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# The Evolution of Defeaters: A Taxonomy

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The Evolution of Defeaters: A Taxonomy


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ABSTRACT

It has been widely argued that reasons for a belief come in degrees but not much literature has focused on the idea that defeaters for justification toward those beliefs also come in degrees. The aim of this paper is to explore epistemic defeasibility and construct a taxonomy for epistemic defeaters. This paper argues that epistemic defeaters undergo an evolutionary process before becoming what they are commonly labeled, such as rebutting and undercutting. I argue that within some stages of this process, there can be different degrees of defeat. This paper focuses on defeaters for justification, expands on the account of partial defeaters and offers a solution to reliabilism's problem with defeat. The main aim of this taxonomy is to provide a framework that allows (most) epistemic theories to accept solely on the basis of epistemic defeasibility.

DEDICATION

To Bernadine.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Defeasibility is a controversial topic in epistemology, and raises a host of questions. What is the nature of defeasibility? How do defeaters, if they exist, function? Does the existence of defeat automatically discredit our justification for a belief? Can defeat come in degrees? Can defeat really fit into a reliabilist framework? In this paper, it is my aim to answer these questions by providing a taxonomy for defeasibility. It is my hope that in understanding the evolution defeaters undergo, we may better understand its nature and answer the questions above and also the concerns posited by internalists and externalists alike.

The dominant theme of this paper is the proposed taxonomy of four different categories of defeat which is surrounded by explorations of prima facie and ultima facie justification, internalism and externalism sprinkled throughout, a revision to the No-Defeater Condition, a deeper look at degrees of defeat, and a detailed view at competing mental systems while incorporating contemporary issues in order to go beyond the armchair.

The structure of this paper is divided into five sections, the first being the introduction which is followed by relevant background information to provide the reader with relevant terminology. The third section will provide the proposed taxonomy in one continuous flow and will be followed by 4 subsections providing extensive detail of each stage of defeat. The fourth section will investigate the Cartesian and Spinozan mental systems and compare the two in order to conclude which system is more efficient for the proposed taxonomy. This inquiry will refer to empirical studies which analyzed the mental and rational limits of those who experienced cognitive load and the side effects contemporary issues entail for our beliefs. The final section, the conclusion, will review the key points of the paper as well address any remaining concerns.

Other themes of this paper include testimony and peer disagreement, concerns for infallibilists, the need for acceptance and relevancy, the formation of dormant defeaters, and investigating an external account of defeat. I will also address potential objections/concerns that have been previously mentioned toward my proposal.

It should be noted that this account of defeat is not attempting to make any normative claims about defeat or how agents ought to approach defeat. I am not making any claims about what is a good or bad epistemic strategy for an agent to follow. It is also not my concern here what an agent should perhaps be responsible for in regulating their beliefs. The core aim of this paper is only to explore what can happen with defeat rather than what an agent should do.

II. BACKGROUND

When it comes to knowledge, we tend to not question what seems apparent to us. We tend to not realize how intricate our belief-forming processes are and how fragile they can be. As we formulate and adopt beliefs, there is always the possibility of evidence that could undermine our knowledge. Epistemic defeasibility refers to the phenomenon where a subject's (S's) justification for a belief (B) could be destroyed or deteriorated so that S no longer is justified in a proposition (P).

Defeaters refer to the information provided to S that interferes, undermines or overrides some positive epistemic status, whether it comes from another individual, the senses alone or some other medium. John Pollock expanded the understanding of defeaters by constructing rebutting and undercutting defeaters. An understanding of these along with an in-depth comprehension of defeaters has been provided by Luca Moretti and Tommaso Piazza in *Defeaters in Current Epistemology: Introduction to the Special Issue*. "An epistemic defeater - possibly coinciding with an experience, a reason, a belief or a fact - is, broadly speaking, what actualizes this possibility" ['possibility' referring to epistemic defeasibility] (M&P, 2845).

For definitions of rebutting and undercutting, I will use the simplified version of Pollock's definitions provided by Peter Graham and Jack Lyons in their work *The Structure of Defeat: Pollock's Evidentialism, Lackey's Framework, and Prospects for Reliabilism*.

> For rebutting defeaters, "d is a **rebutting** defeater for S's belief that p iff d is a reason for S to believe not-p." For undercutting defeaters, "d is an **undercutting** defeater for S's belief that p iff d is a reason for S to believe that her reasons for believing p are inadequate."[1]

Now that I have provided an explanation of epistemic defeasibility along with the two types of defeaters, I will now issue a couple examples of defeaters in action.

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[1] Graham and Lyons (2020).

For example, imagine Charlotte is practicing her typography. She tests herself by opening a random book and copying the text without looking from the pages. When she is finished, she will then check her aptitude. Charlotte begins typing and has a belief that she did not begin with the caps lock on because she checked before she began. We can call this proposition ~L. However, Charlotte is not the best typist and accidentally pressed the caps lock button when she started so her screen is full of capital letters where there should not be any. Once finished, Charlotte turns to her screen and sees her document is full of capital letters. We can call this proposition C. However, there is some initial confusion for her as to why most letters are capitalized because of her belief ~L from the beginning. Yet, it is completely rational for her to conclude that she had accidentally pressed the caps lock button at the beginning which would be strengthened if she were to notice the caps lock indicator light on her keyboard.  From this inference, she is 1) no longer justified in believing ~L and 2) her conclusion has led her to abandon her previously held belief and adopt a new one: the caps lock feature was enabled at the start after she had checked (L). This is an instance of rebutting defeat.

The example with Charlotte illustrates how defeaters can exist and be incorporated in personal settings but I will provide an example where defeaters occur within interpersonal settings. Imagine special agent Banks is overseas in Germany attempting to prevent Stefan from setting off a poisonous gas at a benefit dinner. Agent Banks adopted a belief that Stefan was planning this act from the intel provided by his boss Franks. During his mission, Banks is provided information from his trusted colleague that Stefan is actually trying to prevent the poisonous gas as well. In actuality, it turns out that Franks is planning to release poisonous gas and is trying to frame Stefan on the grounds of some past feud that Banks had been unaware of

previously. With this information Banks has obtained from a reliable source, if he accepts it[2], he is no longer justified in holding the belief that Stefan will release a poisonous gas, and adopts a new belief that Franks is the one who needs to be stopped.[3] In both of these cases, it is acceptable to say that Charlotte and agent Banks had a justified belief at the beginning of their endeavors but were no longer justified in those previously held beliefs.

       Defeaters can either be a defeater for knowledge or a defeater for justification. An example of defeaters for knowledge can be illustrated by changing a feature from Carl Ginet's barn facade counterexample to Edmund Gettier. In this case, Henry takes his son to the countryside. Unbeknownst to Henry, he enters barn facade country where all the objects that look like barns are actually made out of paper. In Ginet's example, Henry points to an actual barn rather than a facade, but my illustration will be the inverse. When Henry points to one of these barns and says to his son, "That's a barn," he is justified in his assertion but because it is not actually a barn, his knowledge is defeated rather than his justification.

       In this paper, I will focus on defeaters for justification rather than defeaters for knowledge as any defeater for justification can defeat knowledge under the agent's discretion. From hereafter, I will provide my account describing the evolution in which defeaters undergo before succeeding in their epistemic damage. Additionally, my account will provide a way to categorize defeaters based on their degree post-success.

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[2] This acceptance condition will be explained later in detail.
[3] More could be said here about defeaters being present for Banks's trust in Franks but I will just be focusing on the first belief mentioned.

III. THE TAXONOMY

As mostly external epistemic theories have struggled with cohesively including defeasibility in their theory, it will be beneficial for both the externalist and internalist to have an account that explains the nature and evolution of defeat. It is my aim that this taxonomy will provide a starting point for both theories to consider or, at the very least, base discussions.

In this section, I will provide a bird's-eye view of the taxonomy which will be followed by subsections exploring each step in additional detail. In order to cover technical concerns in expressing what kind of thing a defeater is, I support that defeaters exist in a variety of ways. Defeaters can be propositions, mental states, facts, states of affairs, sensory information, etc. For example, Cathy could propose that her margarita is salty but I could have a belief that all margaritas are sweet. The proposition "this margarita is salty", and later proved fact, could act as a defeater alone but suppose I taste her margarita and it is actually salty. In this way, the sensory information I have gained can act as a defeater and weaken or abolish my prior justification that all margaritas are sweet.

Although more detail will be provided in the appropriate subsections, I will start by providing two general positions. The first position, which I have found not to be favored by most, is that there exists defeaters for every belief's justification. As all of our beliefs can be revised, updated or abandoned, there seems to be defeaters that perhaps we are currently unaware of. In relation to ultima facie justification, this position implies two views which I will refer to as strict and practical. I will explain these in more detail later but will briefly explain them here. The strict view supports that because there exists at least one defeater for every belief's justification, then no belief is ultima facie justified. As this may appear blatantly incorrect to some, the practical view offers a more comfortable position. The practical view, which will be

discussed later, combines the No-Defeater Condition with the agent's ignorance or lack of awareness of a defeater. Meaning, as long as an agent is unaware of a possible defeater and/or reject it upon becoming aware of it, then they are ultima facie justified.

The second position, which is still not the most favored, is that the mere existence and our awareness of something that could be a defeater does no actual work for us nor acts against our justification. In most literature on defeat, philosophers support that if there is a defeater for a belief's justification, then it does defeat to some extent whether it be partial or full defeat. My reason for pushing back against this supported position is that my account centers itself around acceptance rather than mere existence or awareness of defeaters. It seems to me that the real work of defeaters is only found when an agent accepts it as such.

A few immediate worries could be mentioned in response to this second position. What if an agent is stubborn and constantly rejects the information in order to protect their epistemic status? What if an agent had a cognitive system with a defense mechanism that never let them accept a defeater? What if an agent was judged to be irresponsible or unreasonable by rejecting a defeater? In all of these cases, it may seem to most that the defeaters in question do harm the agent's justification regardless of the agent's cognitive system. I reject this assumption. Again, this paper only aims to focus on the nature of defeasibility and is built upon a notion of acceptance. It is perhaps natural for us to criticize others for the justification they hold for a belief and judge whether or not their system is reliable, reasonable, responsible, etc. but these conclusions have no effect on the agent's justification if they chose to reject a defeater. To reiterate, the work of defeat is only accomplished upon the agent's acceptance. Here I would like to introduce my account of defeaters and their degrees.

In formulating the process defeaters undergo, I will develop four stages of defeaters: *floating*, *possible*, *potential* and *actual*. Each stage is providing something new to the subject as the "defeaters" go through a sort of evolution. As mentioned before, no matter how strong or for how long we have carried a belief, it is always liable to be revised, supported or abandoned. Before I characterize the nature of defeat, I will introduce some themes held by other philosophers that support my reasoning for my two general (and not so popular) positions I mentioned above. Instances of defeat that pique my interest are those of peer disagreement and testimony which lead to my usage of research by Michael Thune and some brief mentions of David Hume. Although we gather information through many forms, it seems to me the most interesting cases of defeat and belief revision come from our encounters with others. We can often expect positions to change or be affected while watching a political debate, attending a religious service, overhearing some gossip, or arguing with our academic colleagues. Although defeat comes in different forms like mentioned above with Cathy and her margarita, my attention is mainly focused on propositional defeaters which we gather from these interpersonal encounters. Even if we are not fully convinced by some proposition, I align with Thune in that there can be partial defeat.

Throughout the paper, I will insist that the taxonomy will generally fit for most, if not all, theories (excluding Mad Dog Reliabilism[4] for instance).

Throughout our lives, our beliefs have been revised, updated or abandoned as we proceeded from youth to young adult to adult. Even now, our beliefs are still liable to change no matter how strong our confidence is in said belief. Thune, as well as others not listed here, mentions that perhaps David Christensen, when speaking of degrees of belief, was actually

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[4] Mad Dog Reliabilists reject the existence of defeaters. (Grundmann's "Reliabilism and the Problem of Defeaters"; Dretske, 2000)

speaking of degrees of confidence in beliefs rather than beliefs coming in degrees themselves (Thune, 356). Although Thune and Christensen are specifically referring to degrees of confidence in peer disagreement, I support, like many others, that degrees of confidence can be found in all beliefs. My purpose of discussing Thune in such detail is to create a foundation of understanding his account of partial defeaters which will elucidate how my account takes inspiration from his.

Thune argues that there can be a partial loss in someone's justification for a belief and hence a partial defeater when engaged in a peer disagreement. To further this account, he posits three qualifications that make a peer an 'epistemic peer'. Although I agree with Thune throughout most of his work from *'Partial Defeaters' and the Epistemology of Disagreement,* there are a few concerns I have that begin with these three qualifications. "Two people are epistemic peers with respect to some question if and only if (i) they are (positively) equals with respect to their familiarity with (and their ability to assess) the evidence and arguments which bear on that question; (ii) they are (positively) equals with respect to general epistemic virtues such as intelligence, thoughtfulness and freedom from bias; (iii) both parties are objectively about equally likely to get things wrong with respect to that question" (Thune, 359).[5]

Multiple accounts[6] of epistemic defeasibility claim that one who even just has the awareness of a defeater would be unjustified and irrational if they were still to hold that P. In

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[5] Through these qualifications, an epistemic peer is restricted to those who fulfill (iii) but are not "...for example, equally stupid, equally biased and bull-headed, or equally unfamiliar with the relevant evidence and arguments...this is why I include the quantifier 'positively' in conditions (i) and (ii)" (Thune, 359). Through epistemic peer disagreement, Thune mentions Thomas Kelly's view on how the qualifications of epistemic peerhood can be too rigid in that a pairing of the sort would not be possible. I support Kelly and Thune's concerns but Thune eventually takes an account that is more narrow than Kelly's which I will discuss shortly. Although all three qualifications could be met, there is always the possibility that one of the parties will fulfill them better than the other and could no longer be rightly considered an epistemic peer. However probable, Thune and Kelly grant that even though there may be some slight difference, one should still grant the other an epistemic peer.

[6] Thune notes the works of Feldman, Christensen and Elga. The strength or weakness of the defeater does not seem to affect this assumption but Christensen does claim that beliefs themselves come in degrees. Thune offers that Christensen may be supporting degrees of confidence rather than degrees of belief.

cases of peer disagreement, Thomas Kelly argues that even just the awareness that someone disagrees with you is enough evidence to count against P and "the strength of this evidence increases in cases where I believe that the other is my epistemic peer" (Thune, 360). However, Kelly argues that awareness alone does not necessitate a defeater but only when the higher-order evidence trumps the first-order evidence in respect to the total evidence which includes both orders. First-order evidence are the reasons, objective arguments, etc. while the higher-order evidence is psychological as it refers to the awareness of the disagreement. Thune continues to distinguish that there can also be partial defeaters when the first-order is stronger than the higher-order.

Thune's notion of partial defeat is dependent on disagreements with epistemic peers. Partial defeat occurs when a subject is aware of a disagreement with someone they consider to be their epistemic peer and concludes that the peer's claim is forceful. Thune concludes that this awareness of forceful defeat from an epistemic peer forms a partial defeater but I argue this is not the case nor is this how 'partial defeat' should be used. I sympathize with Thune and Kelly's notion that awareness is not always enough to necessitate a defeater but I postulate that this notion should be stricter than they offer. It seems to be the case, to me, that awareness is never enough to constitute a defeater even if the higher-order outweighs the first-order. I will further this point shortly alongside the discussion of acceptance, but, for now, I will expound on what is meant by awareness. The awareness of a defeater is simply S's being conscious of or acknowledging the existence of the information that could potentially act as a defeater. For example, in the case of Charlotte, she is aware of the caps lock button and the likelihood of accidentally pressing it but the awareness does not defeat ~L by itself. In the case of agent

Banks, he is aware of the information provided by his trusted colleague.[7] Yet, again, the awareness of this information alone does nothing toward the justification without acceptance.

Before I continue with Thune's account, I want to take a few steps back and dissect some basic points made about defeaters. One element, and probably the most important element I have found that is left out from discussions about defeaters is acceptance. As I previously stated, the mere awareness of information that could act as a defeater does no work unless it is accepted by S. In the case of agent Banks, I argue that this awareness alone does not constitute a defeater and this information does no work to Banks's justificatory status unless Banks accepts the information provided. It is worth mentioning here that awareness can be twofold: 1) S being aware of X and 2) S being aware that X could function as a defeater. In my usage of awareness, I refer to the former. It seems to me that the former is necessary while the latter is contingent. Since the latter may only derive from the former, the former is my key focus. It is also worth mentioning that acceptance can also be twofold: 1) S's acceptance of the content as such and 2) S accepting X leading to defeat. Unlike my references of awareness, my usage of acceptance is focused on the latter. Although both usages can be applied, the latter case of acceptance is necessary for defeat to occur.

As I further the account of Thune's partial defeaters, I will now propose an account of defeaters to be either strong or weak and that defeaters undergo a four-step process: floating, possible, potential and actual. I find in the discussions of defeat, there should be some further clarification about ways that justification for beliefs could be lessened or completely abandoned just as there is much talk about how we form those beliefs in the first place.

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[7] Something might also need to be said about Banks's cognitive processes functioning properly and that he understands what is being set before him. He could simply be attentive of the file his trusted colleague provided to him but awareness must include the content and a basic understanding of it. For now, I want to just include "basic understanding" in order to allow defeaters that could be actualized from misconceptions and misinformation. More will be said about what I mean by actualized defeaters later.

In order to illustrate my account, I will focus on the importance of reliable means to information as reliability carries some weight when it comes to individuals modifying, strengthening or abandoning their beliefs. As humans are social creatures and often debate issues and attempt to change the minds of others, peer disagreement is worthwhile to discuss here. Stemming from this discussion, it is also worthwhile to present David Hume's consideration on the topic.

In our day-to-day lives and specifically in the peer disagreement cases as supported by Thune, there is a sense of reliability we hold ourselves accountable for. In peer disagreements, they begin with supposing each party is (somewhat) reliable for the topic at hand. In general, when our reliability is jeopardized, we may find some errors through the testimonies of others and our experiences. In regard to testimonies, we are often concerned with those that lead us to a belief. However, an agent needs to be wary of those that may be falsehoods or insincere if their aim is to be epistemically responsible.[8]

Although my mention of Hume will be focused on his discussion of miracles, the intended takeaway is to highlight the impact testimony has toward our beliefs and justification. As I previously mentioned, I am interested in the propositional content relayed between individuals and their epistemic peers. Hume's brief talk about testifiers and their reliability (or lack thereof) allows us to explore reliability and our intuitions in respect to potential defeat.

Hume explained factors to take into account when hearing the testimonies of those who profess to have witnessed miracles. Hume claimed that the accounts of eyewitnesses and spectators is one of the more common, useful and necessary aspects of our lives (Hume, 119). Rather than adopting just anyone's testimony, he does mention that "we frequently hesitate

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[8] More will be said about epistemic responsibility and in the appropriate section.

concerning the reports of others" (Hume, 120).[9] We are not to adopt the beliefs of those who are known for promoting falsehoods, villainous or crazy because they are unreliable. Instead, we should turn to those who we do find reliable, consistently tell truths and who we trust will not give us faulty or incorrect information. For those that are in the pursuit of being epistemically responsible, I am sure it would be beneficial to still be hesitant toward testimonies and information even if the source has proved itself to be reliable.[10]

Hume's statement supports my position that the existence of information or the awareness S has of X does not constitute or warrant defeaters to any extent. It appears to be irrational for an individual to modify, strengthen or abandon their belief on merely the presentation of new information alone. By asserting that "we frequently hesitate," this seems, to me, to enforce the rejection of awareness being sufficient for a defeater.

However, reliability is not solely based upon the testimonies of others as we have our own belief-forming processes - one of which is our senses. Depending on our environment and cognitive state at the time, our senses may not always be reliable and in order to gain assurance in some beliefs, we can turn to evidence and probability.[11]

Hume goes on to list some causes as to why we may not initially trust the testimonies of others: contrary testimonies (different accounts), character of witness (doubtful), number of witnesses (few or many) and the manner in which they testify (hesitant/violent) (Hume, 120). Upon receiving testimony that conflicts with our belief, we are aware of one of the possible

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[9] Hume, Section X "Of Miracles", Part 1.

[10] Better to be safe than sorry.

[11] Hume provides an example of where our expectations of events may not always be reliable. His example suggests that we expect better weather in June than in December. However, if this didn't turn out to be the case, then we wouldn't be that surprised because he had previously concluded that the effects in the world could change (problem of induction). Perhaps this example isn't quite the best because someone actually finds December to have better weather as summer months are quite hot and can be uncomfortable. Nonetheless, today we are reliant on weatherpersons to give us a probability of what the weather will be like for the day and those to come. As technology advances, our reliability in weatherpersons' testimonies gains strength.

defeaters. When we take into account these possibilities to reject the testimony, we lessen its force. The potentiality of the testimony to take effect as a defeater is lessened or partial. However, as I have argued, our awareness of some counterclaim does not entail an actualized defeater.

By its nature, a defeater is something that defeats rather than something that could defeat in the right conditions. Like I mentioned previously, it doesn't seem like "defeaters" should be called "defeaters" just because they exist or we are aware of them. However, in an effort to remain consistent, using 'defeater(s)' is sufficient.

To begin with the floating stage, the information that we could acquire that could change our reasons and justifications for a belief are, in a sense, just "floating"[12] around us and waiting to be acknowledged. In this sense, a *floating defeater* is waiting to be made aware by the subject.

By using 'floating', I acknowledge the fluidity of beliefs and how common new[13] data may present itself to the individual. This is directed specifically toward the information that individuals do not yet have but could obtain at any time. As information is more easily accessible than before, it is plausible that individuals may stumble across new data via technology, conversations with others, experiences, etc. which makes frequent modification expected. Under my account, it is a necessary condition that floating defeaters be outside of S's consciousness and one that has never been previously considered[14] by the agent. This includes information that S is unaware of nor knows of its existence.

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[12] This terminology is to be taken more poetically than physically. I often explain this stage as being similar to "the cloud" in which electronic data is stored.

[13] By 'new', I mean information that is new to the individual regardless if the information is actually temporally new in public or private domains or if it has been around for months, years, etc.

[14] It would also be worthwhile to explore the classification of defeaters that have been forgotten or relearned.

The next stage in the evolution is becoming a *possible defeater*. In this stage, the information reveals itself in the domain of the agent. It is sufficient for the agent to be conscious and aware of it but it is not necessary. This leniency enables possible defeaters breathing room before reaching the next stage but also accounts for the fact that humans can only consciously engage with a few things at once but can unconsciously ingest information simultaneously. Considering that individuals are bombarded with incredible amounts of stimuli multiple times per day (if not all day), it is expected that individuals have unconsciously absorbed information. Even though the agent may not be conscious of it at the time of absorption, its entering S's domain has increased the likelihood of it reaching the next stage: potential.[15] If the agent is conscious and aware of the information, then it is highly likely the possible defeater will become a potential defeater rather quickly.

The stage of possibility and potentiality might get muddled together as they can occur in immediate succession, other times more slowly, yet it is important to keep them distinguished. As I stated earlier, it doesn't seem that the mere existence of information or our mere awareness of some evidence or experience damages or supports the strength of our justification. It seems the only way the defeater can move from possible to potential, is when the information has penetrated S's attention and S is aware of it. Of course, as I've argued, the mere existence and awareness of a potential defeater is not enough to affect justification as some could, quite simply, dismiss it.

To sidestep, there may be a worry that some may hold toward these first few stages. The worry is that floating defeaters pose a threat to the stability of our beliefs and justification since I argue that there exists a defeater for each. Although I do not reject this notion, as new data

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[15] There are cases where information is unconsciously absorbed and accepted unbeknownst to the agent at the time. This will be further discussed in the last section pertaining to Cartesian and Spinozan mental systems.

presents itself sometimes randomly, I do accept that some floating defeaters are most likely relevant to what the individual is attending to. For example, when agent Banks is on his mission, he is most likely going to receive information relevant to the mission and not about whether he went rock climbing on his 6th birthday because he can't remember. Inversely, if he was conversing with his loved ones about his 6th birthday, it is likely that he will receive information about his 6th birthday rather than the whereabouts of Stefan. I will not be able to go into much detail here but recognize the importance of a relevancy condition which will be explored in the possible defeaters subsection along with discussions of prima facie and ultima facie justification and their role in defeasibility. Nonetheless, it is likely that information that could alter our justification for beliefs are nearer than we might suppose.[16]

In the first two stages, floating and possible, there is not very much activity occurring. However, in the next stage of *potential defeaters*, the subject is interacting with many components. In this stage, a possible defeater becomes a potential defeater when the subject is conscious and aware of the information. It is necessary that the agent is conscious and aware of the potential defeater at its initial point of conception (call this $t_1$). It should be understood that oftentimes, like when faced with life-changing decisions, deliberation can be a slow and tedious process. I do not expect the agent to be continuously conscious and aware of the potential defeater (as that would be exhausting) but it must still be accessible. After $t_1$, the agent may experience an innumerable amount of $t$'s as long as the potential defeater is still accessible.[17]

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[16] I would like to acknowledge the possible existence of normative defeaters and how they could act against this stage but I will not be able to fully address this issue in this paper.

[17] As mentioned in footnote 14, furthering the understanding of potential defeaters that become inaccessible to the agent would be a worthwhile endeavor. I would suppose that forgotten potential defeaters would at least return to the possible stage but the floating stage at the very most (which is a given). On the inverse, if an agent was reacquainted with a potential defeater they may have supposed they had forgotten, I feel inclined to classify that instance as a dormant defeater. With this classification however, it wouldn't be known it was a dormant potential defeater until it was readdressed.

For potential defeaters, we need to take into account the strength of itself and the strength to which it operates (which will be considered again). This stage can be illustrated through the occurrence of deliberation whether it is immediate, slow, etc. in which individuals wrestle with new information and calculate whether or not they will accept it. For example, although I made no mention of how long agent Banks deliberated over the new information about his boss, this deliberation process falls under the potential stage.

Additionally, the strength or weakness of the potential defeater could be taken into account by the subject along with its classification into one of the three categories: complete, partial, or ineffective. If the potential defeater falls into the category of ineffective, then it seems we should abandon the new information and persist in holding our original belief. As mentioned by Michael Thune, if it is a partial defeater then the belief will lose some, but not all, justification.[18] If the defeater is complete, then it will fully defeat the justification for the targeted belief. However, it should be noted that only the complete and partial defeaters have the *possibility* to move to the final stage in their evolution: actual defeat.

Before I explore the final stage of defeat, it should be noted that in the potential stage, the strength and weakness of the potential defeater is likely to be appraised by the agent. For example, if agent Banks did not find the testimony of his comrade revealing anything pertinent, then he could have easily dismissed it and it would be ineffective. If he found the testimony to be somewhat plausible but not completely, then it is likely to become a partial defeater if he were to accept it. Finally, as he ultimately does, he fully accepts the testimony and the justification he had for his previous belief is eradicated. Depending on the epistemic theory, many would posit a

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[18] Thune introduced his account of partial defeaters after the description of Christensen's view of degrees of belief and the effects of justification in cases of peer disagreement. I argue that it seems only fair that if reasons for a belief come in degrees, then defeaters should also come in degrees. Although it is oftentimes difficult to give an accurate account of gradation, I will give a valiant attempt to provide an account that defeaters undergo until they become undercutting or rebutting and also further Thune's account of partial defeaters.

threshold for judging the strength and weakness of a potential defeater. For instance, if it falls under the threshold, then it is weak and if it is over the threshold, then it is strong. However, I will leave the judgment under the agent's or the theory's discretion. Although this may seem reckless, this will be addressed within subsection IIID1.

As mentioned above, I stated that only complete and partial defeaters have the possibility of becoming actualized defeaters. A common theme I included in the accounts of complete and partial defeat was acceptance. Quite simply, the stage of *actual defeaters* occurs if and only if the agent accepts the information that served as a potential defeater. As mentioned previously, I take the position that information or experiences that could lower or extinguish my justification in a belief does no work simply in virtue of my being conscious or aware of them. It is imperative that a defeater only does work when it is accepted.[19] In this stage, we are now able to employ Pollock's classification of rebutting and undermining to the actual defeater. Recall Charlotte's case. She holds that ~L but once she is aware of C, she is able to accept or reject the potential defeater. She ultimately accepts C, rejecting ~L and endorses L. This is a case of actual defeat, for all that needs to be accepted is the defeater itself. If she were to become aware of C and dismiss it, actual defeat would not occur because nothing was defeated.

As I mentioned before, it doesn't seem like some philosophers are taking heed into an important factor regarding defeaters: acceptance. Even when we consider the testimonies of others, as mentioned by Hume, we are hesitant to accept the testimony of others as fact depending on the reliability of the testifier along with other reasons. From Bob Beddor's account of "Reasons First Reliabilism," "for an agent to have a reason to believe *P* is for them to have a reliable (hence truth-conducive) process that is disposed to produce a belief in *P*" (Beddor, 15).

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[19] Again, it should be recalled that a stubborn agent or one who has a cognitive defense mechanism which prevents them from accepting defeaters would lack defeated justification. If an agent never accepts the defeater, their justification remains intact.

With this process, the approach retains the connection for justification and truth. So, if the evidence is reliable and the subject has a reliable belief-forming process, then the subject is inclined to believe the proposition. To illustrate, in the case of agent Banks, the information provided by his trusted colleague fell into the full category within potential defeaters and was later accepted. Upon the subject's acceptance of the defeater, it is now an *actual defeater*. In this stage the actual defeater is either an undercutting or rebutting defeater.

Now that I have explained this diachronic process defeaters undergo, let's apply it to a popular defeater case posed by Beddor who endorsed Reasons First Reliabilism: Lori seeing red. Lori is gazing at a red wall which seems to be red. After a moment of gazing, Sal approaches Lori and testifies that the wall is actually not red but appears to be because of red-tinted lights that are aimed at the wall. Lori assumes Sal is a generally reliable guy and no longer believes she is seeing a red wall.

To relate it to a defeater's evolution, when Lori is gazing at the wall, there are floating defeaters waiting to be made aware of. In this case, Sal gives a testimony that enables the floater to become possible since Lori is now aware of its existence. Still, the mere awareness she has of its existence does nothing until she sincerely interacts with the evidence. This interaction moves the defeater into the potential stage and Lori engages in some conscious (and perhaps some unconscious) processing where she must judge the evidence to be strong or weak and, depending on which she chooses, will either be complete, partial or ineffective.[20] Lori abandons her belief that the wall is red entirely which entails it was strong and a full-stop, complete defeater. If this was a case of a defeater-defeater, then the process would repeat itself upon the arrival of new evidence and, if successful, would revert Lori's belief back to her original belief.

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[20] Although there is a fact on whether the wall is red or is reflecting red lights, Lori interacts with what is available to her. The conclusion she reaches on the strength or weakness of the potential defeater is under her discretion.

In Beddor's next example, the Two-Testimony of Seeing red, after the first defeater has gone through the process and Lori abandoned her initial belief, Anne gives testimony, albeit misleading, that Sal is actually a compulsive liar (Beddor, 11). According to the Reasons First Reliabilist, "Anne's testimony provides a prima facie reason to believe that Sal is a liar, which provides a prima facie reason to believe that Sal's testimony does not reliably indicate RL [the notion that the wall is illuminated by red lights], which undercuts RL...it thereby reinstates Lori's justification for believing RED" (Beddor, 11). Following the defeater's evolution, every step that had 'Sal,' now input 'Anne' and the defeater's defeater will successfully reinstate the initial belief Lori had of seeing a red wall.

To reiterate, it is a necessary condition for the potential defeater to be accepted by the subject in order for it to be an actual defeater. If S were to reject the information, then the justificatory status remains intact. If agent Banks were to attend to the information provided by his trusted colleague yet rejected it, then his justification for his belief that Stefan will release the poisonous gas remains.

Thomas Grundmann notes in his work, "Reliabilism and the Problem of Defeaters," one of Alvin Goldman's views about the defeat of justification. On this view, "justification is only defeated by already acquired counterevidence that would make belief-revision internally rational" (Grundmann, 6). This claim enforces that the full-stop category for defeaters actually is necessary to accept by the subject. If the subject deems the evidence to be reliable and strong enough to produce a full-stop defeater and accepts this, then it seems that the subject is required to abandon their belief in the proposition. In order to elucidate this claim further, I will briefly mention epistemic akrasia.

Epistemic akrasia is "the attitude of believing contrary to what one believes one ought epistemically to believe" (M&P, 2849). Moretti and Piazza reiterate a claim supported by some but attacked by others: "it is never rational for a subject *S* to believe *P* on the basis of *E* while believing that *E* doesn't actually support *P*"[21] (M&P, 2848-9). Some accounts refute this thesis and claim that epistemic akrasia can actually be rational. However, though not always, those accounts tend to lean on the acceptance of some misleading evidence; but if a belief-processing system was truly reliable, then its proper functioning would not allow such evidence.

> "For Plantinga, a justified belief must not depend on a malfunction of the cognitive system, and properly functioning cognitive systems would remove internally irrational beliefs. Since a defeater for believing that p makes that belief internally irrational, the system can tolerate that belief only if it is not properly functioning, i.e. if it is not working as it *should*. Hence, believing that p in the face of internally rational counterevidence is unjustified" (Grundmann, 7).

After this explanation, Grundmann rejects Plantinga's claim and argues that this normative notion of proper functioning does not have anything to do with reliability. It doesn't seem to me like Grundmann is correct about his diagnosis of Plantinga's claim. I'm not quite sure how Grundmann claims that proper functioning has nothing to do with reliability because, in a common sense, we would tend not to trust something that has proven unreliable due to improper functioning. When a system functions properly, it does the activities that ensures its reliability in the task it is set to do. So, if a task of a proper-functioning cognitive system is to eliminate irrational beliefs and the system is functioning properly, then it will always eliminate irrational beliefs.[22] This supports the thesis that epistemic akrasia can never be rational as long as a cognitive system is properly functioning - which makes its by-product reliability.

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[21] This claim is argued to be false by Peter Graham and Jack Lyons in 'The Structure of Defeat: Pollock's Evidentialism, Lackey's Framework, and Prospects for Reliabilism'.
[22] I am aware of the possibility of systems being poorly designed and are proper functioning yet unreliable. However, I am focused on the systems that are proper functioning and reliable in a positive sense.

At this point, I will be able to provide some additional characteristics of defeaters that will show that they can be processed consciously and/or unconsciously. Also in later sections, I will be able to explicitly interact with many other accounts and examples but I do find, if applied to either, this taxonomy will prove to be sustained. No matter the account or stance taken on epistemic defeasibility, "no man of sense gives attention to these reports till he finds them confirmed by some greater evidence" (Hume, 126). From this bird's-eye view of the taxonomy, the following section will include additional detail concerning floating defeaters.

IIIA. FLOATING DEFEATERS: Prima Facie and Ultima Facie Justification and the No-Defeater Condition

In this stage, I claim that there exists a defeater for the justification of every belief an agent holds. This is a large claim and has several implications which likely raises eyebrows. An example of this would be the negation of the proposition held by the agent. For instance, Lori believes that the wall is red (R). She could receive testimony that ~R or spontaneously think ~R on her own accord. This negation could be accepted by Lori which would defeat R. This example insinuates that there are defeaters for beliefs and not just justification. I find this acceptable. Nonetheless, the negation of a proposition that justifies a belief can also act as a defeater (as seen with Anne's testimony). Putting this clarification aside, the first concern with floating defeat I will address is the clash it presupposes with ultima facie justification, the second will include a revision of the No-Defeater Condition and lastly, implications for infallibilists.

i. Ultima Facie Issues

In this subsection, I will refer to Thomas Senor's "The Prima/Ultima Facie Justification Distinction in Epistemology" as the basis for understanding the role prima facie and ultima facie justification plays in regard to defeasibility. Under my account, by supposing the existence of floating defeaters, I claimed that there exists floating defeaters for the justification of every held belief. For some, this may appear problematic but I will explain how the existence of floating defeaters does not undermine the notion of ultima facie justification nor the No-Defeater Condition under a pragmatic lens.

By claiming that there exists defeaters for all beliefs, it might be interpreted that no one can ever be ultima facie justified. To avoid a misunderstanding or potential implications that could come from this, I offer two interpretations of this issue: strict and practical.

Under the strict interpretation, it could be argued that ultima facie justification does not exist since defeaters exist for every belief. A supporter might claim that accepting the existence of defeaters for any belief entails that one is never ultima facie justified for their belief simply because at least one defeater exists for it. This interpretation would adhere to the theories that claim the mere existence of a defeater, whether or not the agent is conscious of it, does harm their positive epistemic status and makes the agent unjustified in holding the belief in question.

However, as I have noted in the full account of epistemic defeat, a defeater only does work when the agent accepts the defeater. Therefore, the mere existence of defeaters does not prevent an agent from being ultima facie justified.

If we support the notion of acceptance being necessary for defeat, then it is possible that individuals may be forever ultima facie justified. In these instances, the agent simply rejects every potential defeater against said belief such that the agent will always be justified in their belief. Although this is possible, I think most individuals would not find this advisable.[23]

To illustrate this strict account, let us recall the example of agent Banks. Upon receiving the information from his trusted colleague about Franks, if agent Banks were to accept the information as defeating, then he would no longer be justified in holding the belief that Stefan is the enemy. If we use the strict interpretation, then agent Banks could quite simply reject the information from his trusted colleague and continue to be justified in his belief that Stefan is the enemy. Most may find this irresponsible as his trusted colleague is a reliable source that has never betrayed Banks's trust, but concluding that someone may be irresponsible does not undermine or negate the fact that Banks is still justified in holding his belief because its justification has not been undermined or rebutted.[24]

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[23] This notion will be explored in more detail later in response to a couple concerns about the taxonomy.
[24] As in the case of agent Banks, no matter how irresponsible or stubborn an agent is, the defeater defeats nothing if not accepted.

If one were to support this strict interpretation, it seems that they would also have to reject the No-Defeater Condition since it is also what makes a belief ultima facie justified. By definition, an agent is ultima facie justified when there are no defeaters present. Bergmann supplies a definition of the No-Defeater Condition in his paper, "Internalism, Externalism and the No-Defeater Condition," as follows:

> NDC: "NDC is satisfied by *S*'s belief that *p* if and only if *S* does not believe (and would not upon reflection) that her belief that *p* is defeated" (Bergmann, 407).

Although this definition may not be used in the strict interpretation, the definition can be slightly modified for the practical interpretation. If we want to allow that individuals can be ultima facie justified under the proposed taxonomy, then the NDC will have to include the appropriate terminology and be defined as such:

> NDC*: NDC is satisfied by *S*'s belief that *p* if and only if *S* is not conscious nor aware of the existence of a possible or potential defeater and it is not accessible upon reflection.

From this definition, if an agent is conscious or aware of a possible or potential defeater, the NDC* is not satisfied. However, if the agent quite simply rejects the potential defeater and there are no others present, then the NDC* will be satisfied. The practical interpretation would thereby adopt NDC*. The practical interpretation allows for an agent to be ultima facie justified due to the necessary condition that NDC* posits. In order for an individual to be ultima facie justified just means that there is no possible or potential defeater that the subject is aware or conscious of. Let us apply this definition to one of the cases provided by Thomas Senor.

> "Case 2: Alice looks across the quad (in good light) and sees in the distance a person she takes to be her colleague Ed. She comes to believe that she sees Ed. However, Alice (justifiably) believes that Ed is in France and will not return to the U.S. for another six months." (Senor, 551)

According to Senor, Alice is prima facie justified in her belief that she saw Ed across the quad but is not ultima facie justified because the prima facie belief is undermined by her belief that Ed is in France for another six months. As Senor mentions, "had other things been equal (i.e., had she not believed that Ed was out of the country), she would have been justified in believing that she had seen Ed" (Senor, 552). In that sense, she would have been ultima facie justified. Accordingly, if she lacked the belief that Ed was in France for another six months, then she would be ultima facie justified in her belief that she saw Ed in the quad and would have satisfied the NDC*. It should be noted that had Alice rejected her belief that Ed was still in France due to her having more confidence in the reliability of her vision, Alice would be ultima facie justified in her belief she saw Ed and would satisfy the NDC*.

In footnote 5, Senor mentions "if one thinks that stored, non-conscious beliefs are sometimes justified, one will be inclined to think (I would suppose) that stored, non-conscious beliefs could function as defeaters" (Senor, 553). In my account, it is possible that information can be unconsciously absorbed by an individual but I would have to reject that stored, non-conscious beliefs could function as actual defeaters, for they do no work. Although they would not function as actual defeaters, they could be classified as possible as they have clearly infected the agent's epistemic framework but have yet to be made aware by the agent.[25]

ii. Infallibilist Implications

It is my hope that the previous subsection has succeeded in clarifying the nature of floating defeaters and their relationship with primarily ultima facie justification and the No-Defeater Condition. I would now like to address the issue my taxonomy poses on infallibilistic theories. For these theories, such as infallibilist foundationalism, it seems that holders of this theory are always ultima facie justified. "Because of their insistence on

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[25] More about these cases will be included in the section about Cartesian and Spinozan mental systems.

infallibility and what we might call 'truth transparency,' infallibilists have neither need of, nor place for, defeasibility. A belief that is infallibly held and whose truth is transparent is a belief for which the subject has indefeasible justification" (Senor, 556). From the perspective of my taxonomy, it directly rejects infallibilistic theories. In support, the strict interpretation of floating defeaters opposes this idea. With both the strict and practical interpretation, it seems to me to be epistemically irresponsible to reject the notion that there may be even the slightest chance that a belief is not justified. However, from an internalist perspective, we must grant their justification. As stated before, Mad Dog Reliabilists will also not fully adhere to this theory. Nonetheless, I will make mention of epistemic responsibility in later concerns which these two groups (and surely others) may benefit.

IIIB. POSSIBLE DEFEATERS

i. Relevancy Condition

Recall that possible defeaters are those which enter the subject's domain whether or not the agent is conscious or aware of them. The idea is that these defeaters are closer[26] to the agent than others. The question of what then may become a possible defeater should be illustrated through adopting a relevancy condition. This relevancy condition is, simply put, whatever may be relevant to the agent at the moment. To illustrate in the case of agent Banks, who is attending to his mission, he is more likely to receive information that is relevant to what he is attending to and his current environment. It is unlikely that agent Banks will receive information about his 6th birthday party while he is on a mission. In the case of Charlotte, it is likely she will receive inferences on the likelihood of hitting the caps lock button rather than inferences on which of the neighborhood children kicked the ball in her yard.

It should also be noted that possible defeaters are relevant to the belief they aim to defeat. This is to simply say that the defeater for Banks's belief will only be relevant to his belief about Franks and not be relevant toward any belief in reference to his 6th birthday party and vice versa. In the case of Lori, Anne's testimony will be relevant to her situation at the moment and will also be directed at the testimony provided by Sal.

With both of these clarifications in mind, the purpose of the relevancy condition is to explain what information or stimuli an agent is most likely going to come in contact with rather than being too restrictive. To explain, although it seems highly unlikely that agent Banks will receive information about his 6th birthday, it is improbable rather than impossible. By not

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[26] For analogous purposes only, this idea can be likened to possible worlds. If I were to attend to the idea of different hair colors, possible worlds where I have a different hair color are nearer to me than the worlds I am not attending to (like where Lady Gaga is President). For possible defeaters, information I am attending to or that is in my domain are closer to me than others.

making this condition to be so restrictive, it allows for the possibility of random occurrences and improbable scenarios. By providing a relevancy condition which has two aims, it is my hope that it provides a clearer understanding of the nature, probability and likelihood of possible defeaters entering a subject's domain.

Certainly, it can generally be agreed that a defater must be relevant to the belief it can defeat but what makes it relevant? It seems to me that the defeater is relevant to the corresponding subject matter. The defeaters that are closer to defeating a belief are those that are more probable to the agent. I would like to illustrate this idea by relating it to a shooting target. The target as a whole represents the relevant subject matter for a belief. The defeaters closest to defeating a proposition are those that are more probable or reasonable to the agent. To illustrate Charlotte's case, Charlotte's "bullseye" is L while the outer rings could be a faulty caps lock indicator light, a broken keyboard, a malfunctioning screen, a broken computer, a hacker or perhaps hallucination.

IIIC. POTENTIAL DEFEATERS

   To sum up the stage of potential defeaters, an agent must sincerely entertain the information, testimony, etc. which entails it must be done thoughtfully and consciously. So, there must be some interaction with the subject and defeater in order for it to be categorized as such. To refer to my previous explanation of attention, the subject must interact with the information in a comprehensive and substantive way. In an effort to minimize redundancy, in this section I will introduce dormant defeaters and explore the notion of a "challenge" proposed by Mikael Janvid.

i. Dormant Defeaters

   In an effort to address a concern that will be illustrated in the section IIID, I will provide a detailed description of what answers that concern: dormant defeaters. Dormant defeaters are the exception to the claim found in potential defeat - that a defeater is potential only when an agent is conscious of it and sincerely entertaining it. Dormant defeaters differ such that they were potential at $t_1$ but were rejected. This subclassification was created to provide a solution for the later addressed concern that rejected potential defeaters could still potentially defeat later at $t_2$ or $t_3$ and so on. These defeaters remain dormant until they resurface at a later time in which the agent sincerely entertains it. At that point, it should be treated as any other potential defeater.

ii. Janvid's "Challenge"

   In this subsection, I will directly respond to the claims made by Mikael Janvid in his paper "Defeater Goes External" in which he argues in support of an externalist account of defeat that lacks internal constraints. He, too, assumes a position of reliabilism in which reliable indicators are what determines defeat. In his paper he explored considerations from Alston and Bergmann of whom I intend to respond to when appropriate. Here, I will focus on Janvid's notion of a "challenge" which involves internalist conditions.

Janvid defines a challenge as "a prima facie defeater based on *accessible* warrant" (Janvid, 712). He claims that challenges arise while we are awaiting the ultima facie stage and that they assist his account's solution to the concern that "an externalist account fails to take into account, not only *intra*subjective epistemic assessments as in the first objection, but also *inter*subjective assessments of fellows in the epistemic practice of forming beliefs and making epistemic claims, providing warrant for them as well as defeating those of others etc" (Janvid, 712). If I am understanding Janvid's claim properly, I agree with his initial claims that "it seems unavoidable that these assessments are based on accessible warrant only"[27] but face confusion with the implementation of ultima facie. In what follows, I will attempt to propose a few clarifications.

The first clarification is the reason why I am discussing Janvid's Challenge in this section over potential defeaters. Janvid asserts that "In our epistemic practice we often cannot await the ultima facie verdict on epistemic claims we encounter, we have to cope with whatever warrant is accessible to us at the time of the assessment. Any such assessment is, however, precisely prima facie, open to future correction by new relevant warrant all the way to the final *ultima facie* stage, which is often never actually reached" (Janvid, 217).

Based on my exploration of ultima facie justification through Senor's work, it seems to me that 'ultima facie', used here, is misdirected. Although Janvid is referring to prima facie defeat, from my previous explanations above, it would follow that ultima facie defeat could be reached more often than Janvid supposes as seen in previous examples.

Let's recall the example of Alice and assume that she does not have access and never possessed the potential defeater that Ed was in France for another six months. She would be ultima facie justified in her belief that she saw Ed in the quad because she satisfies the NDC*.

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[27] Janvid, 712.

Her ultima facie justification would be satisfied even though she certainly could receive notice of Ed's absence in the future. Now let's apply this to Janvid's usage of prima facie and ultima facie defeat but stipulate that Alice does hold the original belief that Ed is in France for another six months. Upon seeing Ed, she is prima facie justified in her belief that she sees Ed but that belief is also prima facie defeated because of her original belief that Ed is in France. Janvid claims that the ultima stage is rarely achieved but, in this case, Alice does not have access to any other defeaters. Therefore, it would seem to me that she does achieve ultima facie defeat which leads her to continue believing that Ed is in France.

If I have misinterpreted his text, then I will attempt to make further sense with the following text. If this interpretation finds itself successful, then my followup response will raise a concern incorporating my first attempt.

Janvid asserts that "The internalist prima facie conditions firmly rest on the externalist *ultima facie* conditions. The prima facie assessments are therefore always sensitive to new warrant, in benign scenarios moving these assessments further towards the *ultima facie* goal, which also explains why fellows of the epistemic practice are willing to revise their earlier assessments in light of new warrant" (Janvid, 713). This quote, coupled with those above, leads me to believe that Janvid's "challenge" only internally prima facie defeats (and rarely reaches the ultima stage) because it is dependent on the ultima facie conditions external to the agent. If this is the case, perhaps Janvid has succeeded in answering the unrelenting issue of reliabilism and defeat.

However, as I had addressed in my first interpretation and based on his stated conditions, it now seems that either 1) "challenges" never reach the ultima facie stage or 2) external prima facie defeat is nonexistent or 3) external ultima facie defeat is rare. If it is the third, then it seems

it would be a rare occurrence to experience defeat. If it's the second, then Alice never experienced prima facie defeat based on her seeing Ed in the quad. If it's the first, then external ultima facie conditions are not necessary for "challenges" to reach an ultima facie stage for the stage would be internal.

So, in order to salvage his notion of a "challenge," we would have to accept internal conditions that allow for internal ultima facie defeat rather than letting "challenges" depend on external ultima facie conditions alone. However, this seems to undermine Janvid's goal of making defeaters go external.

Regardless of the interpretation, under the taxonomy, Janvid's "challenge" is still required to be accepted by the agent before it accomplishes any sort of prima facie (or rarely ultima) defeat. However, if the agent fails to accept or reject an internal "challenge" and external ultima facie defeat depends on the "challenge," then the agent will face the problem of never being defeated which entails forever justification.

IIID. ACTUAL DEFEATERS

In this subsection I will explore the nature of actual defeaters which, to no surprise, is what most philosophers tend to reference. Since rebutting and undercutting defeaters have been explored earlier, I will provide a detailed account for the degrees of actual defeat: complete, partial and ineffective.

i. Complete, Partial and Ineffective Degrees of Defeat

As mentioned before, just as beliefs are able to have degrees of justification, it seems to be the case to me that defeaters should as well. To recall, Michael Thune, in his paper "'Partial Defeaters' and the Epistemology of Disagreement", argues that the partial loss of justification for a belief has been overlooked in the literature concerning peer disagreement and offers an account concerning partial loss in justification. My conception of partial defeat however, as mentioned numerous times, must involve the agent's acceptance of the provided evidence or experience. In cases of peer disagreement, my account clashes with Thune's to the extent that partial defeat occurs post-acceptance rather than due to the existence of disagreement.

Thune mentions his account of partial defeat which allows for the rejection of the "full-defeater" view and the "no-defeater" view since he finds them too strong. Thune aligns himself with the following principle:

> "PPD. *Principle of partial defeat*: if in a disagreement *S* believes or epistemically should believe that a conversational partner is as reliable as *S* (with respect to some topic) and that it is not obvious which party (if either) is in a more privileged epistemic positions (concerning the particular disputed proposition), even if these beliefs are not fully justified or strongly held, then *S*'s belief (about the proposition which is the subject of that disagreement) is at least partially defeated" (Thune, 364).

From this principle, I sympathize with Thune's notion that the "full-defeater" view is too strong but must reject the latter argument of a "no-defeater" view being too strong. In order to remain consistent with the taxonomy, the "no-defeater" view is not too strong because the

potential defeat (the disagreement) is not doing any work against the agent's justification toward the belief in question.[28]

A point of clarification that has been brought to my attention concerns my usage of Hume's text. This point concerns the reliability of those we find to be trustworthy whereas, as mentioned above, Hume illustrates that "we frequently hesitate concerning the reports of others" since those testimonies are spouted from those who are unreliable (Hume, 120). My justification for highlighting this worry in this section is due to the focus on testimony and peer disagreement. If we often hesitate in believing the reports of those we find unreliable, does this entail that we do not hesitate when concerning the reports of those who are reliable? If this is the case, then instances of unreliable speakers only support that awareness is *sometimes* not sufficient rather than *never* sufficient.

As I mentioned above, it would be beneficial for someone concerned with epistemic responsibility to hesitate even when concerning the reports of those we do find to be reliable. In instances of reliable speakers, awareness alone does not itself constitute defeat; there must still be acceptance. To quote Janvid, "Neither warrant nor defeat comes for free," is the idea I wish to support here.[29] With this in mind, we can conclude the awareness of reliable testimony is not sufficient for defeat. In addressing this concern, I hope to have clarified a worry that could have been interpreted as open-ended.

Although complete and ineffective defeaters do not require as much discussion, I will briefly illustrate their nature. For complete and ineffective defeat, let us assume that the testimony, information and experiences we encounter are reliable. If an agent is conscious and aware of a potential defeater and fully accepts it, then the actual defeater completely defeats the

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[28] Problems like these will be further defended in the discussion on Cartesian and Spinozan mental systems.

[29] Janvid's quote is within the context of defeat requiring the same conditions we expect for warrant in terms of strength. Although the context is different, the general idea of this quote encapsulates my vision quite well.

justification for said belief. This category of completeness is most likely what philosophers have in mind for a general account of defeat.

Ineffective defeaters are simply the potential defeaters that do not succeed in defeating fully or partially. Ineffective defeaters are the potential defeaters that the agent rejects and dismisses. They do no damage to the agent's epistemic framework and cease to be entertained in a serious manner. From this explanation, I would like to address another concern that has been brought to my attention and will use the context surrounding Janvid's quote (as seen above) for support.

Janvid's account of external defeat is confronted with an objection that his account is too open. "More specifically, there will always be defeaters lurking around in the periphery ensuring that no one will ever be warranted in believing anything (even if we restrict our assessment to a particular point in time, as we should), which is a counterintuitive consequence" (Janvid, 710). Janvid answers this concern by stating that information that could defeat would have to be "the presence of (sufficiently strong) reliable indicators,..., warrant or defeats the epistemic status of our beliefs...More precisely in order to defeat, the warrant for the defeater must be at least as strong or stronger than the warrant for its competitor, i.e. the targeted belief" (Janvid, 710).[30] This entails that his account is not too open since not just any defeater can make an agent unwarranted; it must be one which is stronger than the currently held belief. My only issue with this response is the lack of requiring acceptance for even if the potential defeater is based on stronger grounds, it can still be rejected. However, assuming reliabilism like Janvid does, rejection would not be advised.

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[30] I take Janvid's usage of a reliable indication to be reliable evidence of ~P. This idea is illustrated through an example about a belief that all swans are white (P) being defeated by the perceptual experience of seeing a black swan. This experience and evidence functions as a reliable indicator for ~P.

The objection to his account corresponds to mine in a similar vein. Just as his account (and dually mine with floating defeat) may be considered as being too open, a concern my taxonomy reveals is that agents can protect their beliefs by simply rejecting every potential defeater. An additional concern is that potential defeaters rejected for bad reasons does not actually remove their potential to defeat. In response to these concerns, I will address the latter first followed by the former.

Although these are justified concerns and do appear as unwelcome consequences, my overall account is aimed at describing the nature of defeat rather than what an agent ought to do. It is my intention that the agent handles potential defeat in the way that adheres to their held epistemic theory. If an agent rejects a potential defeater on the basis of what could be considered bad reasons, the presented taxonomy does not prohibit this occurrence. However, for most theories, like reliabilism, this is not a desired result. If the potential defeater was rejected due to reliable means, then it would be appropriate. For the evidentialist, if the agent rejected the potential defeater on insufficient evidence, then it would reveal that they were not adhering to their theory properly, and so on.

Likewise, if an agent chooses to continuously reject potential defeaters in an effort to preserve their held beliefs, the taxonomy does not restrict them from doing so. In one aspect, and in no way is it meant to be taken strictly, we may be able to argue that infallibilist foundationalists and Mad Dog Reliabilists could be guilty of this. Again, although this may appear as an unwelcome consequence, it is my aim to illustrate what is possible for agents to do with defeat rather than what they should do.

Drawing from this concern, I will address a feature of potential defeat that perhaps has also been left open-ended. It could be argued that just because an agent rejected a potential

defeater does not entail that it loses its potentiality to defeat. I understand this concern as categorizing the rejected information at t1 could still potentially defeat at t2. Therefore, the potential defeater would not just vanish or return to the floating stage for perhaps it could resurface.

From this understanding, I find no fault in the overall taxonomy by permitting rejected potential defeat to stay close by. However, potential defeaters, as I have defined, are those in which the subject is aware and conscious of and is sincerely entertaining. In the case of a rejected potential defeater, the agent no longer intends to sincerely interact with the evidence, testimony or experience. From the agent's perspective, that information is no longer intimidating. Although the rejected potential defeater could resurface at t2, t3 and so on, it seems correct to say that it would become a dormant potential defeater.[31] To conclude these concerns, I hope I have sufficiently responded in such a way that although there may be some initial concerns, they do not harm the overall taxonomy.

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[31] Refer to IIICi.

V. MENTAL SYSTEMS: Descartes vs. Spinoza

In discussing defeat, I have found interest in the relationship that our mental systems impose on defeat. Unlike the previous sections, here I will consider the two major competing views for mental systems by exploring contemporary issues like propaganda and misinformation. I intend for this section to highlight the conscious and unconscious nature of defeat and the implementation of information into our epistemic framework. Although this section is unlike what has been discussed thus far, my intention is to compare these two systems in relation to my taxonomy so as to highlight some practical and real-world implications. My construction of defeasibility can stand alone yet I find it beneficial to apply this philosophy to prevalent societal and personal issues.

Exploring the differences between the Cartesian and Spinozan mental systems in relation to cognitive load, propaganda and misinformation will support my taxonomy of defeat and my stress of acceptance. This discussion will highlight some downsides of our, often considered, malleable mental systems while also sympathizing with what perhaps the average individual desires to have. I will show that the Cartesian mental system not only aligns with my proposed taxonomy and my stress of acceptance but also provides a more attractive framework.

i. The Mental Systems Explored

In a fast-paced society, stimuli constantly bombards our senses in an effort to win our attention. Whether it is the flashing lights on the marquee, the huge electronic billboards in Times Square or the incessant notifications from our smartphones, information is begging for our consideration. Philosophers Eric Mandelbaum and Jake Quilty-Dunn explored how humans process information and the consequences of these mental systems in their work "Believing without Reason, or: Why Liberals Shouldn't Watch Fox News". In this section, I will refer to

Mandelbaum and Quilty-Dunn's work among others to explore the nature of Cartesian and Spinozan mental systems and their relation to beliefs in our society that is saturated with fake news and propaganda. Although I will be arguing in support of the less popular Cartesian view, I will highlight the pros and cons of each view in relation to epistemic defeaters.

When it comes to information processing, we might suppose that since we are capable of reason, then surely we would also be capable of rational processing. For instance, when I am on the market to purchase a vehicle, I would like to think of myself as a rational agent who is efficient at comparing information and who is not susceptible to flashy commercials or incentives. However, there is empirical evidence that supports that we are easily influenced by information when we are under cognitive load. When under cognitive load, this stress could allow those flashy commercials to influence our decisions or our beliefs about which vehicle is best. Mandelbaum and Quilty-Dunn explored some of these empirical tests about how easy it is to infiltrate someone's mental system, but first, I will explain the Cartesian and Spinozan mental systems from Daniel T. Gilbert's work "How Mental Systems Believe".

As mentioned previously, the two most popular mental systems are the Cartesian and Spinzoan procedures. The Cartesian system, from Rene Descartes, argues that information must first be comprehended before it can be either accepted or rejected. In this process, the act of accepting or rejecting are both effortful processes that require the attention of the agent. Gilbert also illustrated how the Cartesian system promotes the idea of partitioning which separates the mind into active and passive domains. For Descartes, comprehension is within the passive domain while acceptance and rejection fall into the active domain (Gilbert). In this system, humans are able to receive information without assessing it simultaneously. As our mental system is oftentimes compared to a machine, Gilbert mentioned that "Information can exist

inside a machine in an unassessed form, and it can do so because the machine's human designers have generally considered this the most logical and efficient way for machines to think" (108, Gilbert). Although this might be considered the logical and most desired option for information processing, this may not be reality as argued by Mandelbaum and Quilty-Dunn and supported through Gilbert's expository.

Before exploring the Spinozan system, I want to highlight how the Cartesian system is consistent with the proposed taxonomy in two ways. First, the Cartesian system supports that acceptance and rejection are both effortful processes which entails that a deliberate process is occurring rather than an unconscious one. Quite plainly, this entails that information must be accepted by the agent before doing any epistemic work. With the provided taxonomy, this supports that the mere existence of information does no damage nor support toward the epistemic framework. Second, it allows for the consumption of information without requiring the agent to assess it at the time. This aligns with the stage of possible defeat which allows for both conscious and unconscious absorption. Now, we may proceed to discuss its competitor.

For the Spinozan system, from Baruch Spinoza, he argued that information is comprehended and accepted simultaneously. If the agent were to reject the information, then rejection would occur after this stage and is also effortful. For Spinoza, the comprehension and acceptance of information is automatic while the rejection is manual (Gilbert). Under this view, all information is automatically believed upon its conception.

As we can see, the differences between these two theories differ in a significant way in respect to the taxonomy. Although both accounts allow for an effortful process at some point, the Spinozan theory is incompatible with the nature and necessity of acceptance as distinguished

within my account. Illustrations of this problem with the Spinozan theory will be highlighted later.

A dominant theme within Gilbert's work and Mandelbaum and Quilty-Dunn's is the factor of resource depletion or cognitive load. Gilbert illustrated instances of resource depletion in the studies of prisoners who were starved of sleep and overworked. In these studies, prisoners who were fatigued and overworked were found to be easier to indoctrinate than their well-rested counterparts. Resource-depleted prisoners were found to agree more willingly to statements that they would not have originally agreed to. "When resource-depleted persons are exposed to doubtful propositions (i.e., propositions that they normally would disbelieve), their ability to reject those propositions is markedly reduced" (111, Gilbert).

This empirical evidence of resource-depleted prisoners is to support and illustrate the likelihood that our mental systems are most likely Spinozan. The fact that rejection or unacceptance is more effortful in these instances is to show that a Spinozan system is at the core of our information-processing capabilities.

However, the dangers that a Spinozan mental system imposes in regards to the prisoners, fake news and propaganda should be noted. For ethical reasons, it is quite disturbing that tactics like resource depletion occur which lead to individuals giving involuntary confessions and being sentenced unjustifiably. The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and Law published an article by Richard A. Leo in 2003 which discussed instances of false confessions and found that there have been "300 proven false confessions in recent decades" (Leo, AAPL). Although the findings seem quite low, it is a frightful concept that if the Spinozan theory is true, that individuals could easily be coerced into believing false information.[32]

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[32] This seems to me to be a truly unwelcome consequence.

These habits can also be found within fake news and propaganda. In regards to fake news, Mandelbaum and Quilty-Dunn explored the beliefs of individuals who experienced cognitive load. In one of their examples, they explained one of Gilbert's studies which involved participants attending to a televised Fox News report but were instructed to just focus on the crawl at the bottom of the screen. In these experiments, the cognitive load for participants was high because of the excess amount of stimuli that they ingested from the broadcast. In order to focus solely on the crawl, they would have to effectively ignore what the anchor was saying, the graphics and information being promoted on the screen.

These experiments proved that it is incredibly difficult to focus our attention on one subject when under cognitive load. Additionally, it was concluded that participants would consume and accept information even if they were unconscious of doing so. "And again, unattended information processed under load is unlikely to be rejected. We might have no conscious inkling at all what sorts of information (or misinformation, as the case may be) we are parsing...we simply won't notice that we are reflexively parsing the crawl" [when attending to the anchor's face] (Mandelbaum, Quilty-Dunn, 49). Under the Spinozan theory, it seems to be the case that while ingesting this information, consciously or unconsciously, we are accepting the information. If the Spinozan model is correct, then this could potentially eradicate the need for potential defeaters or a less severe outcome would be to modify the condition of awareness to permit unconscious and unaware acceptance.

This method of cognitive load can surely be used in order for individuals, media outlets, politicians, etc. to achieve a certain end. A takeaway from the Fox News experiment is the fact that if someone or a group wants to change the opinions of another, then they can simply bombard them with many opinions they want them to believe simultaneously but instruct them to

do their best to only attend to one.[33] In doing so, the influenced individual will make a conscious effort at attending to one part of the newscast but will also be unconsciously parsing information that will be stored in their cognitive system. With this in mind, it can also be concluded that if someone wanted to just focus on one thing of importance, it would be best if they did not have any distractions. In doing so, they would increase their chances of making a rational decision or conclusion based on their preference.

From these experiments, we can make some assumptions with how our mental system digests propaganda. It seems likely that if individuals are experiencing resource depletion, stress or cognitive load, then the easier it is for propaganda to take root. Whether propaganda, and other forms of information targeted to influence is obvious or not, Mandelbaum and Quilty-Dunn explore how information is cognitively retained even if it is explicitly false.

In one experiment they recalled from Johnson and Seifert (1994), participants were told that a fire was caused by flammable materials inside of a closet. Afterward, the participants would read a following statement of correction which reports there were no flammable materials inside the closet. In this study, it was shown that even though participants were given information that should have updated their belief about the fire, they still held both of the propositions even though they were contradictory.

This experiment illustrates the level of adhesiveness that misinformation plays on the cognitive system. If the Spinozan theory is correct, there is a warranted level of concern that follows with our ability to discern and revise our epistemic statuses. It seems to me that under

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[33] To counter this idea, brainwashing skeptic Hugo Mercier denies and downplays the existence of propaganda and brainwashing. He argues that an individual's default position is a close-minded one; someone has to actively learn and participate in being more open-minded. Although I do not sympathize with Merecier's sentiments, his viewpoint does support the Cartesian mental system.

this view, humans are easily malleable and subject to negative consequences such as involuntary confessions, adoption of fake news or disinformation and propagandistic ideals.

Although there is much support by philosophers and psychologists for the Spinozan procedure, I will posit a problem central to the theory and argue in favor of the Cartesian procedure with the usage of defeaters. Before I begin, I would like to mention that considering the evidence for the Spinozan procedure, it will be difficult to combat. However, it is my intention to adequately defend Descartes' theory through a conscious effort of asserting that our mental systems do not have such pessimistic consequences as is evident in the Spinozan procedure.

I will begin by noting a dominant theme throughout the argument for the Spinozan procedure. As seen in the experiments aforementioned, it is clear that when subjects undergo resource depletion and cognitive load they digest information automatically whether or not they are conscious of doing so.[34] Even though our day-to-day life is saturated with stimuli fighting for our attention, there are, of course, instances where we consciously or at least attempt to attend to one thing at a time.[35]

Mandelbaum and Quilty-Dunn mentioned that even when we are attentive to one thing, like a lecture, our mind often wanders which breaks our attentiveness. "Although this type of self focus is not mandatory, mind-wandering itself is borderline inevitable. And when our minds wander, we disable our ability to reject the information we hear (or see), because our focus is elsewhere" (50). As I am guilty of mind-wandering during lectures or conservations with friends,

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[34] Instances of possible defeat.
[35] It should be noted that this does not go against the Spinozan theory. It is my aim here to suggest the system that best aligns with instances of conscious attention is Cartesian.

this appears to be a valid concern.[36] However, in all other instances expressed by Gilbert, Mandelbaum and Quilty-Dunn, the degree of cognitive load has been substantially different.

It seems to me that in their experiments, I would find it doubtful that participants placed much of any real epistemic weight on whether there were flammable materials or not. They are aware that it is an experiment but it does not play an important factor when it comes to their identity or appears to be a threat to their beliefs. Nicolas Porot and Eric Mandelbaum highlighted this issue within their work "The science of belief: A progress report".

The psychological immune system is the mental system's way of protecting itself just as our immune system protects our health when foreign or destructive elements sneak into the body. "For beliefs we self-identify with, belief updating is dictated by a *psychological immune system*, where counterattitudinal information is seen not just as any new evidence, but instead as a deep psychological threat" (Porot and Mandelbaum, 7). Under this umbrella, it seems that if the participants had strong beliefs about fires, closets and flammable materials, then there may have been a different outcome. It seems that experiments that would better challenge the foundational beliefs of participants may reveal a more Cartesian procedure because agents would genuinely care and be quite attentive when protecting their identity.[37]

As revealed in Porot and Mandelbaum's work, when counterevidence of a belief is presented to an agent, the agent's psychological immune system activates which actually increases the subject's belief toward the proposition in question (Porot and Mandelbaum, 8). Inversely, when subjects are given information that supports their view further, their justification is amplified. In "What Happened on Deliberation Day", Cass R. Sunstein, Reid Hastie and David

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[36] This is another reason why I claimed earlier that attending to a potential defeater continuously would be exhausting. If it was necessary to continuously attend to it, then we would fail more often than not and the process would repeat itself.

[37] This could be exemplified through peer disagreements. If an agent finds the topic of disagreement to be at the core of their identity, then a Spinozan theory would be too risky.

Schkade found that when like-minded individuals are grouped together, they actually become more polarized (Sunstein, et al., 2007). In both instances, it could be argued that subjects were not under cognitive load and exhibited high levels of attention as the issues discussed were core to their beliefs, self-identity and social-identity.

When information poses a threat to our psychology or identity, it may feel to us that most, if not all, of our attention is focused on combating and minimizing that threat. In these situations, it seems that our mental system takes a more Cartesian approach. Imagine two undergraduates, Chris and Claire, are having a debate over the existence of God and neither will be persuaded by the other. Claire is an avid Christian and has been devoted to the faith since her youth. Chris, on the other hand, is not and is an atheist. If we were to suppose the Spinozan procedure is correct, then every instance Chris or Claire disavowed the other's view, then they would each comprehend and accept the proposition simultaneously.[38] To refer to Gilbert, "a Spinozan listener who comprehends a denial should momentarily believe the very state of affairs that he or she is being instructed not to believe" (Gilbert, 113). After doing so, then they would be able to reject the information and continue in the debate.

If the Spinozan theory is true in that agents believe and accept simultaneously with comprehension, then this could create issues within one's psychology and, in this case, the ability to hold a belief. If Chris were to say "God does not exist", the Spinozan theory demands that Claire also believes the proposition. However, it is inconsistent for an agent to believe P and not P. Does this mean that Claire no longer believes in the existence of God? Surely not, but then what would we make of Spinoza's account?

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[38] For textual reference, "A Spinozan system should accept another's implicit self-description as part of the comprehension of the other's action and should subsequently unaccept that self-description only if the system has both the time and energy necessary to do so" (Gilbert, 112). For the Spinozan, acceptance and comprehension go hand-in-hand other than there being some sort of initial acceptance and later comprehension. In other words, the two cannot be separated.

A possible answer is found within the discussion of debate storage where Porot and Mandelbaum discuss the theory of fragmentation which stipulates that the storage of beliefs is fragmented. In this system, agents are able to hold opposing beliefs in virtue of them being separated. Porot and Mandelbaum argued that "fragmentation can explain inconsistent beliefs while allowing our belief system to scaffold rational behavior" (Porot and Mandelbaum, 6). Although this may be a compelling solution, fragmentation still does not seem to fix Claire's problem. In fragmentation, it seems that a belief is held for longer than a moment of comprehension and could even be held long-term.

Let's stipulate that Claire's theology does not allow its believers to be "lukewarm" or "on the fence." In instances of fragmentation, which attempts to solve the Spinozan problem, it would allow for agents to believe P and not P. For Claire, her desire to abide by the religious principles would thus be undermined by a Spinozan mental system.

Assuming the Cartesian procedure is correct in this example, Chris and Claire would be able to debate the existence of God without believing a proposition until they chose to accept it. For Claire, who arguably has more at stake spiritually, this is good news. She is able to comprehend the information provided by Chris without immediately accepting it. In addition, it should follow that an agent who hears the inverse of their belief could reject it just as easily as Spinoza assumes is the case for acceptance. For some individuals, it seems the negation of a proposition they believe is just as automatic in processing as hearing the affirmative.

With this example, I will now introduce additional support through the usage of epistemic defeaters. In the case of Chris and Claire and assuming the Cartesian procedure, they will inevitably hear propositions that they can either accept or reject. If Chris and Claire are open to epistemic and belief revision, meaning they are not infallibilists nor chronic rejectors of new

information, then it seems that their discussion will provide an influx of potential defeaters if they were to actively attend to those propositions. To redefine, epistemic defeaters are instances in which information can undermine, override or interfere with the justification someone has for a belief. In the case of Chris and Claire, propositions and evidence could all potentially defeat either's justification for a belief and, if strong enough, could replace a belief. When considering the testimonies of others, Hume said that "no man of sense gives attention to these reports till he finds them confirmed by some greater evidence" (Hume, 126).[39] This brief statement from Hume supports the idea that we are capable of receiving information without assessing it until we are prepared or have received the proper evidence to do so.

Another example that I argue supports the Cartesian procedure would be Beddor's red wall example. Although Beddor wasn't explicitly arguing for the Cartesian procedure, his example is convenient for my purpose. Let's recall his example. Imagine Lori is staring at a red wall and adopts the belief that the wall is red (R). Soon after, Sal approaches her and states that she is actually perceiving a white wall that has red lights shining on it (RL). In this instance, I argue that Lori, given she is not lacking anything cognitively, has comprehended Sal's information and is able to either choose to accept it or reject it. In this case, Lori accepts Sal's testimony and is no longer justified in holding R. Shortly after this revision, Anne approaches her and claims that Sal is a compulsive liar and she should not believe anything he told her. Again, Lori is in the same situation where she can either accept or reject Anne's testimony. In this case, she accepts Anne's testimony and reinstates her previously held belief R (Beddor, 11).

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[39] The context of Hume's quote is within the discussion of testimonies from those who report miracles. Nonetheless, hesitation even for those we find reliable may be beneficial which I have previously argued.

This exploration in the nature of defeat and information-gathering illustrates how we are able to assess information without simultaneously believing it.[40]

Another distinction that I find to be in favor of the Cartesian procedure is the suspension of belief. Under the Spinozan procedure, the unity hypothesis "states that acceptance is part of comprehension, and therefore when one represents the meaning of a proposition, that proposition is immediately believed" (Gilbert, 115). In discussions of the unity hypothesis, comprehension necessarily entails belief even if an agent is hypothesizing a state of affairs. For instance, if Claire were to hypothesize the nonexistence of God, she would believe that state of affairs which she could later reject. However, I assert that Claire would not actually believe that God doesn't exist while simultaneously considering the proposition; she would simply be suspending her belief.[41] Suspending belief does not require Claire to make any sort of belief commitments or alterations to the beliefs she presently holds.

In addition, when we suspend our beliefs, we partake in imagining a world without them or a world with a different state of affairs. In doing so, we are not truly believing what we are supposing. Quite simply, we are supposing or *simulating* rather than believing. As in the debate on whether memory is simulational or not, simulating is never reality. When we remember an event, we are not truly reliving that event, we are simply simulating a previous experience.

Another example of this idea is seen through the suspension of disbelief when we read fiction, attend plays or watch movies. There is an unspoken assumption that when watching a movie, or other event, that we suspend our disbelief in order to dive into the world we are perceiving. It would seem absurd to suppose that Spinoza might find us to truly believe what we

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[40] It could be argued that Beddor's example only exemplifies that agents can revise their beliefs which the Spinozan theory does allow. However, we still run into the same issue of believing P and not P to which I have previously addressed.

[41] Suspending belief differs from hypothesizing because hypothesizing is the starting point for further investigation which one assumes to be true until proven otherwise whereas belief suspension just allows an individual to entertain other possibilities without ascribing to those possibilities.

perceive from these fictional escapes. It can be argued that just as we suspend disbelief with fiction and imagine ourselves as being involved in the narrative, we can also suspend belief and simulate testimonies and information without truly believing.

In this section, I have explored the differences between the Cartesian and Spinozan procedures and the consequences of each. Although the Spinozan procedure is compelling when we are under cognitive load or depleted of resources, the Cartesian procedure seems well-equipped to handle issues that are foundational to our beliefs and identity. By basing this discussion off of the nature of defeat, I have been able to illustrate how acceptance and rejection follow comprehension rather than simultaneous acceptance and belief. In a world where stimuli assaults us left and right, it seems to me to be in our best interest to wrestle with information when we are not distracted and can give the stimulus the proper attention it deserves. By utilizing a Cartesian system, we can enjoy a sense of optimism and relish in the fact that perhaps we are not as malleable as we thought we may be when assuming a Spinozan procedure.

Throughout this section, it was never my intention to impose any sort of normative pressure. However, it should be mentioned what this section revealed about our mental nature. As mentioned above, a Cartesian system should be our preference even though a Spinozan system may rest at our core. In efforts of holding ourselves to an epistemically responsible standard, it is in our interest to avoid cognitive load to the best of our abilities. This is a tall order to fill but perhaps if we cannot prevent this, it could be advised to inspect the information we took at that time in an effort of protecting our reliability, evidence, coherence, foundations, etc. when given the opportunity.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have provided a taxonomy of defeat that grants the implementation of many theories, excluding some. This account was designed to provide a general, yet extensive, understanding of defeat so competing theories can, at least, line up along the same starting point. Although the epistemic theories will race on different tracks, the necessity of acceptance should hopefully get everyone to the same finish line.

As I primarily referred to reliabilism throughout, the issues the theory has experienced with defeaters has hopefully been softened. The proposal succeeded in providing room for reliabilism to be focused on reliability in the face of defeat. Reliabilism has supposed that the existence of a defeater leads to an individual's justification for a belief being defeated which then leads to the conclusion that the system or process must have been unreliable. However, if reliabilists accept Alston's general proposal, "focusing on the reliability of the *ground* rather than the *process* of belief formation more aptly fits an externalist account of defeat by providing a fruitful externalist substitute for evidence" (Janvid, 709), coupled with the necessary condition of acceptance, they will be able to judge the information of reliable grounds rather than this process. This enables reliabilists to judge the grounds on which potential defeat rests rather than doubting the reliability of the system. Even if the reliabilists fail to be in the clear with this consideration, at least the taxonomy provides pre-acceptance protection for the theory.

The taxonomy has also solved some unwelcome consequences seen in peer disagreement. As we saw in Thune's paper, Christensen argued that peer disagreement can make partial justification loss but if the disagreement is an all-or-nothing case, then all justification is lost and both sides should suspend their belief. As seen with the case of Chris and Claire, his conclusion is not alluring. As we saw, mere disagreement and the mere existence of controversial

information would be exhausting in such a way such that individuals may be suspending their belief and losing all their justification more often than they get to hold on to it.

My account has answered this concern by letting disagreements and the existence of controversial information rest in a possible and/or potential stage of defeat which does not impose any sort of epistemic closure or stress on the subject. In Christensen's view, it would be safe to assume that the individuals are epistemically vulnerable.

In exploring the nature of defeasibility, I began the investigation by proposing a taxonomy of four different categories of defeat and explored their many stages before positing modifications to conditions and creating more in the process. Additionally, I have answered some highlighted concerns to which I adapted and clarified my account accordingly. Finally, I closed with the comparison of the two leading mental system competitors while addressing concerns these systems impose on defeasibility and preservation from a psychological and political lens.

In no way should the discussion of the nature of defeat stop here as it likely will not. There are many more issues of defeat not mentioned here, yet it is my hope that this taxonomy has provided epistemologists with a clear and vibrant account of the nature of defeat and all its facets and applications.

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