respect to P at T2. The following schema illustrates how S1 and S2 look at T2:

S1 at T2 thinks that E3 supports P.

S2 at T2 thinks that E3 supports not-P.

Crucial here is that they share, roughly, the *same total synchronic evidence* at T2, yet each person maintains his original doxastic attitude with respect to P. Regardless of their doxastic attitudes at T2, what does rationality require them to do at this point? Equal Weight Views hold that each person is required to either suspend judgment or radically revise his belief in the direction of his peer. Kelly's Total Evidence View holds that each subject should reduce confidence in his doxastic stance *at least some* though each need not radically

revise his belief or suspend judgment. On my Steadfastness view, both S1 and S2 are permitted to remain firm in their respective beliefs in light of what each thinks the total evidence, E3, supports. If they have considered all of the available shared evidence, and for all they know, neither they nor their peer is the subject of a cognitive defect, then each person is reasonable to maintain his doxastic stance towards P. This remains the case even after each person considers the fact that he disagrees with his intellectual peer. If each has done all he can to consider and weigh all the relevant evidence for/against P, and it seems to each man that his view is supported by the evidence, then there's nothing left for either person to do after disclosing his evidence E3 and differing responses to it at T2. It is reasonable for both men to remain Steadfast in their levels of confidence of what they think the evidence supports.

But why do I think this? At first blush, it strikes me as plausible to think that both men are reasonable to believe what they take their total evidence to tell them. Of course, a *synchronic* evidentialist will wonder at least two things about my claim here. *First*, he may wonder if, in my motivating case, S1 and S2 at T2 are evidentially similar enough to get my argument going. Even though they share E3 at T2, their evidence sets are synchronically different in a way that mitigates my claiming that they share the same evidence. In fact (the synchronic evidentialist might object), S1 and S2 have different seemings in addition to E3 among their evidence bases/sets at T2, and this makes them evidentially different. Their being evidentially different entails having different P-relevant evidence, and this explains why they hold different conclusions at T2. But if that's right, then we have a straightforward synchronic explanation for their doxastic disparity regarding P.

I think there is a response to this worry, and it dovetails nicely on a couple of points I made in both Chapters 1 and 3 of this work. If by “sharing the same evidence” at T2 we mean sharing every bit and piece of evidence in exactly the same/identical way, then I think the objector is on to something. But as I’ve argued previously, this demand is much too high. We will never find two people who are epistemically the same or identical, and if we did, the chance of them disagreeing about P, I suspect is incredibly low (if not nil). Suppose, then, we understand “sharing the same evidence” as sharing roughly the same total *available* P-relevant evidence. This seems to be a standard reading even for the synchronic evidentialist, and it’s the reading I am relying on in this chapter. Here S1 and S2 *disclose* all of their P-relevant evidence as best they can. Disclosure entails sharing the same available P-relevant evidence. When S1 and S2 come to accept/believe E3 at T2, they share the same *available* P-relevant evidence. That is, E3 is their total available evidence, and it is shared as much as we can expect it to be.

What of the “seemings” as additional P-relevant evidence? Do these bits of evidence serve to break the proposed symmetry here? I suggest that we can extend the previous line to them. While strictly speaking S1 and S2 do not share the same seemings about E3’s support of P, at T2 they do *disclose* the relevant seemings to each other at T2. This means their divergent seemings are in fact *available* to their peer, but the seemings are not strictly speaking “shared” in the more narrow and demanding sense. If they were so shared, then I think S1 and S2 would be epistemically so similar at T2 that the peer disagreement would disappear. Thus, I think this first worry can be allayed.

*Second*, the synchronic evidentialist will wonder how, on my view, it is reasonable for both men to believe what they take their total available evidence to support. According to

synchronic evidentialism, there is only one unique doxastic attitude that a body of evidence supports at time T2. Hence, it is unclear how I can suppose that both men have reasonable doxastic attitudes at T2. This concern, I think arises from the synchronic evidentialist's commitment to the Uniqueness Thesis (UT), but earlier I argued the UT can be read two ways.

**Evidential or E-Uniqueness:** for any body of evidence E and proposition P, E supports P or not, so E warrants one unique doxastic attitude toward P.

**Rational or R-Uniqueness:** for any body of evidence E and proposition P, E fixes only one uniquely rational attitude towards P.

In my view, synchronic evidentialists understand the UT in terms of E-Uniqueness. What I argued previously, however, is that this reading can be true, while R-uniqueness is false. I can agree that there is a single objective fact regarding what proposition some single body of evidence actually supports, but I can disagree that this entails there being a single rational attitude that the evidence supports. With this in mind, I will explain how S1 and S2 are reasonable to believe what each thinks E3 supports, but I will need to move beyond synchronic evidential considerations to consider the relevance of diachronic features at work in hard cases of peer disagreement. Also, we will need to talk about virtues and how exactly steadfastness is a virtue that connects to such diachronic features.

## Section 2

### Concerning Diachronic Epistemic Features

By diachronic epistemic features, I have in mind distinctly epistemic phenomena whose understanding, analysis, and explanation depends *in part* on their history, past, or formation over time. By contrast, synchronic epistemic features focus on understanding, analyzing, and explaining some phenomena solely in virtue of their features at a time (or “time slice”). To get clear on what I have in mind here, it will be helpful to briefly consider a similar distinction made in the human action/moral responsibility literature. In their paper, “Responsibility and History”, John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza distinguish between “historical phenomena” from “non-historical phenomena.”<sup>174</sup> This distinction mirrors what I have in mind here, where “diachronic” loosely corresponds to “historical”, and “synchronic” loosely corresponds to “non-historical.” Fischer and Ravizza explain that the former kind of phenomena “are historical in the sense that they depend (in some interesting way) on features of their history; where the latter kind of phenomena are “current time-slice phenomen[a]. . . dependent solely upon [their time-slice] properties and not facts about [their] history.”<sup>175</sup> What they have in mind is that synchronic/non-historical phenomena are properties, facts or states of affairs instantiated at that time; and they can be understood and explained irrespective of changes to other diachronic/historic properties they might have. On the other hand, diachronic/historic phenomena are properties, facts, or states of affairs that depend on

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<sup>174</sup> John Martin Fisher and Mark Ravizza, “Responsibility and History”, in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, XIX (1994): 430-451.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. p. 430. They use the phrase “snapshot properties” instead of “time-slice properties”, though they use “time-slice” interchangeably at one point.

their past in some crucial way. Were their past different, our understanding, assessment, and explanation of these phenomena would be different in some important respect.<sup>176</sup>

Let us first consider a *non-normative* example that illustrates the importance of historical/diachronic phenomena. There is a marked aesthetic difference between (a) a genuine work of art and (b) an exact duplicate, and that difference resides in (at least some of) its historical/diachronic properties. Suppose we have a genuine Picasso painting before us. Certain properties of that painting such as its being “smooth”, “round”, “bright”, “symmetric”, etc. might all be understood as synchronic/non-historical properties. What they are, and our understanding of them, is purely a function of their being instantiated by that painting at a time and is not dependent on anything related to features of the painting’s history. However, if we call in a duplication artist who creates a perfect replica of the painting, this new painting would, arguably, share the synchronic/non-historical properties, yet it would be different from the original in an important respect. In particular, whether or not the painting is an “original” depends crucially on its diachronic/historical property of being authored by Picasso.<sup>177</sup>

Consider a second example that illustrates the importance of historical/diachronic properties to understanding and assessing certain *normative* phenomena. Thomas Nagel has highlighted the importance of diachronic considerations to normative judgments about well-being and human flourishing:

Often we need to know [an individual’s] history to tell whether something is a misfortune or not; this applies to ills like deterioration, deprivation, and damage. Sometimes his experiential state is relatively unimportant—as in the case of a man who wastes his life in the cheerful pursuit of a method of communicating with

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> This is Fischer and Ravizza’s example, Ibid. p. 431.



asparagus plants. . . It therefore seems to me worth exploring the position that most good and ill fortune has as its subject a person identified by his history and his possibilities, rather than merely by his categorical state at the moment. . . These ideas can be illustrated by an example of deprivation whose severity approaches that of death. Suppose an intelligent person receives a brain injury that reduces him to the mental condition of a contented infant, and that such desires as remain to him can be satisfied by a custodian, so that he is free from care. Such a development would be widely regarded as a severe misfortune, not only for his friends and relations, or for society, but also, and primarily for the person himself. This does not mean that a contented infant is unfortunate. The intelligent adult who has been reduced to this condition is the subject of the misfortune.<sup>178</sup>

Nagel's point is that we need to consider historical/diachronic facts about a person in order to evaluate his overall well-being. When we do we find that, had the diachronic facts about his fortune or misfortune been different, our understanding and evaluation of his overall well-being at T2 would have been different as well.

A third example that is helpful to our epistemological concerns here is the *normative* example of moral virtues. On some accounts of moral virtues, whether a person has a virtue and is praiseworthy for exemplifying it depends crucially on historical/diachronic considerations. According to Robert C. Roberts, having a virtue is more than a mere disposition to behave one way over another. Crucial to having the relevant virtue, the agent must have undergone the process of acquisition of the relevant disposition through education and habituation.<sup>179</sup> Undergoing and participating in the process of acquisition is a necessary condition for having the virtue, so this condition is diachronic/historical in a very real way. You would not be praiseworthy at T2 for exemplifying said virtue had you not undergone and participated in the relevant process. And this means that even if you were plugged into

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<sup>178</sup> See Thomas Nagel. *Mortal Questions*. (Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 1-10.

<sup>179</sup> Robert C. Roberts, "Will Power and the Virtues," in *Philosophical Review* 93 (April 1984): 227-47.

the Matrix or fed a “virtue pill” that produced the disposition in you, you would not have the virtue or be praiseworthy for the action that flowed from the purported virtuous disposition.<sup>180</sup> Again, the point is that there’s a crucial feature of the phenomena of moral virtues that depends on certain diachronic/historical considerations. Moral: were the person’s past or history different in some significant respect; our evaluation of the agent and the action in question would also be different.

A fourth and final example that demarcates the diachronic/synchronic distinction quite well comes from the free-will/moral responsibility literature. Some incompatibilists about free-will and determinism hold that an agent S is morally responsible for his action A at time T only if he could have done otherwise. But Daniel Dennett demurs. He thinks there are counterexamples which show that an agent can be morally responsible, and hence praiseworthy or blameworthy for a given action, even if that agent could not have done otherwise at T. One such famous example he cites is from the case of the Protestant Christian Reformer, Martin Luther. After nailing his ninety-five theses on the door of the Wittenberg Chapel, Luther exclaimed “Here I stand, I can do no other.” From this report, Dennett concludes:

Luther claimed he could do no other, that his conscience made it impossible for him to recant. He might, of course, have been wrong, or have been deliberately overstating the truth, but even if he was—perhaps especially if he was—his declaration is testimony to the fact that we simply do not exempt someone from blame or praise for an act because we think he could do no other. Whatever Luther was doing, he was not trying to duck responsibility.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> John Martin Fisher and Mark Ravizza, “Responsibility and History”, in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, XIX (1994): 434.

<sup>181</sup> Daniel Dennett, “I Could Not Have Done Otherwise—So What?,” in *Blackwell Readings in Philosophy: Free Will*, Robert Kane, ed. (Blackwell Publishing: 2002), p. 86.

For our purposes here, we might read Dennett's counter to the incompatibilist as focusing on purely synchronic features of S's action at T. The incompatibilist thinks that the features relevant to assessing moral responsibility at T hinge on S having alternative possibilities open to him at the moment of action, and Dennett uses the Luther case to argue that this is mistaken. An agent S can be morally responsible for his action at a time T irrespective of alternative possibilities being available to him at that time.

But the incompatibilist has an available response here. Robert Kane has responded to Dennett's use of the Luther Case by arguing aptly that there are distinctly diachronic/historical features that must also figure into the understanding, assessment, and explanation of Luther's action and subsequent report. To be responsible for that action, Luther needs to meet "the condition of ultimate responsibility or UR", and this means, "an agent must be responsible for anything that is a sufficient reason (condition, cause, or motive) for the action's occurring. If, for example, a choice issues from, and can be sufficiently explained by an agent's character and motives (together with background conditions), then to be ultimately responsible for the choices, the agent must be at least in part responsible by virtue of choices or actions voluntarily performed in the past for having the character and motives she now has."<sup>182</sup>

Kane's basic idea here is that our character plays an indispensable role in leading to a specific action, but our character is something we make a non-determined contribution to forming *over time*. As such, our evaluation of Luther's responsibility for the action must include more than what happened at the time of action. We must consider his character in our

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<sup>182</sup> See Robert Kane's article "Free Will: New Directions for an Ancient Problem" in *Blackwell Readings in Philosophy: Free Will*, Robert Kane, ed. (Blackwell Publishing: 2002), p. 224.

assessment, and his character that gives rise to the action at time T is not a purely synchronic issue. Instead, Luther's character is a distinctly diachronic feature in the explanatory mix. Had Luther's character been different, our assessment of him and his responsibility for that action may have been different as well. Kane puts it thusly,

My response to Dennett is to grant that Luther could have been responsible for this act, even ultimately responsible in the sense of UR, though he could not have done otherwise then and there and even if his act was determined. But this would be so to the extent that he was responsible for his present motives and character by virtue of many other earlier struggles and self-forming choices (SFA's) that brought him to this point where he could do no other. Those who know Luther's biography know the inner struggles and turmoil he endured getting to that point. Often we act from a will already formed, but it is "our own free will" by virtue of the fact that we formed it by other choices or actions in the past (SFAs) for which we could have do otherwise.<sup>183</sup>

Supposing, for the sake of argument, that Luther made free choices along the way to form his own character, choices he *did* have alternatives with respect to. Kane thinks Luther is responsible for the action he had no alternative possibilities with respect to precisely because of this diachronic/historical consideration in the mix. Again, had Luther's moral history, i.e. character, been different or had his character formation been determined, we would understand and evaluate the action differently. Moral: Luther's action of nailing his ninety-five theses on the door cannot be understood and explained solely in terms of synchronic phenomena at T; we need to consider diachronic/historical features in the mix. Had these features been different in some significant respect, our understanding, evaluation, and explanation of Luther's action would have differed as well.

In light of these examples, it is clear to me that diachronic/historical considerations play a crucial and indispensable role in much of our understanding, evaluation, and

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid. p. 225.

explanation of particular normative and non-normative phenomena. Might the same be true of epistemic phenomena and our understanding, evaluation, and explanation of them? More exactly, might we understand epistemic rationality (a normative phenomena) and evaluate an agent's beliefs as rational (at least partially) in light of diachronic/historical considerations and not solely synchronic ones? The last two examples of moral virtue and Luther's moral responsibility are perhaps the most relevant to my answering these questions in the affirmative. If we can make sense of moral virtue having an indispensable diachronic/historical element, then perhaps we can say something *similar* about epistemic rationality and characteristically intellectual/cognitive virtues. In my view, we can say this about both epistemic rationality and intellectual virtues, and I think steadfastness is one such virtue. So in the next section I will say what an intellectual/cognitive virtue is and explain how it connects to other diachronic/historical epistemic considerations in the evaluation of a person and his belief as rational.

### Section 3

#### Steadfastness as a Rationality-Enhancing and Cognitive System-Sustaining Virtue

If we are going to have high likelihood of forming reasonable beliefs, we need to be epistemic agents who form and update our beliefs in an epistemically healthy way. According to synchronic evidentialism (the brand of evidentialism supposed by the EWV's in Chapter 1 and the TEV in Chapter 2 of this work), belief formation and revision is healthy for S when it takes place in accordance with his total available evidence at T. While I am also concerned with belief formation and revision in light of one's total available evidence, I diverge with the synchronic evidentialist in an important respect here. Where the synchronic evidentialist thinks reasonable belief is purely a function of one's evidence at some "time-slice" T1, and then appropriate belief revision is purely a function of his new total evidence at "time-slice" T2, I think that this *synchronic* construal of rational belief formation and updating is incorrect (i.e. incomplete). I think that one can take into account his P-relevant evidence at T, yet rationality need not require the kind of belief updating and revisions that synchronic evidentialist's demand at T. That is, I think that S1 and S2 can consider their total available P-relevant evidence at T1, then at T2, etc., yet rationality need not require them to radically revise their doxastic stances in the direction of their peer at all. To make my case, I will argue that there are diachronic/historical "properties", "facts", or "features" that make a difference for evaluating each epistemic agent's rationality in cases of peer disagreement. In my view, there are at least two important diachronic facts/features that make a relevant difference: (a) their pre-disagreement rationality in believing P or not-P; and (b) certain epistemic virtues and the role these play in belief formation and revision. Let me explain.

### 3.1 Doxastic Histories as Diachronically Significant to Epistemic Rationality

According to both the Equal Weight and Total Evidence Views discussed in chapters 1 and 2, whether S's belief that P is reasonable or not is purely a function of S's P-relevant *synchronic* evidence at T1, T2, etc. If that's right, then with respect to belief formation and revision, apparently S is to form and update his beliefs in light of new P-relevant evidence at each new "time-slice" rather quickly. Epistemic Rationality, according to these views, requires S to be doxastically prepared to update (i.e. change) his cognitive stance with respect to P on a moment's notice—to adjust his stance on a cognitive dime.<sup>184</sup> To understand the significance of this view of epistemic rationality and rational belief revision to our discussion of epistemic disagreement (and how it differs from my own view), let us home in on what the TEV demands of epistemic peers in cases of known disagreement.

Take, for example, the peer disagreement case I began this chapter with. If the TEV is correct, then what epistemic rationality requires of S1 and S2 depends solely on their totally available synchronic P-relevant evidence at T1, T2, etc. Once disagreement is known, then, S1 and S2 are essentially required to *consider* their new body of evidence received at T2, *evaluate* its significance to P, *integrate* it into their doxastic systems, and then they are required to *revise* their respective beliefs right away at T2. That means there are roughly four

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<sup>184</sup> As I understand them, both the EWV and the TEV demand belief revision and updating immediately at each new time-slice. And this means they both require a cognizer to update/revise her beliefs at each new time slice "on a cognitive dime." The main difference, as I understand these views, is that the EWV does not appear to require integration of newly acquired P-relevant evidence. Disagreement with an intellectual peer about what proposition the P-relevant evidence supports is sufficient for me to revise my doxastic stance towards P. This is why I have chosen to home in on the TEV here.

distinct required stages at each time-slice that each man must traverse in order to form rational beliefs that meet the demands of synchronic evidentialism. They are as follows:

- (1) *Consider* their new P-relevant evidence at T2. For S1, this is S2's E2, and for S2 this is S1's E1;
  - (2) *Investigate* its implications for their beliefs with respect to P;
  - (3) *Integrate* this new body of evidence into their respective doxastic systems;
- and then
- (4) *Update* their doxastic attitudes rather quickly—on a cognitive dime.

Expecting a cognizer to traverse (1)-(4) at each new time-slice (i.e. on a cognitive dime) strikes me as much too demanding of persons in hard cases of peer disagreement. And it is not conducive to their leading an epistemically healthy life. By leading *an epistemically healthy* life I mean *at least* preserving a basic cognitive balance and safeguarding against what I would call cognitive schizophrenia.<sup>185</sup>

To explain my concern here, consider a computer analogy. Computers regularly take in new data, process it, and then integrate it into their network or system. And they do this rather quickly. We might say that, unless something is not functioning properly, computers receive, process, and integrate data in an ideal way. They are ideal computing machines.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Notice that I have said that cognitive health includes *at least* the maintenance of cognitive balance. I am not suggesting that this is the whole story about cognitive health. Cognitive health may, and probably does, include a host of other things, but I need not provide a fine-grained definition or set of necessary and sufficient conditions here to get my argument going. All I'm arguing is that something like balance and stability in a cognitive system is a necessary condition for the maintenance of that system's health, and if some view or other fails to meet this condition, then it compromises cognitive health. In my view, the EWV and the TEV both fail to meet this condition in what they demand of intellectual peers in cases of disagreement. As such, these views compromise our cognitive health in such cases.

<sup>186</sup> I am indebted to Thomas D. Senior for this computer analogy.



As I understand them, the EWV and TEV expect S1 and S2 to be like ideal computing machines that receive, investigate, integrate, and then update any new P-relevant evidential data without delay. At each new “time-slice”, S1 and S2 are expected to take in a plethora of new inputs (i.e. their new body of evidence), process them (i.e. belief integration), and then provide the radical revisionary outputs (i.e. splitting the difference, suspension of judgment, or reduction in confidence) that the EWV and TEV demand of them. And they are to do this without delay, namely, “on a moment’s notice.” This strikes me as much too demanding, and I think it encourages an epistemic way of life that is unhealthy. It encourages (really demands) an epistemic way of life where an agent is to shift her cognitive attitude frequently and quickly; and this disrupts cognitive stability. Yet we need not despair. There is a better epistemic way of life that promotes cognitive health for all parties to the table of disagreement.

The EWV’s and the TEV’s, which rely on synchronic evidentialism, overlook some important historical/diachronic facts in cases of peer disagreement that make a huge difference in our understanding and evaluation of rational belief in such cases. Both views overlook historical/diachronic facts regarding *S1’s rationally believing P at T1 on the basis of E1 and S2’s rationally believing not-P on the basis of E2 at T1*. That is, the time at which disagreement is known, the EWV and TEV either overlook or ignore the rationality of these men’s beliefs about P prior to disagreement being known at T2. But these young men’s doxastic histories with respect to P are crucial to our epistemic understanding and evaluation of them and their beliefs as rational/reasonable at T2. Why? Well, *these men have very different cognitive histories regarding P prior to disclosing their evidence and disagreeing at T2*.

Recall that at time T1 either man has a long-standing rational belief about P: S1 has reasonably believed P on the basis of E1 for five years; and S2 has reasonably believed not-P on the basis of E2 for just as long. When these men meet to compare notes at T2 and either man comes to believe his peer's P-relevant evidence at T2 (as stipulated above), he now has a vastly expansive new body of evidence to consider, investigate, and integrate into his belief set in order to update and potentially revise his doxastic attitude with respect to P. It is simply too demanding to expect each man to *integrate* E3 quickly at T2 and revise his doxastic attitude toward P accordingly. Instead, I think both men are rational in maintaining their different attitudes for a time after disclosing their evidence (E1 and E2) and coming to believe E3 at T2. Their continuing different doxastic stances are rational, because they have not integrated E3 into their belief sets. And it's good for them to have time to do so. In other words, while they may have completed steps (1)-(2), namely considering and investigating their new P-relevant evidence E3, it's too demanding of them that they complete steps (3) and (4) of integrating E3 and revising their stances at T2. This is too demanding due to their having had a rational doxastic stance towards P prior to T2 for a long time based on their P-relevant evidence at T1. Moral: having had a rational doxastic stance towards P based on one's prior evidence is diachronically significant to evaluating and explaining an agent's rationality for continuing to believe P when s/he disagrees with a peer at some later time.

Returning to our computer analogy, then, the EWV and the TEV expect our intellectual peers to do two things that are too demanding. *First*, they ask them to weigh or process (i.e. consider and investigate) their body of new evidence E3 at T2 and simply "see" its *significance* (i.e. integrate) for updating their beliefs. *Second*, they expect S1 and S2 to shift their doxastic attitudes rather quickly in light of our newly acquired evidence. Both of

these requirements are too demanding, because they suppose that our belief-forming and belief-revising capacities are supercomputer-like. Supercomputers process and integrate new data quickly and precisely—i.e. they receive new inputs and accommodate them neatly and on a moment's notice. In other words, supercomputers are ideal information-integrating machines. But we human cognizers hardly integrate new information in an ideal way. We need time to consider, investigate, and integrate new data, especially as it relates to some belief's prior rationality. Put differently, there is a real difference between *having and accepting evidence* relevant to P and *appreciating the significance* of the evidence relevant to P. This difference is crucial to our discussion, because we may have evidence relevant to P at a time-slice T1, but we may need more time to *appreciate* E's significance regarding P at T2 in light of our prior rationality with respect to P. My suggestion is that needing such time is what makes us different from ideal computing machines, and allowing S1 and S2 ample time to appreciate the significance of their new body of evidence (i.e. integrate it) is perfectly reasonable in light of the fact that they have substantially different cognitive histories with respect to P.

Moreover, to expect these men to shift their doxastic attitudes on a cognitive dime is likewise too demanding. It strikes me as reasonable to allow them some time to integrate this new evidence E3 and not require them to adjust their doxastic attitude *at all* until they've done so. The EWV and TEV suggest that we should be ready to change or adjust our doxastic attitudes on a moment's notice; and they require this without regard for our doxastic histories regarding P. But this recommends a cognitive shiftiness, a shiftiness that is not intellectually virtuous. It is cognitively vicious (or defective) insofar as it undermines a crucial kind of *cognitive balance or stability* that's vital for leading an epistemically healthy

life—a life that is partially constituted by epistemic goods such as truth, rationality, knowledge, and understanding.

### 3.2 Steadfastness as a Stability-Enhancing Virtue

If we want to lead an epistemically healthy life (and thereby obtain the goods constitutive of such a life), we need to possess certain cognitive traits. Some epistemologists call these traits “virtues.”<sup>187</sup> I will understand a virtue to be “an acquired human excellence”<sup>188</sup> or a “dispositional property of persons”<sup>189</sup> that aids humans in achieving desirable/good epistemic ends. Some such ends are true and reasonable beliefs, both of which are crucial to leading and maintaining an epistemically healthy life. Intellectual virtues will be those acquired cognitive excellences that increase the likelihood of achieving the ends of truth or rationality (and avoiding error and irrationality), because they “enhance” our pursuit in important ways.<sup>190</sup> Is steadfastness one such rationality-enhancing virtue? I think the answer is ‘yes.’ Steadfastness is a virtue that enhances our pursuit of rational beliefs and helps sustain a healthy epistemic life.

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<sup>187</sup> For a helpful overview of virtue epistemology, see the volume edited by Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski, *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, (Oxford Press: 2003). For a more thorough development of virtue epistemology as “regulative” epistemology, see Roberts and Woods, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*, (Oxford Press: 2007), Ch. 3.

<sup>188</sup> Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, (Cambridge University Press: 1996), pp. 84-89. Zagzebski’s account characteristically Aristotelian in nature. For a delineation of different kinds of virtue accounts (e.g. Stoic vs. Aristotelian), see the volume mentioned in the previous footnote.

<sup>189</sup> Roberts and Woods, “Humility and Epistemic Goods” in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, eds. Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski (Oxford Press: 2003), p. 257. See also their book *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*, (Oxford Press: 2007), Ch. 3.

<sup>190</sup> Zagzebski, *On Epistemology*, p. 82.

Virtue epistemologists Robert C. Roberts and Jay Wood describe “steadfastness” (they actually call it “firmness”) as an Aristotelian mean between the vices of “flabbiness” or what I’ve called “spinelessness” (in Chapter 1) on the one hand and “rigidity” or what I will call “stubbornness” on the other. The trio of terms I will use here will be “stubbornness”, “steadfastness”, and “spinelessness”, where steadfastness is a virtue or intellectual mean between the two vices/extremes.<sup>191</sup> In light of what I have argued thus far in this chapter, I would like to extend Roberts’ and Woods’ picture as follows: *Steadfastness is an intellectual virtue that enhances cognitive balance and stability in an agent’s formation of reasonable beliefs, because it enables her to stand firm for the appropriate amount of time so that she may investigate, integrate, and update her beliefs in light of the significance of her available P-relevant evidence.*

In our motivating case, both S1 and S2 are reasonable to remain steadfast after their disagreement is known, because this will enhance each man’s cognitive stability while he investigates the *significance* of his recently accepted P-relevant evidence E3 and seeks to integrate it into his doxastic system. Recall, they have different cognitive histories with respect to their pre-disagreement doxastic attitudes towards P. What I’m arguing is that they are reasonable to stand firm in their beliefs about P, because it is better for each man’s epistemic health and life that he remain stable throughout the evidence investigation, integration, and belief-updating process. Cognitive stability is better epistemically than cognitive spinelessness (which I think the EWV and the TEV encourage by emphasizing solely synchronic issues), because it is unclear how the latter would promote a healthy

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<sup>191</sup> Roberts and Woods. *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*, (Oxford Press: 2007), Chapter 7.

epistemic life. Instead, cognitive spinelessness promotes a rabid shiftiness and flimsiness with respect to belief formation, updating, and revision. It requires us to update our beliefs and doxastic attitudes towards them so quickly that it is hard to imagine how we can *investigate the significance* of the new evidence E3 at T2 and *integrate it* into our belief sets like the EWV and TEV expect.

My view is that these men are reasonable to stand firm in what they think the evidence supports while they evaluate the significance of the evidence for their beliefs about P. Notice, however, what I am arguing does not entail that either S1 or S2 should write off new evidence relevant to P. All I'm arguing is that cognitive stability is a desirable feature of an epistemically healthy life; and steadfastness enhances such stability. This claim is consistent with the claim that S1 and S2 ought to be open to new evidence relevant to P. At the time they are presented with P-relevant evidence, they would then be reasonable to take some time to consider the significance of that new body of evidence for P and their other beliefs as well.

Peter van Inwagen advances a *similar* line argument in multiple places, especially that standing firm in what one thinks his evidence supports is consistent with openness to future relevant evidence. Towards the end of his *An Essay on Free Will*, he considers the issue of what he should do realizing that he is utterly convinced of incompatibilism about human action yet hard determinists and compatibilists will, in the end, not be persuaded by his arguments. He says:

I do not know how to defend [my attraction to incompatibilism], though of course, I should be willing to consider carefully any argument for the conclusion that I ought to order my preferences differently. I do not, of course, think that my ordering of

preference is entirely arbitrary. I suppose I think that it is based on various conceptual insights and that if you do not share my preferences you lack my insights. . . I am not in the least embarrassed by admitting this. Every philosopher's positions, however much he may argue, must ultimately be based on certain propositions that *simply seem to him to be true*. There is no way round this; it is a simply consequence of the fact that every argument has a finite number of steps. Moreover, every philosopher must think that those of his colleagues whose "ultimate premises" are incompatible with his own have either not considered those premises with sufficient care or else lack some sort of insight into how things are. What else is he to think? If he thinks that the ultimate premises of those who disagree with him are "just as good" as his own, then he should admit that he has no business holding his own premises and should, at the very least, retreat to a position in which he accepts nothing stronger than the disjunction of his former premises with all those propositions that are "just as good."<sup>192</sup>

After spending a couple hundred pages arguing for the libertarian view of free will, Peter van Inwagen admits (a) his work will not persuade everyone, yet (b) this need not require him to change his doxastic attitude about how the arguments strike him—that it seems to him that the libertarian view is the correct view, and (c) this firm reaction is consistent with being open to consider future counter evidence to the beliefs that currently seem true, even if (d) such firmness entails thinking that his interlocutor's differing belief is explained by their lacking the insight he has on the matter.<sup>193</sup>

What van Inwagen illustrates is that it is reasonable to take what some call a "conservative" approach towards belief formation and updating. But this sort of conservatism need not be seen as an intellectual vice. Conservatism of the sort mentioned does not entail intellectual stubbornness or being close-minded. Instead, an epistemic conservative like Peter

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<sup>192</sup> Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1983), p. 220.

<sup>193</sup> He echoes this same line of reasoning in his paper "It is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything Upon Insufficient Evidence", in *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality* Jeff Jordan, Daniel Howard-Snyder, eds. (Rowman and Littlefield, 1996). He argues that conservatism is not only reasonable for religious believers who are aware of differing religions, but it's a natural and reasonable epistemic stance in other areas of disagreement like politics, science, etc. See pp. 37-43.

van Inwagen can consistently maintain that his belief is reasonable with respect to the free-will issue and that he is open to future evidence (or putative defeaters) relevant to that issue.

I see no reason to think that this cannot be applied to the hard case of disagreement between S1 and S2. After they have disclosed their P-relevant evidence and disagreement is known, if it *seems* to each man that his view is still supported by the total evidence, each man ought to stand firm in his belief that P or that not-P. Proponents of steadfastness can argue that “[their] natural conservatism and openness derive from the nature of the epistemic goods”<sup>194</sup> they are pursuing in that domain. Two such goods are true beliefs and rationality. Where they are committed to truth in this domain, they will not only attempt to form true beliefs in that domain, they will also have a tendency to hold onto those beliefs that seem true in light of their P-relevant evidence. Remaining steadfast on the basis of the seeming-true they have regarding P is consistent with being open to future evidence relevant to P.

The moral here is that openness to future P-relevant evidence is consistent with epistemic conservatism; and insofar as steadfastness is connected to epistemic conservatism, steadfastness would be consistent with openness to future P-relevant evidence. Given what we’ve considered here, I think we have good reason to think that Steadfastness is an

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<sup>194</sup> Roberts and Woods, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*, (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2007), p. 184. They go on to say this about how epistemic conservatism is consistent with open-mindedness: “Beliefs are, after all, some kind of commitment to the truth of the believed propositions. . . Not to be at all conservative about them would be not to believe, not to understand. . . On the other hand, a natural openness is entailed by the fact that these dispositions are good and are felt to be good. Every day we find ourselves wanting to learn things (that is, acquire beliefs, understandings, perceptions). And acquisition entails newness. We can’t very well acquire something we already have. So insofar as we participate in the intellectual life at all, we are perforce and naturally both conservative and open. But that does not mean that we have [steadfastness]. . . That virtue is a trait of individual character, an acquired tuning and balancing of these natural tendencies.”



intellectual virtue that enhances cognitive stability in an agent's pursuit of true and reasonable beliefs, because it enables her to stand firm for the appropriate amount of time so that she may investigate and update her beliefs in light of the significance of the total available evidence.

In light of the above discussion, it is appropriate to make more explicit what my “mature” steadfastness view amounts to. Thus far, it is committed to the following three individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions that either man must meet in order for it to be reasonable for him to remain steadfast in his divergent beliefs after all evidence is disclosed and disagreement is known:

**Steadfastness Matured:** In cases of peer disagreement after disclosure, S is reasonable to stand firm (i.e. continue believing with the same level of confidence) with respect to P if and only if: (1) he has good P-relevant evidence<sup>195</sup> to support P, (2) it seems to S that his P-relevant evidence supports P; and (3) there is some diachronic feature D that (partially) explains why it is reasonable for S to maintain his doxastic attitude toward P.

Condition (1) is just what I have argued throughout that it is reasonable to believe what your evidence supports. Condition (2) adds a requirement, namely, not only must one have evidence for P, it must “seem” to S that the relevant evidence supports P. By “seeming” here I mean the P-relevant evidence must strike him as supporting and indicating the truth of P. I mean that S has investigated the relevance of E to P. If each man in our case above has met these conditions, it is reasonable for each man to remain steadfast in his respective beliefs,

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<sup>195</sup> On my view “good P-relevant evidence” need not make only one doxastic attitude rational, even if objectively speaking there is in fact only one proposition and a range of doxastic attitudes towards that proposition that the P-relevant body of evidence actually supports. This point was made by distinction earlier when I distinguished between Evidential Uniqueness and Rational Uniqueness Theses. The former refers to the objective relationship between E and P, while the latter does not. This means, on my view, the former thesis is true, while the latter is false.

because standing firm will enhance cognitive stability while each of them *investigates the significance* of his new body of evidence E3 so that each can *integrate* it into his respective belief set and then *update* his beliefs appropriately. Not only will proceeding in this way lead to an epistemically healthy life, it will also mean either man can meet these conditions. And this means that two intellectual peers to a disagreement can reasonably disagree about P.

### *3.3 Spinelessness & Stubbornness: Rationality-Inhibiting Vices*

#### *Spinelessness.*

Every intellectual virtue has its contrasting vices, and Steadfastness is no exception. One contrasting vice is intellectual flabbiness or flimsiness, and it corresponds to what I am calling spinelessness. To understand how it differs from steadfastness, let us consider a couple of concrete examples where persons form their beliefs while exemplifying this trait, and we will see how being so disposed deprives the agent of an epistemically healthy life along with its constitutive goods like true and rational beliefs. An interesting example from literature is found in Leo Tolstoy's character Stephan Arkadyevich Oblonsky. He has a tendency to form and update his beliefs in light of what is popular among the so-called "fashionable" people he admires.

Oblonsky subscribed to and read a liberal paper, not an extreme liberal paper but one that expressed the views held by most people. And although he was not particularly interested in science, art, or politics, on all such subjects he adhered firmly to the views of the majority, as expressed by his paper, and changed them only when the majority changed theirs, or rather he did not change them—they changed imperceptibly of their own accord. . . .Oblonsky never chose his tendencies and opinions any more than he chose the style of his hat or frock-coat. He always wore those which happened to be in fashion. Moving in a certain circle where a desire for

some form of mental activity was part of maturity, he was obliged to hold views in the same way as he was obliged to wear a hat. If he had a reason for preferring Liberalism to the Conservatism of many in his set, it was not that he considered the liberal outlook more rational, but because it corresponded better with his mode of life. The Liberal Party maintained that everything in Russia was bad; and in truth Oblonsky had many debts and decidedly too little money. The Liberal Party said that marriage was an obsolete institution which ought to be reformed; and indeed family life gave Oblonsky very little pleasure, forcing him to tell lies and dissemble, which was quite contrary to his nature. The Liberal Party said, or rather assumed, that religion was only a curb on the illiterate; and indeed Oblonsky could not stand through even the shortest church service without aching feet.<sup>196</sup>

A number of things could be said about this interesting passage. What is important for my purposes here is how Oblonsky forms and updates his beliefs. He goes about his epistemic life “choosing his tendencies” or what I would call forming his beliefs rather flippantly. At best, he believes what he does by considering what is fashionable or popular, and in light of what will earn him acceptability among the majority, not on the basis of his evidence relevant to P. Since what’s fashionable regularly changes, Oblonsky’s beliefs are subject to the whims of what’s *in* with the majority. And this means that “Oblonsky’s mind is *spineless* on principle. . .rather unreflectively.”<sup>197</sup> He is doxastically shifty and flabby, and this contributes to a rather imbalanced and instable life cognitively and otherwise. He does not deliberate carefully and proceed to form and update his political beliefs in light of the P-relevant evidence or in pursuit of the goods constitutive of an epistemically healthy life, i.e. truth and rationality. And we might evaluate his political beliefs as irrational in light of their being formed and updated in this manner. Such an evaluation could be run by means of an argument such as the following: Since Oblonsky’s political beliefs are formed and updated in

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<sup>196</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), Part 1, ch.3.

<sup>197</sup> Roberts and Woods, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology*, (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2007), p. 187.

this intellectually vicious manner (i.e. spinelessly), we might say in the language of Chapter 3, those beliefs arise by virtue of a cognitive defect. Beliefs that arise from cognitive defects are irrational. Therefore, his political beliefs are irrational. The bottom line here is that we should avoid being spineless, because it is a cognitive defect that compromises stability in a cognitive system and thereby interferes with one obtaining the goods constitutive of an epistemically healthy life.

### *Stubbornness*

There is an intellectual vice at the other end of the spectrum from spinelessness, namely, stubbornness. To see what the vice of epistemic stubbornness amounts to, let us consider briefly its relationship to dogmatism. Intellectual stubbornness is manifest in dogmatic persons, although these two traits are not identical. A stubborn person is generally obstinate and blinded by her attachment to a belief, but a dogmatic person exemplifies a dismissive attitude towards the objections, new evidence, counterexamples, etc. that others level at her own view. This hardened resistance to criticism is quite different from the steadfast person's openness to intelligent dialogue and even critique of her own view.<sup>198</sup>

To illustrate the difference between stubbornness and steadfastness, we might consider the case of a religious skeptic as embodied by Ivan Karamazov. In Dostoevsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan persistently challenges the religious faith of his brother, Alyosha. Ivan challenges him on perennial issues in the philosophy of religion like

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid. 195. Roberts and Woods have a rather extensive discussion of intellectual 'firmness' and how it contrasts with 'dogmatism'. For our purposes here, I've given a rather brief synopsis of dogmatism and its relationship to stubbornness. I encourage the reader to see pp. 193-205 for their fuller treatment of this relationship.

the nature of God, evil and suffering. What I find interesting is that Alyosha persists in his belief in God even after hearing the objections leveled by Ivan. And I am inclined to think that this persistence by Alyosha is neither dogmatic nor stubborn. Why? Well, first of all, Alyosha listens openly to his interlocutor. In terms of our four stages delineated above, he “considers” the new P-relevant evidence that Ivan puts forth. Second, Alyosha “investigates” the evidence and putative defeaters for his religious belief through careful reflection. He even registers the weight of Ivan’s counter-argument. Third, he is even willing to admit that he lacks a response that will satisfy or persuade Ivan (just like Peter van Inwagen is unable to satisfy or persuade the compatibilist or hard determinist on the free-will issue). Here we might say that Alyosha has partially “integrated” the new evidence on some level, yet it still seems to him that P after consideration, investigation, and partial integration of his new P-relevant evidence.

Unlike the dogmatist, Alyosha is not dismissive of Ivan’s challenge; and unlike the stubborn person, he does not appear to be obstinate or blinded by his own belief. This is crucial. Such dismissiveness of evidence or blindness to one’s own beliefs would be cognitive defects such as those mentioned in Chapter 3, and when cognitive defects give rise to beliefs, those beliefs are irrational. So, insofar as an agent’s belief arises from an intellectual vice such as stubbornness or dogmatism, that belief would be irrational.

But Alyosha is not defective in either of these ways. Instead, Alyosha is open to new P-relevant evidence, considers it, and investigates it; but he is steadfast in his doxastic attitude towards P. He opts for what Roberts and Woods call a “wait and see”<sup>199</sup> approach where he wants to take his time to see where this whole discussion will lead. I find his

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid. p. 196.

approach to be akin to (though not identical with) my Steadfastness view, because he wants to take time to *evaluate the significance* of the counterarguments and fully *integrate* them into his belief system in order to update his beliefs appropriately. This taking of time, in my view, promotes *cognitive stability* in Alyosha's doxastic system while he investigates the significance of his expanded body of evidence (i.e. "integrates it fully") obtained through conversation with Ivan. If so, Alyosha's response is both virtuous and reasonable, because it contributes to an epistemically healthy life. What's more is that his remaining firm is consistent with openness to future P-relevant evidence and the reconsidering of his answer to the God-question altogether.

What I think our brief discussion of steadfastness, spinelessness, and stubbornness reveals is at least two-fold. *First*, steadfastness is a virtue that enhances stability in a cognitive system. It does this by enabling a cognizer to stand firm in his doxastic attitude about what he thinks the evidence supports (i.e. that it seems to him that E supports P). If it seems to him that P is supported by the evidence, then it is reasonable for him to stand firm in this, because standing firm will provide stability while he considers the significance of his new body of evidence relevant to P. Stability in a cognitive system is desirable, because it contributes to an epistemically healthy life. *Second*, the vices of spineless and stubbornness are cognitive defects that tend to disrupt one's epistemic health. Spinelessness either ignores the relevant evidence altogether or it encourages a rabid shiftiness in light of new evidence which disallows ample time to figure the significance of the relevance of the new evidence to P and his other background beliefs. Stubbornness closes one off from considering and integrating new evidence relevant to P. This is epistemically vicious and thereby interferes with epistemic health, which includes the pursuit of true and reasonable beliefs. What I think

this shows is both that Steadfastness is a virtue, and that it is connected to diachronic features of our epistemic lives like stability in a doxastic system—a stability that's crucial to having ample time to consider the significance of one's recently expanded P-relevant evidence and then integrate it into their doxastic system.

## Section 4

### Objections and Replies

#### *4.1 A Worry About Steadfastness Matured and Cognitive Defects*

But there is a worry that might be leveled at my Steadfastness view. In particular, there might be tough cases that my view apparently cannot handle. Let's call one such tough case a case of intrapersonal disagreement instead of peer disagreement. This idea was first presented in Chapter 1 of this dissertation in critique of the Equal Weight View, and one might think it threatens my view as well. Cases of intrapersonal disagreement are, roughly, where a single agent has evidence for and against a belief-P. Suppose we have a case where a person meets the conditions for Steadfastness Matured, so she has evidence to support her view, and it seems to her that E supports P. Suppose further that someone else has been given her a really good reason to think not-P—a reason so good that she should automatically see its defeating salience. And even though she is well-intended and not being a jerk or overconfident about it, she simply responds to this obvious defeater for P by saying "I'll need more time to think about that." The worry here is this: even though she has met the conditions for Steadfastness Matured, she should not need more time to consider, evaluate, and integrate this defeater into her corpus of P-relevant evidence. If that's right, then she is not reasonable to stand firm in her doxastic attitude with respect to P. In other words, she has met my view's conditions, and she seems to be as virtuous as she can be; yet these three conditions are hardly sufficient. From her perspective, she is reasonable to be steadfast, because she's met the conditions for Steadfastness Matured, and she's doing her best to stand firm out of a virtuous intellectual trait in order to preserve her cognitive stability and health.



But, goes the objection; this is not sufficient to evaluate such a person's belief as rational. To be more concrete, consider the following case, which we'll call: **Bookstore Case**. Imagine that Tom has visited his family many times in Portland, and while visiting, he has frequented the world-renowned Powell's Bookstore. This year he arrives for the holidays and his generally reliable and trustworthy sister announces to him that Powell's Bookstore has recently closed its doors. Given that it's been awhile since his last visit to Portland, and in light of his trust for his generally reliable sister, Tom forms and updates his belief about Powell's Bookstore. He comes to believe that it has closed. Call this P. The next day Tom is out on the town and walks through the area where Powell's was located, and to his utter amazement, it's still there and in full operation. He gains new visual evidence that Powell's is in fact "open for business." After all, there is an "Open" sign in the front window. But Tom is at a loss for what to do. While he has just acquired a decisive defeater for P, he reflects for a second and reasons that his sister is reliable and trustworthy, so he's going to just give himself some time to figure out the significance of this new evidence against P. He's going to stand firm until he has some time to figure out what to do.<sup>200</sup>

What this case is designed to show is a few-fold. Tom has met the first condition of my account, because he has testimonial evidence that indicates that Powell's is closed. We can add that it seems to him or strikes him that this evidence is good, because he trusts his sister as a reliable testimonial source. This means Tom meets the second necessary condition of Steadfastness Matured as well. Moreover, Tom is well intentioned in believing as he should. He's not obviously being stubborn or dogmatic. He ends up being steadfast out of an

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<sup>200</sup> I am indebted to Thomas D. Senor for this objection counterexample to my view. It has helped me understand that my account needed a fourth condition.

interest to give himself more time to decide between believing P or not-P. As such, Tom fits the ideal for what my view calls for in order for a person to be rational to believe P, yet there's a problem. When he sees that Powell's is open, he has an obvious defeater for P. He should just see that it is such a defeater, and this means he should have a new seeming or intuition that his sister is plain wrong and P is not the case. But he doesn't acquire what appears to be the obviously correct seeming in light of the obvious defeater for P.

Can my view say anything in response to this objection? I think that it can. I agree that Tom ought to have the new seeming that P is false in light of his newly acquired defeater. That said, we need an explanation for what's going on with Tom. The explanation for what's going on in this case is that Tom is suffering from a cognitive defect. There's just something awry cognitively even if that doesn't amount to a cognitive vice of sorts already mentioned. As we saw in Chapter 3, there are a number of other cognitive defects (e.g. wishful thinking, bias, etc.), and these can cloud one's judgment, consideration of the evidence, and belief formation. So what I think this kind of case reveals is that I need to add another condition to my view:

**Steadfastness Matured:** In cases of peer disagreement after disclosure, S is reasonable to stand firm (i.e. continue believing with the same level of confidence) with respect to P if and only if: (1) he has good P-relevant evidence to support P, (2) it seems to S that his P-relevant evidence supports P; and (3) there is some diachronic feature D that (partially) explains why it is reasonable for S to maintain his doxastic attitude toward P; and (4) S is not suffering from a cognitive defect.

I am inclined to think that cases like the Bookstore Case will all have a similar explanation by Steadfastness Matured. There will be some cognitive defect that can be pointed to (from the third-person perspective) that explains why the individual does not have the obvious new

seeming that s/he ought to have. And if I'm right about this, then my view has allayed the worry.

But notice something interesting and important here about how cognitive defects enter the picture. In Chapter 3, I discussed how cognitive defects enter the picture in cases of disagreement to give one party to the dispute grounds for thinking that his peer suffers from a cognitive defect. Such grounds are sufficient to give an agent reason to stand firm with respect to P according to Cognitive Error or Defect Steadfastness (CEDS). What's crucial to note is that on CEDS, defects enter the equation from the first-person perspective. As such, they form part of one's total evidence with respect to P and whether it's reasonable to stand firm or not. If I sense that you are suffering from a cognitive defect, this is part of my total evidence that counts in favor of my doxastic stance with respect to P.

But in the Bookstore Case defects enter the equation from the third-person perspective. Neither Tom nor his sister knows about his defect (or possibly his sister's defect), so it does not figure into either person's evidence base to tip the scales in the favor of Tom's or his sister's rationality regarding the belief about the Bookstore being open or not. As such, the defect does not effect the shared evidence with respect to P. The bottom line is that there may be hard cases like this that have to be assessed from the third-person perspective, cases where the philosopher has to say that such a person is not reasonable to stand firm with respect to P even though that person thinks he has met my conditions for Steadfastness Matured and done his epistemic best with respect to E and P.

#### *4.2 Steadfastness Matured and the Evidence Proportionality Principle*

A second objection to my account comes by way of what might be called the “Evidence Proportionality Principle.” According to the Evidence Proportionality Principle, a cognizer ought to proportion her level of confidence in P to the evidence she has in support of that proposition. But my account appears to deny the EPP, because I have argued that in many hard cases of peer disagreement, one need not lower her level of confidence at all after disclosing evidence with a peer and coming to discover their disagreement. But this seems too strong a view according to the objector. Surely we are obligated to proportion our level of confidence to our evidence.

In response to this objection, I think my view can offer the following reply: I don’t reject the principle per se, but I do reject one version of it. For starters, I think the epistemology literature in general and the disagreement literature in particular has not only presupposed but also overemphasized a synchronic understanding of evidence, belief formation, belief revision, and rationality. So we might say that the Evidence Proportionality Principle invoked in this objection rests on a purely synchronic understanding of evidence, belief formation, and confidence in one’s beliefs. As such, we do better to write the accepted principle that undergirds the objection in the following way:

**EPP-Synchronic:** For any cognizer S, body of evidence E, proposition P, and time T, S should proportion his level of confidence in P solely on the basis of E at T.

This version of Evidence Proportionality Principle captures what I think not only the objector has in mind, but it also captures what the Equal Weight Views and Kelly’s Total Evidence View presuppose. But I have argued throughout this chapter that this purely synchronic understanding of evidence-to-rational-belief-formation is mistaken. By mistaken, I mean

that it is an incomplete account. There are indispensable diachronic/historical features present in cases of belief formation and revision, especially as it relates to epistemic disagreement, that make a significant difference in our understanding and evaluation of a belief as rational or not. If there are such features relevant to our understanding and evaluation of a belief as rational in cases of peer disagreement, then we do well to extend our understanding of the Evidence Proportionality Principle accordingly. When we do, we find that there is a more complete version of this principle that is friendly to my Steadfastness Matured. It runs as follows:

**EPP-Diachronic:** For any cognizer S and proposition P, S's level of confidence in P ought to be proportioned to S's corpus of P-relevant epistemic features including: (a) evidence for/against P and (b) diachronic features/facts bearing on one's rationally believing P.

Notice here EPP-Diachronic *retains* the importance of having (synchronic) evidence for P and proportioning one's level of confidence on the basis of that evidence, but it says that having (synchronic) evidence is not the whole story. Put differently, having evidence to support one's belief level that P is necessary but not sufficient to establish the rationality or irrationality of that belief/level of confidence in cases of known peer disagreement. We need a more complete story that includes diachronic/historical features in play in our evaluation of a belief as rational. When we take these P-relevant diachronic features into account, the Evidence Proportionality Principle expands. It expands to say that one's level of confidence in P should rationally depend on both synchronic and diachronic considerations, which together constitute "the corpus of P-relevant epistemic features."

What this opens up to a proponent of my view is at least two-fold. On the one hand, it allows me to maintain some version of the Evidence Proportionality Principle, so I am not

rejecting the principle wholesale. I am only rejecting one version of it—the purely synchronic version, because it is incomplete. This means that I can consistently maintain that proportioning one’s level of confidence in P given one’s evidence is in some sense correct. On the other hand, it allows me to maintain that one’s evidence at a time need not require a reduction in confidence at all, because while having new P-relevant evidence may be necessary for belief revision in the form of confidence reduction, it may not be sufficient. To determine whether confidence reduction is required, we need to take into account the entire “corpus of P-relevant epistemic features.”

Of course, one might ask two further questions about my account: “When, if ever, would confidence reduction be required on your account?” And “What’s the payoff of my no-reduction-at-all view compared to a view like Kelly’s?” Let us take these in turn. It would be a misunderstanding to think that my view entails that confidence reduction is *never* required of a person in a case of peer disagreement. Nothing I have said entails this strong claim. Throughout my work here I have argued that we should take cases of disagreement on a case-by-case basis, and this is why there has turned out to be a variety of views in the Steadfastness family (refer back to Chapter 3).

Even with these clarifications in place, when might confidence reduction be in order for an intellectual peer in a case of disagreement? Here are a couple provisional answers. *First*, confidence reduction *may be required* after integration of one’s new evidence has taken place *fully* or is *complete*. By “taken place fully” or “complete” I do not mean that a cognizer has come to understand all of the propositions entailed by their newly acquired and believed P-relevant evidence. Surely this is not psychologically possible and would never take place. At most, I mean that they have done what they can to integrate their newly

acquired and believed P-relevant evidence for now. Recall from above that we can demarcate stages in the process of belief formation and revision as follows:

- (1) consideration of new evidence
- (2) investigation
- (3) integration. . .and then. . .
- (4) belief revision.

What I've been arguing is that it is too demanding to expect cognizer to do (4) prior to (3) taking place *fully or completely*. After all, we are not ideal computing machines. I have suggested that in hard cases of disagreement we should not expect (3) to take place in full right away at a new time T; and this is due to different factors, but especially diachronic/historical ones. Since S1 and S2 have been previously reasonable to hold their respective beliefs about P, this should figure into why it is reasonable for them to remain steadfast in their same level of confidence in P until integration fully takes place. If that's right, then once integration is complete, that may be the time at which S1 and S2 ought to *reduce confidence at least some*. A reduction in confidence would be required because they would be well aware of the *significance* of their newly accepted evidence along with newly acquired putative defeaters for their belief/level of confidence in P. If they cannot address such defeaters at the point of full integration, then each party to the dispute ought to lower his level of confidence *at least some* until he is able to do so. Of course, either person (or

both) might be able to deal with such defeaters at the point of full integration, and in this case, they ought not lower their level of confidence at all.<sup>201</sup>

To get a picture of how “full integration” might look, suppose that libertarian proponent, Peter van Inwagen meets hard determinist, Derk Pereboom at a philosophy conference. At T2 after they disclose their new evidence relevant to Peter van Inwagen’s Principle Beta, which is a crucial premise in his argument for libertarian free will. There is evidence both pro and con Principle Beta. After disclosure, however, Peter van Inwagen thinks that their total available P-relevant evidence, E3, supports P, i.e. that humans have libertarian free will, while Derk Pereboom thinks E3 supports not-P. Now either party has gained new putative defeaters for his view at T2, but these (along with all of their other new beliefs that are a part of E3) are not integrated into their doxastic systems. Suppose that we give them some time after their meeting at T2 to integrate E3, perhaps a few weeks. At this new time T3, suppose Peter van Inwagen has come to integrate fully E3. He has thought it through and understands E3’s bearings on his view of free will and other beliefs, i.e. he has come to appreciate E3’s significance. He has fully/completely integrated E3 into his doxastic system. If he’s unable to respond to any P-relevant defeaters at this point, then I think he should lower his confidence at least some. This general line can be extended to Pereboom as well.

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<sup>201</sup> It is worth adding that I do not think that lowering one’s confidence at least some is the *only* possible rational result after integration is completed. Other possible results include: (a) both persons are rational to continue to stand firm without confidence reduction; (b) one person is rational to stand firm without confidence reduction, while the other person is irrational to stand firm without confidence reduction or to stand firm at all; (c) neither person is rational to stand firm.



Now let us address the second question of what is “gained” by my view over, say, Thomas Kelly’s TEV. Notice that my view differs from Kelly’s in at least two respects. *First*, my view places more emphasis on diachronic issues than purely synchronic ones. This shift in emphasis then opens us up to delineating the “stages” of belief-formation and revision in a way that I think is less demanding in the senses that a cognizer is not expected to do (1)-(4) quickly at each new time-slice, and so he is not required to reduce confidence at a new time when disagreement is known. *Second*, this all comes together to aid in the promotion and preservation of stability in a doxastic system in a way that I do not think that Kelly’s does. Since it’s plausible that “integration” takes time, it is best to not require a shift in doxastic stance (if at all) until integration is complete. Weakening the demand in this way is good for one’s epistemic health, because it enables one to remain cognitively balanced while the process of integration is underway. Consider the following schema:

- \*Stability in a doxastic system (comes in degrees). . . . 1 . . . .5. . . .10
- \*Confidence in one’s belief (comes in degrees). . . . . 1 . . . .5. . . . 10

Suppose that we think of stability in a doxastic system just like we think of confidence in one’s beliefs, namely, it comes in degrees. If we do, then we might think that our degree of stability corresponds to our level of confidence in a fairly tight way, especially when we are talking about a belief that a cognizer has held for a long time (we stipulated five years in our “motivating case” of S1 and S2). Also, suppose that integration of one’s new P-relevant evidence takes place over a period of time. What I am suggesting the Steadfastness Matured view offers us here is a maintaining of stability in one’s doxastic system by not requiring confidence reduction until integration is complete. This is different from Kelly, because he demands a lowering of confidence before integration is complete, and in so doing, I think it

compromises stability in some way even if it is not as drastic as Equal Weight Views are. It compromises stability, because it demands confidence-reduction prematurely.

To return to our computer analogy, suppose you are updating your i-Tunes software, and you have that download percentage bar in the middle of your screen while the update is processing. Your computer won't run the most recent update until download and integration is complete. What Kelly's view demands is akin to pressing buttons on your computer to get it to run the most recent update of some software before the little onscreen icon has reached "100% download complete." If you get your computer to do anything in that instance it surely won't be what you hope. It surely won't run the most recent update of the software; and you might just cause your machine to freeze up and malfunction. In other words, you will compromise its functionality and stability. In my view, this is what Kelly's view does in demanding at each new time  $T$  that a cognizer adjust his level of confidence solely in light of his synchronic evidence and prior to integration fully taking place.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I extended the “generic steadfastness” by arguing that Steadfastness Matured is a substantive view about how to handle intellectual peer disagreement after disclosure in difficult cases. Here I showed how two intellectual peers can be reasonable to disagree about whether or not some (roughly) shared body of evidence E supports a given proposition P. In order to keep peerhood and sameness of evidence intact here I have presented a unique explanation for why we might think that both S1 and S2 are reasonable to maintain their doxastic stances after they have disclosed their evidence and disagreement is known. That explanation has focused not on some bit of synchronic evidence that might “tip the scales” in one’s favor so to speak. Instead, my explanation has focused on diachronic considerations that are present in a case of intractable disagreement that enables us to understand and evaluate their doxastic responses as reasonable—an understanding and evaluation that may have been different had either party’s diachronic features been different.

One such diachronic consideration is the history of their belief regarding P prior to known disagreement with an intellectual peer. Since their different beliefs about P were previously rational and they held their belief for a long time, I argued that we should allow each subject ample time to consider and evaluate their newly acquired and accepted/believed body of evidence E3 so that they might fully integrate it into their doxastic systems.

Allowing each man time brings us to the second diachronic issue: in order to stand firm in his doxastic stance for the right amount of time, each man needs to possess the relevant cognitive virtue(s) that will enable him to maintain cognitive health. Cognitive health here was understood in terms of stability in a doxastic system, because it’s better for a cognizer’s health to be stable doxastically than to shift his beliefs and doxastic attitudes on a cognitive

dime. Stability in a doxastic system can be undergirded by the virtue of steadfastness, where this is a cognitive trait that enables one to stand firm for the right amount of time so that he can consider the significance of his new P-relevant evidence and integrate it into his doxastic system.

Connecting these diachronic features to synchronic ones, I argued for my ultimate view **Steadfastness Matured**: In cases of peer disagreement after disclosure, S is reasonable to stand firm (i.e. continue believing with the same level of confidence) with respect to P if only if: (1) he has good P-relevant evidence to support P, (2) it seems to S that his P-relevant evidence supports P; and (3) there is some diachronic feature D that (partially) explains why it is reasonable for S to maintain his doxastic attitude toward P; and (4) S is not suffering from a cognitive defect. Crucial here is (4), because if there is a cognitive defect in the mix, it would have to be unknown by either party to the dispute in order to preserve sameness of evidence, peerhood, and ultimately reasonable disagreement. If both parties meet conditions (1)-(4) after disclosure, then it is reasonable for either man to remain steadfast for a time in order to “appreciate the significance” of E3 to P, i.e. to fully integrate his new total P-relevant evidence into his doxastic framework. Once either man fully integrates E3 into his system, then he should either (a) lower his level of confidence some (if he’s unable to deal with new putative defeaters at that time) or (b) not lower his level of confidence at all if he is able to deal with these newly acquired putative defeaters. In the end both parties to the dispute can satisfy the conditions for Steadfastness Matured, and this means that intellectual peers can reasonably disagree about P.

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