

Disagreement and alienation

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Abstract

This paper proposes to reorient the philosophical debate about peer disagreement. The problem of peer disagreement is normally seen as a problem about the extent to which disagreement provides one with evidence against one's own conclusions. It is thus regarded as a problem for individual inquiry. But things look different in more collaborative contexts. Ethical norms relevant to those contexts make a difference to the epistemology. In particular, we argue that a norm of *mutual answerability* applies to us when we engage in shared inquiry with others, and precludes us from treating one another's conflicting judgments as evidence relevant to the dispute. From this it follows that standard philosophical accounts of peer disagreement—e.g., the Equal Weight View and the Total Evidence View—presuppose that the disagreeing parties are in a sense alienated from one another. It's doubtful that such forms of alienated disagreement should be treated as the central case.

Imagine that, after careful consideration, you've formed an opinion on some matter of controversy. What sort of significance should you ascribe to the fact that others, whom you regard as your epistemic peers, disagree with you? Does this lack of consensus give you any reason to reconsider your conclusion or reduce your confidence in it?

In the recent literature on disagreement, the issue is usually formulated as a question about the extent to which you should adjust your confidence in your own view in light of the additional evidence provided by the fact of the disagreement itself. But it's worth beginning with a somewhat broader view of the philosophical problem posed by peer disagreement.

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The issue might be put in terms of two ideas, which seem to be in tension. On the one hand, it seems that a person's judgment must stand in a different rational relation to her own assessments of the evidence and arguments that bear on the matter under dispute than it does to the assessments of other thinkers. With respect to your beliefs, there is at least some sense in which it is your evaluation of the evidence that ultimately counts.¹ On the other hand, this difference can seem hard to square with the recognition that your judgment is, so to speak, one among others, equally real.² At least from a certain standpoint, it seems your own judgment should be regarded as no more likely to be correct than the judgments of your epistemic peers. And those who disagree with you are in symmetrical positions. Indeed, this is what the notion of an *epistemic peer* is meant to capture: They are initially just as likely to get things right as you yourself are. And in the event of a disagreement, their perspective on your conclusion is exactly on a par with your perspective on theirs.³ Even if, in fact, your view is the correct one, it hardly seems possible to cite *that* as justification for maintaining your view in the face of disagreement. To do so would be pure obstinacy. The difficulty is to articulate a satisfactory response to the symmetry between you and your fellow believers—to the fact that you are initially equally likely to get things right in the matter under dispute—that nevertheless acknowledges the special status of your own assessment of the relevant factors in working out what to believe.

In this paper, we will argue that, understood in this way, the problem of disagreement is not just the problem of assessing its evidential value for the parties involved. It is also, and more fundamentally, a problem about *when* it makes sense to respond to a person's judgment (whether your own or another person's) by considering what evidential value it might have. We will attempt to bring this out by considering the assumptions that the standard accounts have to make about the context of disagreement and the relations between those who disagree. Specifically, we will argue that the standard approaches depend on an understanding of disagreement as profoundly alienating—something that alienates us from our own convictions and from our fellow thinkers. This is a more radical position than the advocates of these approaches acknowledge. More importantly, whether or not it's a position we should accept is a question that can't be answered by considering what sort of evidence is provided by disagreement.

In what follows, we will argue, in §1, that one cannot treat one's own reasoning and judgment as evidence relevant to the question one is considering without exhibiting a problematic form of self-alienation. This, we claim, should cast doubt on the Equal Weight View of peer disagreement. We build on this conclusion to argue, in §2, that certain alternatives to the Equal Weight View—like Thomas Kelly's Total Evidence View—require a related form of interpersonal alienation between the parties to a disagreement. We argue for this, first, by considering the problem of disagreement in the context of *shared inquiry*. We show that you cannot regard another as someone with whom you are engaged in an activity of shared inquiry while regarding that person's disagreement with you as evidence to be taken into account. We then lay out our positive account of the proper response to disagreement within shared inquiry in §3—what we call the Interpersonal Reasoning View. On this view, the only evidence relevant to what you ought to believe is the original, first-order evidence. At the same time, we argue that there are distinctive, non-evidential reasons why, in such collaborative contexts, you may not simply dismiss the disagreement and stick to your guns. If these conclusions are right, then neither familiar “conciliationist” or standard “steadfast” views will offer an adequate account of the rational response to peer disagreement in contexts of shared inquiry. Finally, in §4, we draw some conclusions about how attention to the context of shared inquiry might lead us to rethink the problem of disagreement in other contexts as well. In particular, it will matter whether or not we think the attitude we ought to take toward others with

whom we disagree is of a sort that preserves the potential for engaging with them as epistemic agents—a question that is as much ethical as epistemological.

1 | SELF-ALIENATION AND THE EQUAL WEIGHT VIEW

Let's begin with the Equal Weight View. Here is a representative statement of the view:

When two individuals, who rationally regard each other as “epistemic peers”, and who are equally aware of each other's evidence, have a disagreement about some issue, they should both give equal weight to both of their opinions about that issue.⁴

The account derives much of its plausibility from reflection on examples. Consider the following, due to David Christensen:

After a nice restaurant meal, my friend and I decide to tip 20% and split the check, rounding up to the nearest dollar. As we have done many times, we do the math in our heads. We have long and equally good track records at this (in the cases where we've disagreed, checking with a calculator has shown us right equally frequently); and I have no reason (such as those involving alertness or tiredness or differential consumption of coffee or wine) for suspecting one of us to be especially good, or bad, at the current reasoning task. I come up with \$43; but then my friend announces that she got \$45 (2011, 2, cf. 2007, 193).

Christensen argues that, plausibly, he should give his friend's conclusion the same weight as his own. The fact that one of the conclusions is *his* doesn't, after all, speak in favor of his believing it rather than the conclusion of his friend. In light of this, he should think that the chance that he's right is roughly .5.

Of course, this in a way leaves out the calculation itself, which Christensen relied on for his original result. Let's suppose he took the total (\$71), and went through the following steps:

$$71 \div 10 = 7.1$$

$$7.1 \times 2 = 14.2$$

$$71 + 14.2 = 85.2$$

$$85.2 \div 2 = 42.6$$

Rounding up to the nearest integer, he concludes they should each pay \$43.

Now one might think that in this case Christensen could just appeal to this calculation in order to conclude that it is his friend who is mistaken, not him.⁵ Christensen argues, however, that this would be question-begging. The fact his friend came to a different conclusion puts Christensen's own calculations in doubt. It seems circular to appeal to those very calculations to resolve the

doubt. Accordingly, Christensen argues that the reasoning which the parties to a disagreement relied on in arriving at their initial conclusions must be set aside or “bracketed” when considering the epistemic significance of the disagreement itself.⁶ In particular, he argues for the following claim:

Independence: In evaluating the epistemic credentials of another’s expressed belief about p , in order to determine how (or whether) to modify my own belief about p , I should do so in a way that doesn’t rely on the reasoning behind my initial belief about p . (2011, 1–2)

In general, then, if you find yourself disagreeing with someone about what conclusion your evidence supports, what should determine your response, according to Christensen’s Independence doctrine, is not a matter of which conclusion the first-order evidence actually supports. Rather, it’s a matter of how independently likely it is that—setting aside the content of your view and your reasons for it—you, as opposed to the other person, will turn out to be correct. And if the two of you are epistemic peers, then (again, setting aside the content of your views) you have no basis for thinking that you’re any more likely to get it right than the other party. Hence, the Equal Weight View: you should suspend belief, or perhaps split the difference between the credences you each initially had in the relevant proposition.

There are various questions one might raise about Independence.⁷ But what we wish to bring out here is the sense in which it requires the subject to adopt an alienated stance toward her own judgment about what the (first-order) evidence supports in cases where there is disagreement about this. Responding to disagreement in the way the conciliationist account requires means regarding the fact that you take the available evidence to support a particular hypothesis as just a psychological fact about you. This is necessary because of the peculiar way in which your conviction as to what the evidence supports is to figure in your reasoning, upon learning of your peer’s disagreement. In reconsidering the question of whether p , you do not reason *from* your conviction that, for example, p is the best explanation of the observable evidence. Rather, you reason from your *attribution* of this conviction to yourself, together with an assessment of how reliable your take on the evidence is likely to be, given that your peer is inclined to believe p is false.

It’s clear that this form of reasoning cannot be the norm. In the absence of disagreement, you would not ordinarily reason: “I believe e indicates the truth of p ; if I (who am fairly reliable about such matters) believe e indicates the truth of p , then e probably does indicate the truth of p ; so, p is probably true.” Obviously, you could not *always* reason in this way. If you are going to reason at all, at some point you must *avow* your conviction about what the evidence supports—that is, you must actually draw the conclusion, as opposed using it to formulate a new premise stating the probability that your hypothesis is correct, given your conviction that it’s what the evidence supports.

But it’s not just that the form of reasoning here is non-standard. Insofar as your reasoning does take this higher-order form, the self-ascription that serves as your starting point—namely, that you take the evidence to support p —no longer embodies your answer to the question of what the truth is likely to be. This is not, however, because you have come around to the view that the evidence does not in fact support the conclusion that p . (If that were the case, you would have already changed your mind; your old view would be irrelevant.) Instead, you take your conviction to be relevant, but merely as an additional piece of information that itself provides some evidence that bears on the question you’re trying to answer. In this sense, you don’t treat your judg-

ment that the evidence supports p as an element of the rational point of view from which you are attempting to determine whether p is the case. On this view, when you encounter disagreement, the appropriate relation to your own convictions about the matter under dispute is an alienated one.

2 | TWO REPLIES

Have we perhaps exaggerated things? The sort of alienation described in section 1 seems would seem to be in the offing only because we characterized the conciliationist view as requiring you to treat your current convictions as evidence. That would require being convinced that the substantive evidence indicates the truth of p , while at the same time regarding the truth of p as an open question. But while it might be admitted that such a state would involve a kind of dissociation, one could object that it misrepresents what the conciliationist account calls for. You need not rely on your current assessment of the evidence, only the fact that you took the evidence to support a certain conclusion *prior* to learning of the disagreement.

The problem with this response is that it's unclear why the fact that you used to think the evidence supported p should be relevant at all, unless you are, to some extent, *still* inclined to think this. It's implausible that you could totally divorce the rational significance of the (past) psychological fact that you formed a belief in p from your (current) assessment of the grounds on which you held that belief. To justify giving *any* weight to your own view of the matter (even if no *more* weight than you give to your peer's view) your initial assessment of what the substantive evidence supports must in some sense remain intact.

Indeed, according to the Equal Weight View, you are not supposed to bring your awareness of the disagreement directly to bear on your thinking about what the totality of your evidence indicates—as though it were an additional datum that might turn out to be more or less difficult to square with your original hypothesis. Your view that the evidence supports p is not portrayed as directly challenged or overturned. (Again, if it were, it's hard to see how you could justify giving your former conviction the significance the Equal Weight View assigns it.) Instead, you are assumed to stand in a different relation to your assessment of the (first-order) evidence. You don't reconsider that assessment so much as put it at arm's-length—regarding it third-personally, as an “inclination” to believe p on the basis of the available evidence.⁸ For the proponent of the Equal Weight View, discovering that someone disagrees with you ought to first alienate you from your convictions; it's only from that alienated vantage point that you'll see you cannot rationally maintain them.

But now we should ask: is this really a problem for the Equal Weight View? A powerful motivation for the Equal Weight View lies in this: We all know that we're fallible. And we all know that the fact that a particular opinion is our own is not the kind of thing that could, in and of itself, justify thinking it's more likely to be correct than someone else's. In light of these facts, it can seem that stepping back from our beliefs and taking a more objective, impersonal attitude toward them is precisely what is called for. A certain dissociation from our inclinations to draw this or that conclusion, despite others' disagreement, looks like exactly the right posture to adopt.

Consider the following dramatization of this line of thought offered by Earl Conee:

Suppose that at first, each of us is given the following information about a proposition, X . The truth-value of X is in longstanding dispute among experts, with some accepting X and some rejecting it. Their cognitive abilities on the topic of X are on a par and they are quite well informed regarding the issues concerning X . They are familiar

with the reasons on which each side bases its position. These reasons—at least the communicable ones—have been thoroughly aired.

Clearly, from just this information we get no better reason to think that a proposition so characterized is true than to think that it is untrue....

Next we are each informed that [one of the experts] who affirms *X* is oneself. Does this give us better reason to affirm *X* than to deny it?

No. Just learning the identity of the expert affirming *X*... makes no difference. (2009, 315)

Conee's dramatization makes vivid the fact that, from an objective or impersonal point of view—that is, from a point of view that abstracts from the fact that a belief is yours—your belief has no more claim to being true than does your epistemic peer's. Considered from an objective or impersonal point of view, the fact that you believe *p* is just an empirical psychological fact that stands as a more or less reliable indicator of whether *p* is true. The effect of taking an objective or impersonal view of your beliefs and the beliefs of your epistemic peers is thus to now treat these beliefs as evidence pulling in opposite directions.

On closer inspection, however, we can see that this line of thought actually just presupposes that, upon encountering someone who disagrees with you, your relation toward your own convictions must take the alienated form described above. It doesn't lend any independent support to the idea that this is the right response. For the question of whether it's reasonable to give more weight to your own view, on the ground that it's yours, already assumes that you may relate to your own judgment merely, to borrow a formulation from Richard Moran, as the judgment of "someone who also happens to be [you]."⁹

Notice, for example, that Conee's argument depends on the intuition that, as you learn the facts about the disagreement he describes, you will not be in any better position to affirm or deny *X*. But let's consider now the point at which you're asked to imagine learning that you are one of these experts. How should we imagine that you learn this? There are two different ways to do so. The first is this: You learn that you are one of the experts, because you learn what *X* is. For example, you learn that *X* is the proposition that free will is compatible with determinism—and since, by supposition, you are a leading expert on the issue, you know of, and find convincing, many reasons that support your view, even though you also know that there are other experts who disagree. But if you learn that you are one of the experts by learning what *X* is, and you already know that some of your epistemic peers disagree with you, and why they do, it would be natural for you to think that you *do* have better reason to affirm the view you actually hold than to deny it. At any rate, if you did think this, it would not be because you take your own beliefs to constitute better evidence than your peers'. It would be because you take the arguments in favor of the view to be better than those against it. Hence, Conee's dramatization, if it is to clearly support the Equal Weight View, cannot be understood in this way.

The other way to understand Conee's dramatization is to imagine that you learn that you are one of the experts who believes *X* *without* learning what *X* is. And then we are asked to consider whether the mere fact that it is you who believes *X* gives you any reason to believe that *X* is true—without knowing the reasons in light of which you believe *X* and without even knowing what *X* is. But why would we think that our conclusions here should generalize to ordinary cases of peer disagreement? Conee's scenario provides a model for thinking about the significance of disagree-

ment only if we assume the very thing that is at issue—namely, that learning that a peer disagrees with you undermines the distinctively first-personal way you normally relate to your own beliefs, along with their grounds, as integrated elements of a more-or-less unified rational point of view.

The challenge thus remains, for a proponent of the Equal Weight View, to explain why learning that someone you respect disagrees with you on some topic should produce this kind of alienation from your own reasoning and judgment. Without some justification for this, the usual arguments in favor of the Equal Weight View don't get off the ground.

Perhaps this stance toward your own judgment is necessary if you're to avoid begging the question in some way against those with whom you disagree? Christensen, recall, cites this as the motivation for Independence.¹⁰ The thought is that the disagreement confronts you with the possibility that your own assessment of what the evidence supports is misguided, and it would be illegitimate to rely on that very assessment to dismiss this possibility. Insofar as you take seriously the possibility that your reasoning about what the evidence supports is mistaken, it might seem that you are forced to step back from that reasoning and adopt the more external, alienated stance that we've argued the Equal Weight View requires.

We won't be in a position to fully address this response until we've laid out the argument of the next section. For now, what we want to point out is this is a fairly extreme view about what it takes to avoid question-begging forms of reasoning in the face of disagreement. For it often seems perfectly legitimate for a person to address the possibility that she's made a mistake in her reasoning by reflecting on the content of the reasoning itself. Indeed, the question of whether your reasoning is mistaken is, from your own point of view, normally treated as more or less equivalent to the question of whether the evidence really does support your view—is *p*, for instance, really the best explanation of the data or might there be alternative explanations that are just as plausible? This may not always be the case. For instance, if you have reason to believe that your ability to think straight is thoroughly impaired—either in general or about some particular topic—then reflection may be ruled out as a method for rationally resolving your doubts.¹¹ But there's a big difference between taking seriously the possibility that you've made some mistake and taking seriously the possibility that you're incapable of thinking clearly about some issue.

If the argument of this section is right, then insofar as the Equal Weight View requires that we view our own beliefs as evidence bearing on the truth of the propositions believed, it presupposes a form of alienation from our beliefs and the reasons for which we hold these beliefs. We've seen no good reason why encountering a disagreement with someone—even someone we regard as an epistemic peer—should lead us to dissociate from our beliefs in this way. In what follows, we will argue that an alternative approach—according to which we are to treat the fact that others disagree with us as additional evidence to be considered alongside our original evidence—while avoiding the kind of self-alienation we've been discussing, involves a related and problematic form of interpersonal alienation.

3 | SHARED INQUIRY

Let's turn now to a more moderate approach to peer disagreement. We will focus on Thomas Kelly's Total Evidence View.¹² According to this view, the first-order (non-psychological) evidence that is the basis for the parties' initial views remains relevant to the response that's called for in light of the disagreement. Thus, Kelly rejects Independence. This doesn't mean that, if you respond correctly to the first-order evidence, you may necessarily stick with your view and dismiss the other person's belief as mistaken,¹³ That someone whom you would expect to form accurate

views on some matter has arrived at a different conclusion is itself evidence (albeit, perhaps misleading evidence) that needs to be taken into account. And according to the Total Evidence View, the rational response to the first-order evidence, combined with the higher-order evidence—that is, the other party's judgment about what that evidence supports—will not always be the same as the rational response to the first-order evidence alone. But on the most natural interpretation of the account, what is set against the evidence provided the other's belief is are the considerations that constitute the substantive evidence, as opposed to the fact that you *take* the substantive evidence to support a particular conclusion (a fact about your psychology). On this interpretation the Total Evidence View avoids the worries about self-alienation discussed in the previous section.

What this implies, though, is that a person's beliefs have an evidential significance for her peers that they do not have for that person herself. Now, there is nothing inherently mysterious about such believer-relativity of evidence. It frequently happens that, because of different background knowledge and experience, something that for one person will constitute evidence in support of a certain proposition won't for another. We will argue, however, that the particular type of believer-relativity required by, for instance, the Total Evidence View, does present a problem in normal contexts of peer disagreement.

We can begin by noting that the picture in the background of Kelly's account seems to be fundamentally one of separate individuals, each announcing their conclusions and then retreating again to work out for themselves what to think in light of the conflicting announcements of their peers. Consider the case he uses to motivate the claim that disagreement with one's epistemic peers can provide evidence that's relevant over and above the first-order evidence on which their beliefs are based.¹⁴

Within the mathematics community, there is substantial and longstanding interest in a certain mathematical conjecture. (Call it The Conjecture.) ... [O]ne day, the unexpected happens: alone in your study, you succeed in proving The Conjecture. ... Later, you show the proof to a colleague whose judgment you respect. Much to your surprise, the colleague, after examining the proof with great care, declares that it is unsound. Subsequently, you show the proof to another colleague, and then to a third, and then to a fourth. ... In each case, however, the judgment is the same: the proof is unsound. Ultimately, your proof convinces no one: the entire mathematical community is united in its conviction that it is unsound, and thus, that the status of The Conjecture remains very much an open question.¹⁵

Kelly's description of the case is striking. We are asked to imagine that the entire mathematical community disagrees with you about the soundness of your proof. But we are not asked to imagine any reasons offered for their disagreement. When your colleagues declare your proof unsound, they walk away; they don't tell you *why* they think that it is unsound. Kelly's mathematical community consists of extremely terse naysayers.¹⁶

This is not what peer disagreement is normally like. If we consult colleagues about our mathematical proof, we expect them to give us reasons for their disagreement and not just a negative verdict. Of course, Kelly is free to stipulate the details of the case however he likes. The point is not that it's unrealistic; the point is that it's a case tailor made to fit an interpretation of the problem of disagreement as a problem that the individual parties confront separately. Indeed, the believer-relativity of the evidence provided by the disagreement ensures that each individual party to the disagreement in a sense faces a separate problem, concerning what he or she should believe in light of the disagreement. Each person faces a different problem about what to believe because

the total evidence that's relevant to one party is not the same as the evidence that's relevant to the others.

Consider, however, a different context in which disagreements may arise. For the image of private reasoners working things on their own, let's substitute a conception of shared inquiry and collaboration. In what follows, we will describe a certain ideal of shared inquiry and what we take to be its implications for how we ought to respond to the fact that an epistemic peer disagrees with us about the matter under investigation. Eventually, we will return to consider the significance of disagreements that arise outside of such collaborative contexts.

Two people who justifiably regard each other as epistemic peers may find that they disagree about the import of the evidence available to them. But this is normally the beginning, not the end, of their engagement with one another. People who disagree will normally try to explain to each other why they take the evidence to support one conclusion rather than another. They will try to convince each other of their views, to answer lingering doubts and rebut objections. They will try to understand and do justice to what might be true in the other's position. In short, *they will reason with each other* with the aim of arriving at a shared view of the subject matter under dispute. Berislav and White (2018).¹⁷

Suppose we take this collaborative spirit to characterize a particular disagreement between peers. You and I are trying to figure out who stole the jewels. You think it was the butler, I think it was the nephew. After having satisfied myself that you have not uncovered any clue that I was unaware of, and vice-versa, should I treat your belief as evidence that I am wrong—that the butler, not the nephew, is the thief? To do so would be basically opposed to the kind of shared reasoning by which two persons aim to arrive at a common understanding of the facts. That is because if I take the fact that you believe as you do to be a reason bearing on how confident I should be that the nephew as opposed to the butler is the culprit, I view you, as it were, as another clue, on a par with the footprints in the garden or the hammer used to break the glass.¹⁸ But, as we have seen, this is not how you will view yourself. You do not believe that the butler committed the crime *in light of the fact that you believe that he did, or even in light of the fact that you initially believed this before our disagreement came to light*. You believe that the butler committed the crime in light of whatever substantive considerations you take to support this conclusion.

You may, of course, try to convince me of your view. But given the point just made, it would not be reasonable or appropriate for you to offer, as something that should be taken into account in our shared deliberation, the fact that you, a fairly reliable investigator, believe, or initially believed, that the butler did it. Reasoning with another person in a spirit of collaboration precludes aiming to convince her on the basis of considerations that you do not accept as reasons for yourself. For, the point is not merely for us to arrive at the same conclusion, but to do so on the basis of common considerations. The mark of success here is that we are each able to truly report “We believe that so-and-so did it; and here's why we believe this...” And this requires that there is a shared set of considerations we both regard as relevant and sufficient to justify our conclusion. Since the fact that you believe the butler did it cannot belong to a set of reasons on the basis of which you and I together believe the butler did it, it is not something you can offer as a reason for me to believe the butler did it without undermining the aim of our shared inquiry.

Moreover, it is not just that *you* cannot in good faith *offer* the fact of your belief as evidence, in this context. Simply for me to rely on this fact, as an independently relevant factor in drawing my own conclusions, would for the same reasons undermine our shared deliberation. Whatever evidential value your belief might have for me, it won't constitute a reason you can share with me, and so it won't be a reason I can share with you. This suggests that I can either reason with you—and view you as a fellow inquirer aiming to get at the truth along with me—or I can reason

alone and view your psychology as another source of evidence, which will hopefully lead me to the truth. But I can't do both at once. (To echo Strawson's "Freedom and Resentment" (1962/2008), we can either take the participant or the objective view of the other.)¹⁹ Viewing your psychology as evidence that bears on the question at hand cuts me off from the type of *interpersonal* relation that is involved in shared inquiry—a relation in which the parties view themselves as answerable to one another.

Being prepared to engage with and take seriously another's reasons for thinking what she thinks is fundamentally opposed to regarding her convictions as states of an organism, bearing more or less regular relations to other features of the natural world, and hence as items to glean information from. To the extent, therefore, that you and I are working out together who committed the crime, neither of us will treat the evidence provided by the other's belief as relevant to our question.

4 | THE INTERPERSONAL REASONING VIEW

On the model of shared inquiry presented in the previous section, it is a mistake for the parties to consider, as evidence, facts about what they believe. If you and I are together trying to work out the answer to the question of whether *p*, then our aim will be to reach consensus on some conclusion concerning whether *p* is true, as well as on the rational basis for that conclusion. If I'm rational, then I will not, in the course of such an inquiry, take the fact that I formed the belief that *p* to constitute further evidence for *p*'s truth, over and above the substantive evidence I relied on in forming that belief in the first place. Given this, if you were to adjust your attitude toward *p* on the grounds that my belief in *p* is some indication that *p* is true, it would prevent us from realizing the aim of arriving at a shared attitude toward *p* on shared grounds.

But this does not mean that our divergent attitudes are irrelevant to our inquiry or that either of us should remain steadfast in our views. Those psychological facts are a reflection of the fact that our shared inquiry has not yet concluded. That an epistemic peer disagrees with us shows that we have not yet come to a conclusion together and that our shared inquiry is ongoing. In order, then, for us to continue the process of reasoning together despite our initial disagreement, our only option is to proceed by way of joint reconsideration of the *substantive* evidence—the evidence on the basis of which each of us drew our initial conclusions.

Our proposal thus has two distinct components. First, in the context of shared inquiry, the only evidence that's relevant to the question of how confident the parties to a disagreement should be that their view of the matter is correct is the first-order, substantive evidence; the fact that the other disagrees is not itself evidence that is to be treated as relevant to the matter under dispute. Second, awareness of the disagreement calls for joint reconsideration of the first-order evidence.

Here it's worth returning to Christensen's doctrine of Independence. Recall that this amounted to a requirement to bracket the first-order evidence in working out the rational response to a disagreement. We've just argued that, when engaged in shared inquiry, we need, on the contrary, to bracket the *psychological* evidence—the facts we know about what each of us believes or initially believed before our disagreement came to light. Otherwise, we would undermine the possibility of shared inquiry. Assuming, then, that shared reasoning among epistemic peers is a rational response to initial disagreement, we must be rationally permitted to regard the substantive evidence as sufficient—despite our disagreement—to justify some view about the matter under investigation, and thus to regard the psychological evidence as irrelevant to the ultimate

justification of the proper attitude to take. At least this is so as long as we're rationally permitted to pursue our shared inquiry together.

We can now more fully explain why the violation of Independence is not necessarily question-begging. One may, for instance, appeal to one's initial reasoning if and when it serves to expose flaws in the other's reasoning or to rebut countervailing considerations the other had taken to be decisive. But this is a far cry from a question-begging dismissal of what the other believes. On the contrary, it's an expression of the sense in which one holds oneself and one's peer to be answerable to one another for what each believes. Indeed, in such a context, we may think that one owes the other an account of why one is inclined to believe she is mistaken—an account that must address her reasons for taking the position she takes, rather than appealing to dispute-independent evidence concerning your reliability and competence. Though it violates Independence, there's no reason to think this way of responding to disagreement will automatically beg the question against the other's view.

We turn now to the second component of the view—the idea that disagreement calls for joint reconsideration of the (substantive) evidence. It might be thought that there is a kind of instability in the way we have so far articulated and defended the Interpersonal Reasoning View. On the one hand, we want to say that the discovery that one disagrees with a peer requires reconsidering what the available evidence really supports. On the other hand, we want to say that the fact that a peer disagrees with one's view about a particular issue should not itself be treated as evidence that one's view is incorrect. But if the fact that the other disagrees should not be taken as a further bit of evidence, which calls into question one's initial conclusion, why should any reconsideration of one's view be called for?

Here is why: As long as the disagreement persists, and as long as one remains engaged in reasoning with the other, one has to regard the arguments mooted so far as not yet settling the question under dispute. The disagreement does then provide a reason for suspending judgment. But the significance of the disagreement is interpersonal and, in a broad sense, ethical rather than evidential. The disagreement is relevant to one's doxastic state, but this is because it bears on whether and how to bring one's deliberations to a close, not because it bears on what the content of one's conclusion should be.

The key is to recognize that there are certain kinds of reasons to suspend judgment that do not constitute evidence.²⁰ To say this is not to endorse anything like pragmatic reasons for belief. Certain considerations may provide good reason to refrain from drawing a conclusion without indicating one way or the other whether the proposition in question is likely to be true. To give one sort of example, reasons of this kind can arise in cases where one knows one is soon to acquire some crucial bit of evidence, though one does not know which conclusion it will favor. Consider, for instance, a case of Mark Schroeder's (2012). You go to your doctor to have a growth on your skin checked. Your doctor does a biopsy and sends it to be tested. You have had several such skin spots biopsied in the past and each time they have turned out to be benign. Since the base rates for a bad outcome are low, you have excellent grounds for believing this one is benign as well. But, Schroeder argues, "it makes sense to wait on the test results before concluding that it is really benign. The fact that the lab is soon going to report its results isn't evidence that [your] skin spot is benign, and it isn't evidence that it is not benign, but it is a reason to not yet make up [your] mind as to whether it is benign" (2012, 471).

In a similar way, discovering that someone with whom you are engaged in shared inquiry disagrees with you is a reason to revisit your belief and the reasoning that led to it—not in virtue of having been provided with evidence against what you believe, but because the proper attitude to take toward a collaborator demands that you be willing to consider and take account of her rea-

sons for disagreeing with your conclusion. Recall our account of why shared inquiry is focused on the substantive evidence in light of which you and your interlocutor have arrived at your initial conclusions. Shared inquiry is governed by a norm of mutual answerability. You are answerable to one another for your judgments in that each is expected to take into account and attempt to address the reasons the other offers for what she thinks. But this also means that, unless you are open to the possibility of adjusting your level of confidence in light of those reasons, you fail to respect your interlocutor as a partner with whom you are engaged in a cooperative pursuit of the truth. This suggests a sense in which the significance of peer disagreement in shared inquiry is *ethical*, rather than *evidential*. Disagreement confronts us with the ethical requirement to keep an open mind—as long as we remain party to shared inquiry.

5 | MUTUAL ANSWERABILITY OUTSIDE OF SHARED INQUIRY

We have argued that shared inquiry is guided by a standard of mutual answerability. The fact that collaborators engaged in shared inquiry are subject to such a standard requires that their attitudes toward disputed propositions be based only on the first-order (non-psychological) evidence. Shared inquiry cannot therefore proceed where there is disagreement in the way that the Equal Weight View or the Total Evidence View would imply. At least in this context, it seems we are not rationally required to take the psychological facts about what we and our fellow inquirers initially believed as evidence that bears on the substantive questions under dispute.

At the same time, to steadfastly refuse to reconsider your view, dismissing your interlocutor's view as mistaken, would fail to respect the other as an equal participant in shared inquiry. The fact that consensus is an aim internal to the activity of shared inquiry constrains the parties to suspend judgment until they can arrive at a conclusion together.

But, of course, many of our disagreements with epistemic peers arise outside of the special collaborative contexts we've been discussing under the heading of shared inquiry. We disagree with people who are not in communication with us, for instance, or who are already dead. In other cases, disagreement may persist to the point that shared inquiry breaks down. One might wonder, then, how the Interpersonal Reasoning View can account for cases outside of shared inquiry. Indeed, isn't persistent disagreement exactly the sort of breakdown that leads to individualistic inquiry in which you have to take into account the psychological evidence?

Our argument in this section will be that even outside of shared inquiry, a standard of mutual answerability normally holds, which affects how we should regard others, as well as ourselves, in disagreement. The discussion of disagreement in the special context of shared inquiry suggests a more general distinction between two ways of understanding the nature of disagreement for the purposes of assessing its normative significance. We can think of disagreement primarily as a relation between *persons* (you disagree with me), or we can think of it primarily as a relation between the *beliefs* (or degrees of belief) held by different persons (what you believe is inconsistent with what I believe).²¹ In particular, you take your relation to the other person as primary insofar as you regard the disagreement as a moment in an ongoing intellectual activity or endeavor you are both engaged in. This need not be an instance of shared inquiry, per se, with its distinctive emphasis on securing consensus. The idea is more general. For, it will often make sense, even outside of robustly collaborative contexts, to situate our disagreements with other people within some broader epistemic project we see ourselves as part of, and in which it would make sense to reason or argue with each other over the proper way to understand some aspect of the world. Where this is the case, we are plausibly subject to a standard of mutual answerability.

Take the familiar fact of philosophical disagreement. Suppose you read a paper by David Lewis and, despite considerable efforts to engage with the arguments, you find the conclusion unconvincing. Of course, you recognize Lewis as an epistemic peer at least—indeed an epistemic superior. Nonetheless, even if your disagreement with Lewis persists, it seems hardly reasonable to revert at this point to the fact that it was Lewis who presented these arguments and, on this basis, revise your philosophical views. After all, in setting out his reasons for his position, Lewis meant to *thereby* be arguing for that position; he was not offering even implicitly the fact that *he*, a first-rate philosopher, was convinced by his arguments as itself an argument in favor of his conclusions. Moreover, as his readers, we see it as incumbent on us to consider how he could respond to our criticisms and to imagine the sorts of challenges he might have pressed against our conclusions. And this does not include the consideration that he, a first-rate philosopher, believed one thing and we, whatever sorts of philosophers we may be, believe other things. At least, this will be so insofar as we take ourselves to be engaged in the same, ongoing philosophical endeavor to which Lewis contributed. We would be changing the topic if, after considering all his arguments, we then started thinking about Lewis, the man himself, and looked to psychological facts about him and us to figure out what is true. Surely, he would balk at that. Indeed, just turn the tables: Imagine that, after you give a talk, someone responded by saying, “If you say so, then it is quite likely to be true.” This may be flattering, but, though favorable, it is *ad hominem*; it is not a form of philosophical engagement.

Consideration of philosophical disagreement shows that the standard of mutual answerability is in place in forms of inquiry that proceed on the understanding that the various parties are presenting *arguments* that are to be assessed as such. Richard (2018).²² In putting forward an argument, you take yourself to be answerable to others’ questions and criticisms and you expect others to either accept or rebut your arguments, without looking to your personal biography. If, as we have argued, psychological facts about the disagreeing parties cannot be put forward in a way that those parties could use in reasoning, then those facts are inadmissible as reasons in any argument. Indeed, they are inimical to the nature of philosophical argument.

(The Interpersonal Reasoning View could be regarded as a complement to non-reductive views in the epistemology of testimony. According to such views the epistemological significance of someone’s claim is not to be understood in terms of the evidential or predictive value of the fact that the person is making the claim, but in terms of an invitation to believe *the person*.²³ Such views are best understood as analyses of the epistemological import of the speech act of *telling*. Yet presumably if a non-reductive view about *telling* is correct, a non-reductive view about the speech act of *arguing* should also be correct. The view we put forward here is, precisely, such a view.)

Shared inquiry is thus not the only form of intellectual pursuit in which we take ourselves to be in principle answerable to one another for the views we hold. And this means there will be broader limits on the extent to which we may take estimates of how likely others are to form correct beliefs as the basis for our own beliefs. The point that our discussion of shared inquiry was meant to bring out, and which we now want to generalize, is that the epistemology of disagreement is not independent of the normative structure of our interpersonal relations. Our understanding of the norms governing our epistemic activity—including the standards of rational justification for belief and judgment—is not separate from how we understand our relations to other epistemic agents.

To recognize another as an epistemic agent is not just to ascribe to her some property or capacity, but, in part, to regard her as someone you can reason with—someone you can learn from, but also someone you can disagree with, not just in the sense you might disagree with the reading

of a thermometer, but in the sense that admits of the possibility resolution. (You can't resolve a disagreement with a thermometer; though you might become convinced its readings are accurate, *it* can't convince you of this.) In epistemology no less than in ethics, our encounters with persons, as persons, are categorically different than our encounters with objects, as objects.

In putting things this way, we mean to suggest a broadly Strawsonian position. Strawson famously draws a contrast between two very general, opposing attitudes we can take toward other people: a participant attitude and an objective attitude. The participant attitude characterizes our stance toward others within ordinary, interpersonal relations and interactions. As Strawson emphasized, it's the sort of attitude that is expressed in emotional responses such as gratitude and resentment. But it is also only insofar as we take up the participant stance that we engage others as fellow reasoners and at least potential audiences of our arguments—arguments we hope will convince them (and not just move them).

In contrast to the participant stance, we can approach other people as we would mere forces of nature—seeing them as to be “managed or handled or cured or trained,” as Strawson puts it in describing what he calls “the objective attitude” (1962/2008, 9–10). To take a wholly objective attitude toward a person is to oppose a conception of your relationship to that person as intelligibly governed by reciprocal expectations of mutual regard. And as we interpret it, it is also opposed to a conception of your relationship as one in which you view yourselves as answerable to one another for the things you do and think (at least where these are matters of common concern).

In other words, holding ourselves answerable to one another is part and parcel of the Strawsonian participant stance that we take towards others, (whether we are currently interacting with them or not).²⁴ The alternative to regarding ourselves as subject to a standard of mutual answerability is not individualistic inquiry but solipstistic inquiry—a stance from which others are not regarded as even potential fellow reasoners, but merely as objects from which we can glean information. But holding ourselves subject to this standard, we've tried to show, affects how we understand the significance of disagreements with our peers. Indeed, one could say in this vein that to disagree with someone (as opposed to disagreeing merely with what she thinks or says) is itself to adopt an attitude that presupposes and partly constitutes a participant stance.

6 | CONCLUSION

Let's return, then, by way of conclusion, to Kelly's example of the mathematical conjecture, which was meant to show that we sometimes need to adjust our views in light of evidence provided by peer disagreement. Recall the scenario: You've discovered a proof of the Conjecture, only to find that all your numerous colleagues reject it. However, none of them deign to give you any reasons for their disagreement. The first thing to say about this case is that, in merely disagreeing with you without giving reasons for their disagreement, they are, to put it bluntly, being *jerks*. They don't treat you with the respect you deserve. Now, it may be that, given the evident breakdown in your relations with your colleagues, you're forced to confront the question of what sort of evidence their attitudes and behavior provide vis-à-vis the soundness of your proof. But the point we want to emphasize is that registering your colleagues' dismissals as countervailing evidence relevant to the Conjecture becomes appropriate only against the background of this apparent estrangement from them. It is as much a response to this fact as to the fact that they do not agree with your conclusions. Kelly's scenario misrepresents the more fundamental problem we face as thinkers when we encounter others with whom we disagree. We need to rethink the problem lest we represent

disagreement as inherently alienating and thus overlook the essentially interpersonal nature of the majority of human inquiry.

POSTSCRIPT TO “DISAGREEMENT AND ALIENATION”

Stephen White died in 2021 unexpectedly and suddenly at age 38. The paper published here is the draft that we had at the time of his death. It does not contain any additions or changes, except for the correction of typographical errors. I would like to acknowledge the help and insight of many philosophers with whom we discussed the paper, and I regret not being able not to thank people by name.

This paper was in the works for a very long time. As became typical for my collaborations with Steve, it started out with a bad argument by me: I wrote a paper arguing that we should not relate to our beliefs as psychological facts, because we would be alienated from our beliefs and therein exhibit a failure of responsibility. My initial view was that beliefs, like decisions and promises, involve commitment, and whenever one regards one's commitment as a psychological fact, one exhibits a form of Sartrean bad faith.

With this initial view in hand, I boldly set out, in March 2016, to give a talk at Northwestern University. I presented my argument and, to put it mildly, crashed and burned. Baron Reed had a particularly elegant refutation of my view: He said that, in matters of belief, unlike with promises and decisions, commitment is not ‘for good times and bad’, but only ‘for good times’. When things go bad for a belief, we should let it go. More specifically, if we have reason to think that our belief is mistaken, we should suspend judgment, not hold on to the belief like we would hold on to a commitment in the face of temptation. The objection was clear and devastating.

As that seemingly endless discussion period was coming to an end, Steve was called on to ask the last question. In his usual manner, he charitably restated, at some length, the view I meant to be defending. He then said that he thought I was right that relating to our beliefs as psychological facts is a form of alienation. However, he suggested, the problem of alienation from belief is not a lack of commitment or a failure of responsibility, but an inability to engage in shared reasoning with others. He argued that *for us* our beliefs are not reasons to believe what we believe, and if others are engaged in shared reasoning with us, our beliefs are not reasons *for them* to believe what we believe, since those are not reasons that they could share with us. To look upon beliefs as psychological facts can, therefore, not be part of shared reasoning, and hence it precludes an interpersonal conception of disagreement.

At the end of Steve's question I felt deeply moved, intellectually and emotionally. In my response, I conceded the point and, immediately after the Q&A, asked Steve to be a co-author on the paper. This was the beginning of our friendship.

We rewrote the paper in much the way that he had suggested, and we submitted it to several journals. For about five years we tried to publish it, with no success. We felt misunderstood by reviewers, because we sought to question the premises on which the peer disagreement debate is conducted. However, reviewers typically took us to defend a position *in* the debate and found this position either unsatisfactory or unoriginal (or both).

In our last conversation before Steve's death, we decided that we should, as Steve put it, “get out of the disagreement business” and shelve the paper. We thought we would instead focus on the idea that shared reasoning involves mutual answerability. The dream—I can't say plan—was to write a book in which we would argue that other subjects figure in our thought in a categorically different way than objects, because they are potential partners in shared reasoning. Our account

would articulate the interpersonal relations that constitute shared reasoning in terms of mutual answerability, and it would then consider the implications for the epistemology of testimony, the ethics of belief, the possibility of doxastic wronging and, perhaps once again, the epistemology of disagreement. I still think that this book is a good dream.

The reason that I have taken the paper off the shelf now is that, upon Steve's death, several of his close friends and I have sought to make available his unpublished writings—and this piece is part of his body of work. I am deeply grateful to the editors of *Philosophical Perspectives* for offering to publish it. I very much like this paper, more so now than ever, and I am happy that it will find some readers. I hope some of them will be sympathetic and might find ways to articulate our thinking in a way that epistemologists will be more receptive to.

"Disagreement and Alienation" is the realization of years of philosophical conversation and friendship. Work on it has opened my eyes to the interpersonal dimensions of thought, and I continue to be struck by how deep the interpersonal goes. I feel this depth all the more through Steve's death. The paper is also a piece of philosophy that exemplifies what it argues for: it is a piece of shared reasoning. However, in this case, the shared reasoning did not involve much disagreement. Steve and I saw eye-to-eye. His death is the loss of a philosophical brother.

Berislav Marušić

ENDNOTES

¹ Cf. Enoch (2010).

² Echoing Nagel (1970).

³ There are different ways of explicating the notion of epistemic peerhood. We will rely on Elga's (2007) characterization, which is roughly that of someone who is initially (i.e., prior to discovering the disagreement) as likely to have the correct view of the matter under dispute as you are.

⁴ Schafer (2015). For defenses of the Equal Weight View or conciliationist views more broadly, see, for instance, Christensen (2007), Elga (2007), Feldman (2006). See Sidgwick (1907) for a precursor.

⁵ See Kelly (2005).

⁶ Christensen (2011).

⁷ For recent critical discussion, see Weatherson (2019), Ch. 12.

⁸ This is particularly clear if we imagine a case where you learn what your epistemic peer thinks before you have considered for yourself the evidence on which she has based her conclusion. If genuine disagreement is still a possibility—as it surely is—then it's possible that you'll judge the evidence supports a different conclusion. At the same time, if you're an adherent of the Equal Weight View, even as you recognize you are inclined to make this judgment, you won't endorse or identify with it.

⁹ Moran (2001), p. 63.

¹⁰ "The motivation behind the principle is obvious: it's intended to prevent blatantly question-begging dismissals of the evidence provided by the disagreement of others," (2011) p. 2. Cf. Elga (2007).

¹¹ It's noteworthy that Christensen often compares the epistemic significance of disagreement to the epistemic significance of finding out that you may have been given a drug that undermines, in ways that you may not be immediately aware of, your ability to perform logical deductions. Plausibly, discovering the latter will induce a certain amount of alienation from your own reasoning and judgment—and rightly so. See Christensen (2011), (2016).

¹² For a related view, see Lackey (2010).

¹³ As Kelly's earlier view, the Right Reasons View, implied. See Kelly (2005).

¹⁴ A case which he reports led him to abandon his earlier Right Reasons View.

¹⁵ Kelly (2010), p. 137.

¹⁶ Compare also Kelly's further discussion in (2010, 152-158 and 167-173).

¹⁷ Cf. Laden (2012) and Marušić and White (2018).

- ¹⁸ Craig (1990, 35) draws the distinction between regarding a person as an informant and regarding them as merely a source of information. We are here proposing to expand Craig's distinction slightly: The contrast is not just between seeing other people as sources of information and seeing them as informants, but between seeing other people as sources of information and seeing them as fellow reasoners.
- ¹⁹ See Marušić and White (2018) for further discussion.
- ²⁰ In a different context, this idea is of crucial importance for pragmatic encroachment views of knowledge and justification. See, for instance, Fantl and McGrath (2009) and Ross and Schroeder (2014). Moss (2018) extends the idea to ethical considerations in defending moral encroachment.
- ²¹ Again, this is intended to parallel the distinction, in the epistemology of testimony, between regarding a person as an informant versus a source of information. See Craig (1990); Moran (2018).
- ²² Moran (2005) stresses the importance of distinguishing the speech acts of arguing and telling.
- ²³ See especially Moran (2005; 2018), but also many others, including Hinchman (2005; 2014) and McMyler (2011; 2013).
- ²⁴ Consider, for instance, the contrast Strawson draws with the objectively attitude: "If your attitude towards someone is wholly objective, then though you may fight him, you cannot quarrel with him, and though you may talk to him, even negotiate with him, you cannot reason with him. You can at most pretend to quarrel, or to reason, with him" (1962/2008, 9).

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