

On Disagreement
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Introduction

Disagreement is a characteristic of everyday life. That is, in the course of our lives we encounter a wide variety of disagreements. Some disagreements are relatively shallow. We disagree about how to decorate the living room, and children argue about who was the last one to sit by the window in the car. At the same time, there are a great many deep disagreements, and they can be painful. It is not easy to be at odds with your family members about religious questions. Neither is it fun to disagree with your friend about what is right and wrong.

Unsurprisingly, this is a paper about disagreement. However, it is at heart a practical treatment of disagreement. We could speak of disagreement as an abstraction, but doing so would obscure the fact that disagreements are essentially lived. Our first impulse in disagreement is not to contemplate the phenomenon of “disagreement,” rather, it’s to ask one of a variety of questions: “Who’s right?” “Could I be wrong?” “How could she possibly come to that conclusion, since I’m obviously right?” “Should I argue with him? Ignore him?” Thus, although I will engage in a theoretical analysis of disagreement in the following, considering what kinds of phenomena disagreements are and drawing distinctions among them, my theoretical vein of inquiry intends to serve a practical purpose. We might say that this paper is a theoretically informed answer to the question, “What should I do about disagreement?”

Most succinctly, a disagreement is a relation between two persons whose beliefs are inconsistent. People disagree about various matters, and the content of their disagreements (what they are about) are sets of propositions; nonetheless it is *persons* who disagree, and not beliefs. In isolation from persons, the belief pair A and $\sim A$ is contradictory or inconsistent, but A and $\sim A$ do not figure in disagreement unless they are held by particular persons. In short, disagreement

has a two-fold nature. It is a noetic or epistemic phenomenon, since it involves two beliefs, but it's also a social phenomenon, since it occurs between persons.

In turn, the two-fold nature of disagreement will affect the practical orientation of my account. After all, any good recommendation for practice must attend to the nature of the thing being practiced. Since we disagree with persons about beliefs, a viable account of how to conduct oneself in disagreement must acknowledge both the epistemic and social aspects of disagreement. However, the fact that these two components cannot ultimately be broken apart does not prevent us from distinguishing them for the sake of analysis.

The division of this paper will follow this two-fold nature of disagreement. After examining disagreement itself and classifying various types of disagreements, I will turn to disagreement as an epistemic phenomenon, mining the epistemology of disagreement for normative claims that can be translated into guidelines for disagreement. For instance, I will consider two main approaches within the epistemology of disagreement, conciliationism and conservatism. Roughly speaking, the conciliationist account requires that the parties to a disagreement “split the difference,” whether splitting the difference entails resolving the disagreement or withholding assent about the subject matter of the disagreement. In contrast, conservative approaches to disagreement recommend that each party to a disagreement maintain her original belief, when resolution is not feasible. However, it is doubtful that the guidelines provided by the epistemology of disagreement are of much practical use, since they are too general for helpful application in disagreement and we lack direct control over our beliefs. Thus, the epistemological section of this paper closes with a consideration of relevant intellectual virtues. I identify firmness and humility as two virtues that can effectively shape our conduct in

disagreement. As an epistemic account, this half of the paper aims at fostering and protecting knowledge, through and in the face of disagreements.

After considering epistemological standards regarding disagreement, I turn to consider disagreement from a social perspective. My account emphasizes that disagreement occurs between *persons*, in which case it is worthwhile to investigate how we should live with and among those with whom we disagree. Unlike the epistemological account, on which knowledge is the good at stake in disagreement, on the social approach, friendship (or the possibility thereof) is the good at stake in disagreement. Here, I propose the virtue of openness, a social virtue relevant to disagreement. Finally, the thesis closes with a brief reflection on conversation. I consider conversation to be the ideal form of disagreement, since conversation represents the integration of social and epistemological concerns. In conversation, disagreement takes the form of friends pursuing truth together.

The Nature of Disagreement

Suppose two friends are eating dinner and arguing about health care. One of them, Sophie, is in favor of universal health care run by the government. The other, Ella, thinks that health care should be privatized. This is a paradigmatic disagreement, since it involves two persons, aware of each other, and aware that the other one holds an opposing belief.¹ In contrast, say that I am looking up health care on Wikipedia. One paragraph discusses various opinions regarding the best way in which to run a country's healthcare system. No doubt, this paragraph will mention the positions of Sophie and Ella, but in this case, there is no disagreement. Rather, we simply have two propositions that stand in opposition to each other. Without Sophie and Ella, there is no disagreement. Persons disagree. Propositions do not "do" anything.

¹ Here I suggest that disagreement occurs paradigmatically between two persons. In what follows, I will speak of disagreement as a phenomena that occurs between *two* persons, ignoring the question of what disagreement looks like when it occurs between more than two people, or across groups.

However, what if Sophie and Ella have just met, and they do not yet know the other's position on health care? Would we call this a disagreement? I will call this a dispositional disagreement, in contrast to the above case in which Sophie and Ella find themselves in a occurrent disagreement.² That is, Sophie and Ella disagree about health care, even if they are not aware of this disagreement. However, we can distinguish among the cases in which we are aware or unaware of a disagreement with the labels "dispositional" and "occurrent," the latter being the cases in which we are aware of the disagreement. For the remainder of this paper, I will speak simply of disagreements, although most will be occurrent disagreements. After all, when we are not aware that we are in some situation (i.e. disagreement), we do not ask how to conduct ourselves in that situation.

Here is a harder question: what if we confine the scenario to one person, Sophie. Say that Sophie is reading about healthcare on the internet and she comes across ideas that oppose her own. Is this a disagreement? I think it is. Sophie, unless she is exceptionally unintelligent, will infer that someone else holds this belief. Regardless of whether or not Sophie knows this person, this scenario involves a person (Sophie) discovering a belief that stands in opposition to her own, a belief that some other, albeit unknown, person holds. However, even if we say that this case is properly a disagreement, I would not describe it as a paradigmatic instance of disagreement. Consider, for instance, the difference between Sophie's response to Ella over dinner, and Sophie's response to Ella's position on the internet. In the former case, it will be obvious to Sophie that she is dealing with another person, and she will (hopefully) respond accordingly, with some degree of kindness and respect. On the other hand, in the latter case, it will require

² This distinction is analogous to a distinction within epistemology regarding beliefs. At any given moment, I actively assent to a very small portion of the total number of propositions to which I would assent, if pressed. Those propositions to which I actively assent are my occurrent beliefs, whereas those that I would assent to, upon reflection or other prompting, are my dispositional beliefs.

work on Sophie's behalf to keep the opposing position in context. The fact that Sophie has encountered a belief "divorced" from a person may lead her to dismiss the opposing belief.

Types of disagreement

Having seen that disagreement occurs between persons who hold opposing beliefs, we are now prepared to attempt a classification of disagreements. Why do we require this classification? Well, briefly consider two kinds of disagreement. Our first occurs between two adult siblings: one maintains that the worst ever family camping trip occurred during the summer of 1986. The other insists that the worst ever family camping trip most definitely occurred a summer later, in 1987. (In fact, they are both wrong. It occurred in 1989.) On the other hand, our disagreement between adult siblings might be of an entirely different sort: one advocates for non-violent resistance and is strongly opposed to military action. The other is less sure. On pragmatic grounds, she thinks that governments are justified in using military force in order to protect civilians.

It seems obvious to me that these two disagreements are of very different kinds. There is not much at stake when siblings disagree about the date of a camping trip, and they can probably resolve their disagreement with a glance at some old photos. On the other hand, disagreeing about the appropriateness of violence involves higher stakes, and is much less easily resolved. This suggests that I have some further work to do, some classifying work, in order to have a grasp on the phenomena of disagreement. As I have already noted, practical investigations cannot be divorced from theoretical investigations entirely, at least not without ill effects. If I assume that a paradigmatic disagreement is like the first sort we examined above – disagreements are always like our adult siblings who disagree about when their family camping trip occurred – I'll be giving extremely narrow recommendations about how we should conduct

ourselves in disagreement. My guidelines will fail to accommodate the complexity of the contexts in which disagreements surface. Thus, in what follows, I want to highlight the differences among cases of disagreement by articulating three scales along which we can classify disagreements.³

Depth of ingression

The first scale concerns depth of ingression, or the degree to which a belief affects other beliefs in someone's noetic structure.⁴ The relevant metaphor at play here is that of a web⁵; beliefs with a high level of ingression hold a central location in the web and their removal would require substantial change in the rest of the web's structure. Religious beliefs are paradigmatic examples of beliefs with a high depth of ingression; although it is important to note that a belief having a high level of ingression for someone does *not* necessarily mean that they will hold it with a high degree of certainty. In contrast, my belief about the location of my car in a parking lot has an extremely low level of ingression. If my car turns out to be parked somewhere else, and I have to change my belief, little to no changes will occur in my noetic structure. Or, to return to our adult siblings: their beliefs about when the worst ever family camping trip occurred won't have a very high level of ingression. When they look at old photos and discover that they are both wrong, not much will change in their noetic structure. In contrast, if one of the adult

³ This is not to suggest that there are only three scales along which to categorize disagreements. There may well be more ways in which to classify disagreement. For instance, we could classify disagreements as dispositional or occurrent, as I did above.

⁴ There are no doubt some interesting cases of disagreement in which the belief in question has high ingression for one party and low ingression for another party. For instance, say we have a theoretical physicist whose life work has been devoted to the investigation of quantum indeterminacy. His beliefs in this area will no doubt have a high level of ingression. In contrast, a scientific layperson will no doubt be relatively agnostic about the degree to which physical systems are indeterminate. Given her agnosticism, it seems that her beliefs have a relatively low level of ingression. However, insofar as asymmetry in level of ingression poses a problem, it is a problem to address on the social approach to disagreement. That is, in disagreements with asymmetrical levels of ingression, the concern is to not offend someone who cares much more about the topic, and this is a social question.

⁵ An alternative metaphor for beliefs with a high depth of ingression would be the "load bearing" capacity of a given belief. That is, some beliefs carry a heavy load and their removal would cause the remaining, unsupported beliefs to collapse. See Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues* (Oxford 2010), p. 199.

siblings were to adopt the position of the other regarding the appropriateness (or lack thereof) of military action, this belief-change would recommend a relatively significant change in noetic structure, since beliefs about the goodness or badness of violence no doubt ramify throughout a person's noetic structure.

Now, to anticipate recommendations we might make about how to conduct oneself in disagreement, we should note that when disagreements involve beliefs with a high level of ingression, there may be reason to give conservative recommendations. That is, when a belief is highly ingressed, we should be cautious about giving up that belief, and one might even think that it is appropriate to adopt a general policy to maintain highly ingressed beliefs in disagreement. If a belief has a high depth of ingression, giving up the belief in the face of disagreement will require extensive belief-change, which constitutes a kind of intellectual timidity, in addition to being cognitively (and emotionally) inefficient. In contrast, if someone refuses to change a belief with a low depth of ingression in the face of disagreement, we are inclined to ask, "Who cares? What's the big deal about changing your mind? It's only a disagreement about the date of your camping trip, after all."

Belief-forming procedures

The second scale we can use in classifying disagreements concerns belief-forming procedures. I will motivate the need for this scale by considering several instances of disagreement. For example, take two students who have turned out different answers for a calculus problem. We know how to resolve this disagreement: they should each recalculate, and they might ask their teacher to walk them through the problem. Or, say we have two friends standing near the finish line at a high school cross country race. It's a close finish, and the friends disagree about who crossed the line first. In order to resolve this disagreement, they would have

to find some footage of the event, slow it down, and determine which runner shoved an arm or leg over the finish line first. In both of these cases, it is obvious how to resolve the disagreement. However, in other cases, things become a bit messier. For instance, perhaps no one was filming the high school cross-country race. Suddenly, although we know how we would resolve the disagreement, we lack the required evidence. In the absence of the footage required to declare a certain runner the winner, we split the difference and call a tie. Or, say we have two scientists with competing hypotheses. Both parties to this disagreement know what evidence would resolve their disagreement (or partially resolve, since the scientific method relies primarily on falsification, in which case resolution takes the form of “Well, I’m wrong; it remains to be seen if there’s an unnoticed third option or my colleague is in fact correct”), but they do not yet have the relevant evidence. Perhaps they require more time to re-run their experiments, or the hypothesis in question might not lend itself to experimental testing, or they may lack technology for accurately observing the phenomena in question. Nonetheless, there is an important similarity among these cases of disagreement. In all of them, we agree on and would recognize the evidence that could resolve the disagreement, regardless of whether or not that evidence is available to us.

In contrast, at the other end of the spectrum, we have a set of disagreements in which there is a second-order disagreement supervening on the first-order disagreement. Among second-order disagreements, some are relatively shallow – for instance, we might disagree about which recording is better *and* disagree about what criteria are relevant to determining which recording is better – whereas others have more significance. Let us call this latter category of

disagreements “PPR disagreements,” or political, philosophical, and religious disagreements.⁶ (In what follows, I will treat PPR disagreement as paradigmatic “deep disagreements,” while ignoring “shallow” second-order disagreements.) Unlike the above disagreements, in which the parties to the disagreement agree about the evidence that would resolve their disagreement (even if they do not know how to “get” that evidence, as in the case of our two scientists), the parties to deep disagreements do not agree on the evidence with which they might resolve their disagreement. Consider the kind of thing some atheists say to theists: “If there’s a God, I’m sure God is capable of announcing this fact to me. But this announcement hasn’t arrived.” This constitutes an admission of the evidence that would resolve the disagreement, analogous to the scientists who are both aware of what would falsify their own and the other’s theory. However, unlike the scientists, the atheist and the theist are unlikely to agree on what evidence would resolve their disagreement. The atheist might say, “Evil in the world shows that God doesn’t exist,” but the theist does not find this convincing. She responds, “You cannot expect fireworks from the sky announcing God’s existence. That’s not how God is known.” But neither does the atheist accept this. In short, they do not (fully) agree on what evidence would resolve their disagreement; there is a second-order disagreement supervening on the first-order disagreement about their religious beliefs.

We are now prepared to return to the idea of belief-forming procedures. For each disagreement, we can identify the belief-forming procedures relevant to that disagreement, which are “those procedures that establish what the evidential basis for establishing true beliefs is.”⁷ Belief-forming procedures, then, are like translation practices; they specify how to process or

⁶I am not claiming that philosophical, political, and religious disagreements exhaust the relevant category of disagreements that I am considering here. Rather, I think that they are simply paradigmatic instances of the disagreements I have in mind.

⁷ Amir Konigsberg, “The Problem with Uniform Solutions to Peer Disagreement,” *Theoria* 79 (2013), p. 112.

translate evidence in order to obtain correct beliefs. In some cases of disagreement, we will have well-established belief-forming procedures or consensus about which belief-forming procedures to adopt. In these cases, there are “clearly defined, explicit and transparent consensual procedures for arriving at beliefs.”⁸ In empirical disagreements, for instance, we usually find consensus regarding the appropriate belief-forming procedures. There is no such consensus when it comes to most philosophical, religious, or political disagreements.⁹ Our scale, then, has high consensus regarding belief-forming procedures on one end, and low-consensus regarding belief-forming procedures on the other end. The low-consensus end of the scale represents the class of disagreements in which there are second-order disagreements supervening on the first-order disagreement.

Now, again, we can anticipate the recommendations we might make for conduct in disagreement in light of this scale. In disagreements that involve high-consensus over belief-forming procedures, some will admit of actual resolution, whereas others will admit of potential resolution. For instance, our calculus students who disagree about the answer to their problem have recourse to actual resolution, whereas the disagreement between scientists with competing hypotheses admits of only potential resolution. In cases of actual resolution, it seems that we ought to resolve the disagreement,¹⁰ whereas in cases of possible resolution, skepticism might

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ This is not to say that there is no consensus whatsoever in PPR disagreements. However, in contrast to other disagreements, there’s much less overall consensus about the belief-forming procedures appropriate in PPR and related disagreements.

¹⁰ In my opinion, the literature in the epistemology of disagreement has tended to overemphasize cases of possible disagreement, forgetting that in cases that admit of actual resolution, the best thing to do would be to resolve the disagreement. For instance, a paradigm case in the epistemology of disagreement introduced by David Christensen is, on my way of thinking, a case that admits of actual resolution. Christensen suggests that we consider two friends out for dinner, who are calculating their share of the bill, but end up with different amounts. Christensen goes on to claim that this case motivates a position called the “Equal Weight View” –since the two are epistemic peers, would it not be irrational for them to maintain their initial belief in light of peer disagreement? Well, yes, it would be irrational for these friends to maintain full credence in their original beliefs in light of this disagreement, but it is *just as irrational* for them to balance out credence, since their disagreement admits of actual resolution. In this case, the rational course of action is to recalculate the bill. However, there might also be cases that admit of actual resolution

seem prudent: “since I don’t have any reason to privilege my own belief yet, perhaps I should withhold full assent.” For PPR disagreements, on the other hand, it is justifiable for both parties to maintain their beliefs.

Epistemic communities

Another way we might classify cases of disagreement relies on the idea of epistemic communities. Although I will use language of epistemic communities, rather than traditions, my account of epistemic communities draws on Alasdair MacIntyre’s understanding of “traditions.” On MacIntyre’s account, a tradition is essentially a “form of enquiry” over time.¹¹ That is, although traditions form out of and remain connected to a set of key beliefs, ultimately, what constitutes a tradition is not adherence to these beliefs, but an ongoing process of engagement with these beliefs as authoritative.^{12,13} In this sense, the ongoing enquiry involves both a set of authoritative beliefs (or texts) that function as a touchstone, in addition to a mode of enquiry: a set of standard questions, assumptions about how these questions can be answered, etc. An epistemic community, in turn, is the instantiation of a tradition in a group of people at some time. For example, on this account, a religious community would *not* be a community primarily in virtue of its uniformity in belief, or the fact that all the group members assent to propositions *x*,

in which the stakes of the disagreement are not high enough to outweigh the cost of chasing down the evidence. For instance, say two educated lay-people are having a disagreement about some rather technical point in botany. A quick Google search does not turn up resolving evidence, and the disagreement arose out of a casual conversation. Given this, the two are not epistemically required to immediately visit a library and do research in order to resolve their disagreement, although no doubt their disagreement does admit of easy resolution. In fact, we would think them rather odd, or perhaps obsessive, if they did go visit a library and commence researching in order to determine the correct answer: “Don’t you have anything better to do? Do you always have to prove that you’re right?” See “Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News,” *The Philosophical Review* 116 (2007), pp. 192-194.

¹¹ *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 358.

¹² *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 355.

¹³ The kind of authority I have in mind is relatively weak. That is, I am not working with a notion of strong authority, on which to say that a proposition is authoritative for a person is to say that she believes it. Rather, on my account, to describe a proposition as authoritative for a person is to say that this person will feel the need to “tell a story” about why she does not hold that proposition, or why she holds some similar but nonetheless altered form of the proposition.

y , and z (“the people who assent to x , y , and z ”). Rather, the community would be such in virtue of the fact that it arises from ongoing mode of engagement with certain texts and/or ideas.

One might object that there are no neat lines by which to distinguish one community from another.¹⁴ This is correct; the lines we draw among communities are to some degree arbitrary: when speaking of communities, we choose to distinguish a community at one level (“Christian”), and not another (“Protestant” or perhaps even “Reformed”), in spite of the fact that communities occur on multiple levels and we belong to and participate in communities at multiple levels. Moreover, if we identify an individual with one community, we may well be privileging that community over some other, conflicting, community, to which that individual might also be described as belonging. In some cases, communities will integrate, or the overlap between two communities might form a new “hybrid” community.

Now that I have identified the phenomenon of an epistemic community, I am able to develop a third classification scale for cases of disagreement. We can distinguish between disagreements that are inter-community (between communities) or intra-community (within a community). In some cases, the communities will present themselves in obvious ways: a disagreement between a westerner and a person from a nomadic tribe in West Africa is a paradigmatic inter-community disagreement. On the other hand, when political conservatives

¹⁴ However, in spite of the arbitrariness involved in identifying some set of boundaries as the boundaries of a community, it is helpful as a heuristic device to speak of communities as quasi-unified entities. It is much easier and faster to say, “Group XY does x and believes y . Since she’s a member of Group XY, she must do x and believe y ” than it is to think through individual claims. Claims about groups are not everywhere and always accurate. While our perceptions of a given community often represent tendencies of that group, groups as heuristic devices become problematic and distorting when we cease to acknowledge individual differences. Thus, an intellectually responsible adaptation of our above claim would be “Since she’s a member of Group XY, there’s an increased chance that she will do x and believe y .” Preferably, this adaption would be combined with an eagerness to adjust claims about groups as one learns more about the individuals who belong to those groups.

disagree with other political conservatives, their disagreement is an intra-community disagreement.¹⁵

Now, the implication of epistemic communities for disagreement is two-fold. Since different communities take different beliefs as authoritative and have different modes of conducting enquiry, inter-community disagreements will admit of multiple second-order disagreements. Individuals disagreeing across communal boundaries will have characteristically different ways of speaking about the world, different standards for intellectual conduct, and different touchstone beliefs. Such individuals are likely to talk past each other at multiple points, unless they learn to inhabit the perspective of the other community and “see things that way.”¹⁶

The second implication of epistemic communities for disagreement involves the significant contribution of communities to our sense of identity. That is, communities are centrally important to the construction of our identities. We are deeply social creatures. I have already suggested that we inherit more from our communities than a set of beliefs; we also inherit a mode of enquiry. Furthermore, we inherit from our communities an identity that goes beyond the merely intellectual. (Consider the implications of leaving a community as the result of a disagreement. Although this would involve deep re-writing of a noetic structure, this departure would also require the re-writing of personal relationships and identity.) This means that inter-community disagreements do not only involve opposing beliefs; they also involve two

¹⁵ However, as I have already observed, communities do not come pre-packaged. Our identifications of any given community will be arbitrary, to some degree. Moreover, the parties to a given disagreement may well belong to multiple epistemic communities. Given this, I would suggest that it is not always helpful to think of ambiguous cases of disagreement in terms of intra-community or inter-community. At least, we should be cautious in these ambiguous cases, lest we distort the disagreement by rendering it in terms of “communities” that in fact do not apply.

¹⁶ I for one am optimistic about our ability to speak to each other, rather than past each other. However, coming to a point at which we have learned to speak to each other is no doubt a difficult and time-consuming process, similar to learning a new language. (See “Tradition and Translation” in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, pp. 370-388.) However, it is important to note that even if we do “learn the language” and become adept at speaking across the divide between two epistemic communities, the ability to translate modes of speech characteristic of these communities does not entail resolution of the disagreements between these communities. Nonetheless, in inter-community disagreements, translation is a pre-requisite to resolution.

identities in tension with one another. By this, I do not mean to suggest that inter-community disagreements are always characterized by fist fighting. Rather, I simply wish to highlight the deep sense of foreignness involved in some inter-community disagreements: “Your way of thinking and talking is different from mine. Your assumptions and perception of the world is different from mine. You seem to live in a wholly other world. You yourself are other.”

Now, relative to the practical project I am pursuing in this thesis, epistemic communities are relevant to the epistemology of disagreement in a primarily negative way, since they highlight its shortcomings. Insofar as the epistemology of disagreement has something to say about inter-community disagreements, I would apply a conservative recommendation in cases of inter-community disagreement, since these disagreements involve highly ingrained belief with little to no consensus over belief-forming procedures. However, as I mentioned briefly above, it is possible to inhabit another’s epistemic community. In some cases, when the divergence is deep enough, doing so will require a great deal of work. The inhabitation may never become final. Nonetheless, we can make progress regarding our ability to see the world as another community does, to speak and think in the modes of that community. If we hope to make progress in this regard, we would do well to foster friendship in cases of inter-community disagreement, since the identification of oneself with another characteristic of friendship prevents us from ostracizing those whose identities, and not merely beliefs, are in tension with our own.

Summary

A disagreement occurs when two persons have opposing beliefs. Absent persons, two opposing propositions do not constitute a disagreement. Disagreements can be classified in a variety of ways, three of which are level of ingression, consensus over belief-forming procedures, and epistemic communities. Moreover, giving accurate recommendations for

conduct in disagreement requires close attention to the kind of disagreement at hand. The question of conduct is what we will consider next.

The Epistemological Approach to Disagreement

As I have said, this project is ultimately a practical one: it aims to say something about how we should conduct ourselves in disagreement.¹⁷ At this point, we begin answering this question from an epistemological perspective, which seeks to preserve knowledge in the face of disagreement. Cashed out, this means that the epistemology of disagreement is concerned with justification in the face of disagreement: epistemically speaking, what is the justified thing to do in disagreement? Although not unrelated to practical questions, this approach to disagreement does not provide much in the way of guidelines for practice, since we have little control over what we believe.¹⁸ This leaves us with two options. We might conclude that this is a grim and unfortunate fact about us: “Ah well, we’re unjustified in many of our beliefs and can do nothing about it. There is no rescue from this body of epistemic death.” On the other hand, since we do have indirect control over our beliefs, we might extract from the epistemological theories of disagreement general recommendations that would shape our beliefs and intellectual practices in helpful ways. The latter option is my preferred one. The epistemology of disagreement suggests two main approaches to disagreement, “conservatism” and “conciliationism.”¹⁹ The epistemic conservative will recommend maintaining one’s beliefs in cases of disagreement, and the

¹⁷ Within epistemology, the practical/theoretical distinction is articulated as regulative and analytic epistemology. In contrast to analytic epistemology that attempts to provide an account of the conditions of knowledge, regulative epistemology is an attempt to generate guidelines for epistemic practice and say something about “how we should conduct ourselves as reasoners.” See *Intellectual Virtues*, pp. 20-3 and Miranda Fricker, “Feminism and epistemology: Pluralism without postmodernism” in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, eds. M. Fricker and J. Hornsby (Cambridge University Press 2000), p. 159.

¹⁸ For instance, as I will go on to show, a theory known as the equal weight view argues that one cannot justifiably maintain one’s initial belief in the same way upon encountering a disagreement. However, it seems very likely that I might find myself in a disagreement in which an adherent to the equal weight view would say, “let go of your belief,” to which I would reply, “I simply can’t. It seems true to me; it would be dishonest to say otherwise.” In other words, I do not have direct volitional control over my beliefs.

¹⁹ Conservatism is also referred to as the “steadfastness view.” Additionally, I’ll be devoting most of my time to a specific kind of conciliationism known as the equal weight view.

conciliationist will recommend resolution of the disagreement, or some kind of skeptical withholding of full assent, in the absence of resolution.

Epistemic Conservatism

Most succinctly, epistemic conservatism holds “that an agent is in some measure justified in maintaining a belief simply in virtue of the fact that the agent has the belief.”²⁰ Any number of reasons, many of which are pragmatic, can motivate the position. For instance, changing one’s mind requires a certain amount of cognitive energy, and can be inefficient.²¹ Consider a scientist advocating for a disputed theory. Epistemic conservatism suggests that he continue research in light of the disagreement. In this case, conservatism maintains efficiency in research, lest disagreement occasion excessively frequent overhauls of one’s opinions and work. In contrast, if our scientist maintains his belief, he will be in a position to uncover some new insight, one that would have gone unnoticed if he had immediately given in to disagreement.

Moreover, there seems to be something valuable about the unity of one’s epistemic life. Conservatism functions as a safeguard against a nomadic epistemic life.²² The epistemic nomad undergoes belief-change frequently, to an extreme and problematic degree. She discovers someone who disagrees with her; she thinks she ought to change her mind, and she does. This pattern repeats. Eventually our nomad wanders through too many disagreements and opinions. She loses her sense of epistemic agency, and she does not know what *she* thinks anymore, because she has capitulated to disagreement too frequently. On the other hand, if our epistemic

²⁰ David Christensen, “Conservatism in Epistemology,” *Noûs* 28 (1994), p. 69.

²¹ Although I will not work out this objection in what follows, one might object to this articulation of conservatism on more empirical grounds. There is good evidence that human beings are highly averse to expending cognitive energy, even to a problematic degree. (See Daniel Kahneman’s *Thinking Fast and Slow* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux 2011).) Given this, it seems misguided to codify a problematic tendency in human epistemic conduct by articulating it as an epistemic principle.

²² Although he does not use language of the sort I adopt here, I take it that Peter Van Inwagen expresses a similar concern about skepticism in his essay “It is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything Upon Insufficient Evidence” in *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*, eds. M.J. Murray and E. Stump (Blackwell 1999), pp. 273-284.

nomad had adopted a conservative position, and had tended towards maintaining her opinions in disagreement, her epistemic agency would have been maintained along with individual beliefs.

Another, albeit more technical, motivation to epistemic conservatism is found in the observation that we tend to lose track of the evidence upon which we have based our beliefs.²³ Say I have the belief that Abigail Adams was an opinionated woman. What evidence justifies this belief? Well, I don't remember the exact origins of this belief. I read something to this effect in a book in 8th grade. Certainly, I don't remember the evidence cited by the author of the book. Yet, if we did some epistemic digging, it would seem that a rather large percentage of our beliefs have "foggy" origins. Does this pose a problem? Are we problematically irrational in light of this? Do I need to cease holding beliefs about the kind of person Abigail Adams was? I assume that we have strong intuitions in favor of these foggy-origin beliefs;²⁴ after all, we have general reasons or background beliefs that incline us to maintain our foggy-origin beliefs. For instance, I have a belief that my middle-school education was generally reliable, in addition to a belief that my 8th grade self read well-informed books, both of which incline me to think that my belief about Abigail Adams is appropriately justified. These cases establish the conservative point as regards justification, and the resulting conclusion is that one should generally maintain one's beliefs, rather than abandon beliefs that lack clear justification.²⁵

²³ It might be easy to confuse beliefs with memory-based content, or "memory beliefs, such as "I read a book about Abigail Adams in 8th grade" with beliefs that are justified by memory beliefs, like "Abigail Adams was an opinionated woman." The two are distinct but importantly related. Thus, when I argue in favor of beliefs justified by memory beliefs, my affirmation of the rationality of such beliefs does not entail a direct affirmation about the rationality of memory beliefs, since we are easily misled about memory beliefs. This latter point is another indicator that many of our beliefs lack clear justification (since the justification required would be supplied by memory beliefs).

²⁴ "Conservatism in Epistemology," p. 74.

²⁵ I should stress that the conclusion is that we are "generally" justified in maintaining beliefs absent an ability to articulate our reasons for believing such. There are knowers and situations to which this policy will not apply.

Epistemic conservatism on other beliefs

My discussion this far has primarily been confined to justifying our own belief. Even if the conservative principle stands, it is insufficient when talking about disagreement. After all, there are two beliefs involved. I have already established our attitude towards one of those beliefs (our own) on the conservative approach; what should our attitude to the “Other Belief” (i.e. the belief of one’s interlocutor in a disagreement) be? After all, phenomenologically speaking, disagreement is characterized by another belief “coming on the screen,” and provoking us to say something about it.

One thing seems clear: my characterization of conservatism thus far does not entail any particular view towards the Other Belief. We might find adherents of epistemic conservatism who disagree about the proper attitude to adopt towards the Other Belief; more likely, adherents of epistemic conservatism would advocate for a variety of attitudes towards Other Beliefs relative to the variety of cases of disagreement. In what follows, then, I will not argue that conservatism is required to adopt any particular attitude towards Other Beliefs; I will simply highlight some of the approaches a proponent of epistemic conservatism could coherently take.

Does conservatism rule out the possibility of me treating the Other Belief as equally plausible with my own? After all, the practical result of epistemic conservatism is that I keep on believing as I always have, and it seems odd to characterize this position as treating the Other Belief “equally.” Nonetheless, there is a sense in which an epistemic conservative can treat her own beliefs and Other Beliefs “equally.” I will call this the “live-and-let-live attitude.”²⁶ More technically, one might say that the live-and-let-live attitude is a kind of relativism. This attitude emphasizes that the proponents of Other Beliefs are just as justified in their beliefs as we are justified in our beliefs. That is, a proponent of the live-and-let-live attitude might argue as

²⁶ “Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News,” p. 190.

follows: “Look, isn’t it possible to have more than one reasonable epistemic response to a situation? Couldn’t we share the same evidence, reason equally well, and yet come to different conclusions given, oh, different personalities or something? That doesn’t mean that one of us is irrational. No, no, we’re both rational. I’m justified in maintaining my belief and my interlocutor is justified in maintaining his.”²⁷

One might wonder, however, if the live-and-let-live attitude is always appropriate. For instance, the live-and-let-live attitude faces what I will call the “epistemic improvement problem.” Although I might find my interlocutor rational given his current experience, evidence, etc., I might also think that he would benefit from listening to me for a bit, since my belief is true. (It is also plausible that he would feel this way about me.) Here is a trivial example of this scenario: say two first graders, Harry and Bobby, are having a disagreement about dairy cattle. Both have grown up on dairy farms, but Harry’s farm milks only Holsteins, whereas Bobby’s farm milks Brown Swiss *and* Holsteins. Harry has innocently declared that only Holsteins can be milked. Bobby, on the other hand, knows better. Now, in this case, we would not find Harry irrational. The only dairy cattle he’s ever encountered are Holsteins. However, we also think that Bobby is right when he insists that he has relevant evidence to the contrary. In short, it’s entirely plausible that our interlocutor in a disagreement be *rational* (conducting his intellectual affairs well), but require further evidence or experience in order to be *right* (have a true belief). In such cases, the live-and-let-live attitude would be epistemically imprudent, since it fails to consider the possibility of epistemic improvement as a result of disagreement.

²⁷ David Christensen criticizes this attitude as being ironically close-minded. That is, the person with a live-and-let-live attitude refuses to allow the beliefs of others to have any sway in her own thinking: she has closed Other Beliefs off from her own epistemic structure. See “Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News,” p. 192. Additionally, I think the proponent of the EWV will criticize this response on another point, namely, that although two interlocutors can respond differently to a given set of evidence and still be rational, this is only the case *before* they’ve disagreed. That is, the disagreement itself is evidence that someone has responded incorrectly.

Having noticed one of the flaws with the live-and-let-live attitude, we are prompted to consider a series of attitudes one might adopt towards other beliefs, all of which are in some sense exclusivist. By “exclusivist,” I mean a stance towards Other Beliefs that requires at least one of the beliefs in a disagreement to be wrong.²⁸ On an exclusivist position, both parties cannot be right.²⁹ In what follows, I will consider weakly exclusivist attitudes, strongly exclusivist attitudes, and very strongly exclusivist attitudes.³⁰ Adopting a weakly exclusivist attitude in a disagreement involves thinking that one’s own belief is rationally justified (the position of epistemic conservatism) and that the relevant Other Belief is logically inconsistent with one’s own.³¹ Unlike the live-and-let-live attitude, the weakly exclusivist attitude requires that one party to the disagreement be wrong, at least in part. Two logically inconsistent beliefs cannot both be right. However, practically speaking, the weakly exclusivist attitude might look a lot like the live-and-let-live attitude. There is a crucial difference between them, namely, that the live-and-let-live attitude does not treat cases of logical inconsistency, in which case someone with a live-and-let-live attitude can say, “We’re both right! Right enough, at least!” while the weak exclusivist insists, “No, the case I’m considering involves logical inconsistency, which means that we can’t both be right.” However, since the weak exclusivist might not be willing or able to make a call about *who* is right, weak exclusivism may very well look like a live-and-let-live attitude in practice.

²⁸ In fact, the live-and-let-live attitude might count as exclusivist under this description. That is, one form the live-and-let-live attitude could take would involve thinking that one’s interlocutor in disagreement is wrong, but, well – who cares. No problem. This would be an exclusivist form of the live-and-let-live attitude. However, since the live-and-let-live attitude might *also* be a kind of naïve relativism, I have considered it separately from the exclusivist positions.

²⁹ None of the exclusivist attitudes will fully account for the epistemic improvement problem. Doing so requires a notion of epistemic peer-dom, which we have yet to develop.

³⁰ My account of this series of attitudes is drawn entirely from Peter Van Inwagen’s “We’re Right. They’re Wrong” in *Disagreement*, eds. R. Feldman and R.E. Warfield (Oxford University Press 2010), pp. 10-28. It is worth noting that Van Inwagen’s account of exclusivism is given in the context of religious examples. However, I find, and he admits, that his account can be applied generally to Other Beliefs.

³¹ “We’re Right. They’re Wrong,” p. 11.

A sterner take on Other Beliefs is a strongly exclusivist attitude. Strong exclusivism is identical to weak exclusivism with one key addition: anyone who shares my epistemic situation is irrational if he does not also share the belief in question.³² This is in direct contrast to the live-and-let-live attitude, a central feature of which is that there are multiple ways to respond rationally to some piece of evidence. Moreover, on weak exclusivism, two people can share an epistemic situation and yet rationally hold diverging opinions, although both cannot be right. On strong exclusivism, however, a shared epistemic situation requires consensus for *both* rationality and rightness.³³

The remaining exclusivist attitude is *very* strong exclusivism, the position that with regard to some epistemic situation, Other Beliefs are not epistemically permissible.³⁴ Or, playing off the account of strong exclusivism above, we might say that on *very* strong exclusivism, the relevant epistemic situation is “being an epistemic agent.” This account is confusing in its generality, so I will provide an example. Say that I am having a disagreement about gender with a Maasai man. He tells me that women are of similar value with cattle; I insist that women are agents, of equal status with men, and should be valued accordingly. Now, on all accounts, we have very different epistemic situations, since he belongs to a semi-nomadic tribe in East Africa. If I were to adopt a strongly exclusivist attitude, my attitude towards his belief would be along the following lines: “well, he’s wrong. But, given his epistemic situation and the degree to which it diverges from my own, it’s perfectly rational for him to believe as he does.” However, if I

³² “We’re Right. They’re Wrong,” p. 13.

³³ David Christensen articulates the distinction between rightness and wrongness as a distinction between doxastic and propositional rationality. He writes, “If my evidence supports P (so that P is, in the propositional sense, rational for me to believe), and I in fact do believe that P, my belief may yet fail to be (doxastically) rational.” However, I chosen to reject his terminology because I think that rightness and rationality have important differences in strength (rightness being much stronger than mere rationality), something his labels don’t convey. See “Disagreement, Question-Begging and Epistemic Self-Criticism,” p. 4.

³⁴ “We’re Right. They’re Wrong,” p. 13.

were to adopt a *very* strongly exclusivist attitude, I would instead respond: “This belief is both wrong and irrational; no person can justifiably hold such a belief.”

For reasons that should be obvious, I assume that no one takes a blanket position of *very* strong exclusivism (in fact, as I’ve already suggested, I assume that no one takes any position as blanket when it comes to Other Beliefs), but I would expect that most people are *very* strong exclusivists regarding, say, the law of non-contradiction. That is, it seems that epistemically *impermissible* to reject the law of non-contradiction; one is neither rational nor right to reject it. However, as I have already noted, *very* strong exclusivism is indeed strong, so strong as to be of little use when it comes to disagreement, since it is implausible that anyone should disagree about beliefs to which *very* strong exclusivism applies. I am suspicious of anyone in a disagreement who is tempted to adopt a *very* strongly exclusivist attitude towards the Other Belief, since the beliefs for which *very* strong exclusivism is apt are not the sort of beliefs around which we would expect frequent disagreements.

My goal in this section was to flesh out epistemic conservatism by investigating the various attitudes we might take towards Other Beliefs. The live-and-let-live attitude allows that, various responses to a body of evidence can be equally rational; similarly, weak exclusivism states that although two parties with logically inconsistent views may both be rational, they cannot both be right. On the other hand, strong exclusivism holds that sharing an epistemic situation requires consensus in belief for *both* rationality and rightness, and finally, *very* strong exclusivism thinks that the epistemic situation relevant for evaluating rationality and rightness is merely being an epistemic agent. I have not argued for any of these attitudes, and I have suggested several times that a well-functioning epistemic agent will employ all (or most) of them

at different times. Moreover, I do not think that epistemic conservatism entails one of these attitudes to the exclusion of others.

Rethinking Epistemic Conservatism: Are the interlocutors peers?

At this point, I hope to have made clear what conservatism in epistemology is and how one might be motivated to hold such a position. However, careful readers will realize that my above articulation of epistemic conservatism and the guidelines it provides is sorely lacking.

Consider these cases of disagreement:

- (1) I'm the parent of a eight-year-old. He wakes up around 6 am, regardless of when he's gone to sleep. If he gets less than 10 hours of sleep, he is a weepy and crabby kid throughout the next day. Nonetheless, when 8 pm rolls around, he staunchly informs me that he's not tired, and that given his current state of being well-rested, he doesn't need to go to sleep, etc.
- (2) A young doctor has recently begun practicing medicine. He was an average med school student, but found a job at a well-respected hospital with the aid of a family connection. One of the patients he visits during rounds is a long-term patient of one of his colleagues, a physician recognized for her excellent work. After briefly chatting with the patient, he forms some diagnostic impressions. But, when he reviews the patient's charts, he finds that his colleague's diagnosis differs substantially from his initial thoughts.
- (3) A friend and I are discussing a class we took as freshmen, and we're disagreeing over a historical detail: approximately how long were the various Balkan states joined into one, Yugoslavia? Usually, I would trust my friend on a point like this; he has proven himself to have an excellent memory for such details in the past, and I know that he did well in

the class. But, I chose to write a paper about Yugoslavia (while he wrote about the Austro-Hungarian Empire), and I'm feeling very confident about my opinion.

Now, assume that we can reduce the guidelines of epistemic conservatism to the general principle "maintain your initial belief in cases of disagreement."³⁵ Obviously, this general principle will not apply to all of the cases articulated above. In (1), for example, it is a significant stretch to say that a eight year old child has epistemological justification for his belief that 8 pm is too early a bedtime. I think the same applies in (2): it would be epistemically (and medically) irresponsible for the young doctor fully to maintain his beliefs in light of his colleague's disagreement. She has an established and distinguished history as a doctor, and she has been involved in this particular patient's treatment far longer than he has. In contrast, the diagnostic abilities of the young doctor require maturing.³⁶ In the case of (3), however, my intuitions are less clear. Given that my friend's accuracy in memory is well established, an advisable general policy would be to defer on such matters of detail. But, in this case, there's good reason to think that I am better-informed. A principle of conservatism seems appropriate here. What accounts for the fact that each of these cases admits of different recommendations? In other words, what causes us to ignore the conservative impulse in cases (1) and (2) and yet advocate some kind of conservatism in (3)?

³⁵ This is perhaps unfairly strong. Must the conservative position be all or nothing? No, I think. But, just as I'll tend to articulate the conciliationist's position in strong language so as to distinguish it sharply from conservatism, I'm here articulating the conservative's position in strong language so as to sharply distinguish it from conciliationism.

³⁶ One might object to a policy of blanket submission in cases between junior and senior colleagues, since a junior colleague willing to challenge the views of her senior can bring much needed fresh perspective to a person or institution thinking in a problematically repetitious way. However, I am not proposing a blanket policy of submission to senior colleagues, and neither am I proposing that the divergent views of the junior colleague go unspoken. One might choose to voice a view (that one is nonetheless abandoning) simply for the sake of provoking discussion.

Applying peer-dom to epistemic conservatism

We can make sense of these cases and our intuitive responses to them by introducing the idea of an “epistemic peer.” Generally speaking, epistemic peers are “equals with respect to their familiarity with the evidence and arguments which bear on that question” and “equals with respect to general [intellectual excellences] such as intelligence, thoughtfulness, and freedom from bias.”³⁷ In (1), our eight-year-old child is obviously not an epistemic peer with his parents. His epistemic capacities are not fully developed, in which case his parents are not trespassing epistemically if they ignore his insistence about not needing to go to bed.³⁸ Similarly, in (2) there is good reason to think that the new doctor is not an epistemic peer with his older colleague. The older colleague is much more familiar with the relevant evidence.³⁹ She knows more about medicine and more about this particular patient. (However, it is important to note that I have not specified the presence or lack of intellectual excellences like thoughtfulness and freedom from bias in this example. For instance, unbeknownst to our young doctor, his older colleague might have a well-established bias regarding this patient: she finds the patient annoying and accordingly shrugs off the patient’s complaints. Unsurprisingly, this leads her to misdiagnose his symptoms. If this were the case, we would have good reason to doubt whether the older doctor is in fact an epistemic “expert.”⁴⁰) In contrast, neither of the parties in (3) is an obvious epistemic

³⁷ Thomas Kelly, “Epistemic Significance of Disagreement” in Vol. 1 of *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, eds. T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (Oxford University Press 2005), p. 168. Note that Kelly’s account of epistemic peers is partially drawn from Gary Gutting’s *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism* (University of Notre Dame Press 1982), p. 83.

³⁸ This is not to suggest that parents are everywhere and always justified in ignoring the claims of their children. The fact that children lack full epistemic maturity does not mean that they are totally immature, epistemically speaking. Moreover, we might think that there are important moral reasons for taking the claims of children seriously, even if we do not ultimately give assent to them.

³⁹ I owe readers at least a brief account of my use of the term “evidence.” I take it that there is no special kind of thing that constitutes evidence. Rather, evidence is found in a relationship of support between a belief and some other belief, experience, testimony, etc. Evidence, in short, is the relationship of *x* supporting or suggesting the truth of *y*.

⁴⁰ I will use the terms “novice” and “expert” to describe the ways in which one might be situated relative to a given disagreement. The party “in a place to know” is the expert, her interlocutor, the novice. Although the labels are

superior. My friend's general reliability in memory is more-or-less balanced out by my own special "expertise" on this particular topic.

Having introduced the notion of epistemic peers, I am able to revise the initial principle of epistemic conservatism: maintain belief in cases of disagreement, provided that one is party to a peer-disagreement or is the expert in a disagreement. But, having established that the two parties are epistemic peers, why adopt this policy? Should the knowledge that our interlocutor is an epistemic peer in fact incline us to decrease our confidence in our own belief? Perhaps, but recall the several reasons I have noted for adopting a position of epistemic conservatism.

Revisiting the motivations for epistemic conservatism

The first reason I considered involved cognitive efficiency. Constantly giving in to disagreement creates epistemic fragmentation. Moreover, tenacity in belief can have payoffs later on – recall our scientist and his refusal to abandon his theory at the first sign of disagreement. The problem with this perspective, however, is that it can tend to assign practical concerns excessive epistemic weight.⁴¹ When you are presented with evidence that Wisconsin is a swing state, not a Democratic state, as you had been led to believe, you do not get to claim "cognitive efficiency" and go on believing that Wisconsinites tend to vote for Democrats. Thus, perhaps it would be better to say that our scientist is justified in maintaining her unpopular theory insofar as she has reason to expect that she will eventually uncover some new evidence in support of her theory.⁴² "The earth is the center of the universe" is not a viable theory; if she were to adopt this theory, we would expect (and even mandate) that she change her mind in the

mildly awkward, I chose them in lieu of more politically charged terms like "inferior" and "superior." Also, I will note here that no person is an expert *per se*. Rather, we are experts and novices relative to particular cases of disagreement.

⁴¹ "Conservatism in Epistemology," p. 72.

⁴² A question remains, namely, what would justify the belief, "I will eventually uncover some new evidence that will prove my belief to be correct"? Answering this question would be a difficult task, one I will not pursue in this paper.

face of ensuing disagreement. Finally, if our young doctor has reason to suspect that his colleague is biased against the patient (or even biased in general), we might recommend that he continue advocating for his own diagnosis, if for no other reason than to shake up the intellectual and diagnostic habits of his colleague. However, there is slippage in this case insofar as it is not obvious whether the young doctor would actually continue to believe his own diagnosis, or whether it would be right for him to do so. That is, he could speak up about his impressions and reap the ensuing practical benefits while having ceased to believe his diagnostic impressions after learning of his colleague's disagreement.

The second motivation for conservatism derives from the epistemic conservative's general optimism about epistemic justification, which leads to the conviction that merely having a belief is evidence that the belief is justified. This articulation of conservatism seems especially applicable in case (3), in which my friend and I are epistemic peers. Given this, why should I adopt his belief? According to the conservative impulse, there is not any reason for me to adopt his belief. I am justified in maintaining my own. However, there is something odd about this conclusion, namely, that it privileges my beliefs. "Well," you might ask, "why not privilege my own beliefs? They're mine, after all." No doubt, there is something psychologically compelling about our own beliefs, but it is not obvious that we should translate a psychological pull to our own beliefs into a recommendation for epistemic practice. After all, we have already concluded that my friend and I are epistemic peers. We are approximately equal with regard to our intellectual capacities and our relation to the evidence; this excludes either one of us from appealing to "special insight" and a privileged epistemic status.⁴³ After all, when a disagreement occurs between two epistemic peers, there are no grounds for explaining away the disagreement

⁴³ As an example of appealing to special insight ("I guess I must know something she doesn't!"), see Van Inwagen's "It is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything Upon Insufficient Evidence" and his "Quam Dialectica" in *God and the Philosophers*, ed. T. Morris (Oxford University Press 1996), pp. 31-60.

by assuming an error on the part of the epistemic inferior. The likelihood of error is equally distributed between the parties of disagreement. Given this, an epistemological recommendation to maintain one's belief would seem to be a codification of a merely psychological pull.

A Second Approach to Disagreement: The Equal Weight View

Conciliationism as resolution

If we grant any weight to this line of criticism, we have motivated a conciliationist approach to disagreement. The conciliationist approach to disagreement is what its name suggests; the recommendation for conduct in the face of disagreement on this view is that one resolve the disagreement. For instance, in cases like that of our adult siblings who disagree about the date of their worst ever family camping trip, a generally conciliationist approach seems fitting. The siblings can easily resolve their disagreement, so the rational thing to do would be for the two to go look up old family photo albums. (Admittedly, it might also be rational for the two to forget the disagreement.) However, if this were all there were to say about conciliationism – “resolve when possible” – it would be an odd view to set forth in a discussion of disagreement. Why? When we are in a disagreement that easily admits of resolution, we resolve it, and the disagreement goes away. In many such cases, the disagreement is not very salient, since we move right past it in order to resolve the discrepancy. Suppose I am taking my younger brother and sister to a concert. They qualify for a youth ticket rate. I do the mental math, and conclude that it will cost us \$22 to go, but my brother interjects to tell me that I have miscalculated: it will in fact cost us \$20. At this point, my brother and I have a disagreement. However, we might not characterize this situation as a disagreement, since it is so temporary: obviously, one of us has made an error. We are not going to maintain our positions or withdraw our assent in order to accommodate the position of the other. Rather, we are going to *recalculate*.

In short, readers can take it for granted that if resolution presents itself as a possibility in disagreement, resolution is probably the route to take. However, above I identified a variety of ways in which to classify disagreements, and one aim of this exercise was to highlight the complex nature of many disagreements. When disagreements admit of little consensus over belief-forming procedures, resolution does not present itself as an option. When two colleagues disagree about a political issue, no easy mode of resolution presents itself. This disagreement is here to stay, at least long enough for it to become noticeable as such. In the following, I will restrict my attention to disagreements that are “here to stay,” disagreements in which resolution is not obvious. In these cases of disagreement, a specific form of conciliationism known as the equal weight view (the EWV) presents itself as the main contender against epistemic conservatism.

The equal weight view

As I have already observed, the conservative recommendation in disagreements between peers is to maintain belief. In contrast, EWV requires the parties to such disagreements to adjust their beliefs in response to their interlocutor. Thus far, I have been speaking of disagreement as paradigmatically occurring between two persons in virtue of the beliefs which they hold.

Proponents of the EWV use the term “credence” to indicate one’s doxastic attitude towards a given proposition, or the degree to which one assents to a belief.⁴⁴ This enables the EWV theorist

⁴⁴ Credences are typically enumerated in decimal form, which means that we can also think of them as percentages of belief. More technically, we might say that credences are the probability I assigned to a given proposition. Thus, if I have a credence of .6 in a proposition, I’ve assigned that proposition a .6 probability of being true. However, I also take it that the use of “credence” language by EWV theorists is intended to describe one’s doxastic attitude towards some proposition. If I have a .999 credence in the proposition “I am now sitting in the library,” we could say that my doxastic attitude or degree of assent to that proposition is 99.9%. However, it is odd to speak of assent as having “degrees” – we usually think of assent as binary. I believe that I am sitting in the library, period. I do not believe that I am now standing in Lake Superior. Thus, perhaps it is better to finally think of credence in terms of probability judgments expressed by way of confidence. For instance, since I’ve assigned a high probability to the proposition “I am now sitting in the library,” my confidence in the proposition “I am now sitting in the library” is

to speak of someone having credence in a proposition that we would not describe her as believing. For instance, say we have two meteorologists, Alfred and Brandon. They are epistemic peers. Alfred predicts (and thus believes) A, which is also to say that Alfred assents to proposition A. Brandon, in turn assents to proposition B, which conflicts with A. Let us say that Alfred's credence in A is .7, and Alfred's credence in B is .2. In contrast, Brandon's credence in A is .2 and his credence in B is .7. According to the equal weight view, Alfred should lower his credence in A and raise his credence in B.^{45,46}

It is important to note that there is no consensus among EWV proponents regarding how much weight we should give to peer opinion.⁴⁷ That is, in the above case, we could take a "strong conciliation view,"⁴⁸ in which case Alfred and Brandon should average their doxastic attitudes towards propositions A and B. The result would be a credence of .45 across the board: Alfred's credence in A, and B, would be .45 in both cases, and Brandon's credence in each would be .45 respectively. However, if this seems unduly strong, we could develop a weaker view. We could tamper with the exact formula and stipulate, for instance, that disagreement

99.9%. Finally, note that we could argue about where to draw a line on the scale of credences for belief. If my credence in a given proposition is .5, do I believe it?

⁴⁵ It's not entirely clear how we should respond on the equal weight view in cases involving indirect disagreements, or cases of disagreement involving multiple and asymmetrical beliefs. For instance, if my friend's belief X is implausible on my belief Y, should we adjust our respective credences on the equal weight view? Our views are not contradictory, after all.

⁴⁶ My use of "should" in this instance is perhaps misleading insofar as it assumes that Alfred and Brandon have direct control over their credences in A and B. As I have noted above, I'm skeptical about our ability to exercise direct control over our beliefs. We can modify the recommendation as follows: "Since Alfred is in a disagreement with his peer Brandon, he's not epistemically justified in maintaining his initial credence in light of this disagreement. Assuming that he has properly functioning epistemic equipment, his credence in A will drop and his credence in B will raise."

⁴⁷ Tommy Graves, "A Defense of the Equal Weight View" (paper presented at the weekly meeting of Calvin College Philosophy Symposium, Grand Rapids, Michigan, October 2013).

⁴⁸ Recall from above that "Equal Weight View" can also be referred to as "conciliationism." Formally speaking, the Strong Conciliation View can be expressed as follows: "If (i) EWV is true and (ii) S1 and S2 are in a peer disagreement at time t' with S1 having adopted doxastic attitude D1 toward p at t and S2 having adopted a competitor doxastic attitude D2 toward p, and (iii) S1 has no undefeated reason to discount S2's conclusion, and (iv) S1 has gained no other evidence affecting S1's justification for p since t; then at t' S1 is justified in adopting a doxastic attitude that is the average of D1 and D2 on the scale of doxastic attitudes." See "A Defense of the Equal Weight View."

between peers requires a 10% decrease and increase in doxastic attitudes towards the relevant propositions.⁴⁹ In the above case, for instance, Alfred would then move from his original .7 credence in A to a .63 credence in A, and from a .2 credence in B to a .22 credence in B.

The motivation for this view, as I have suggested above, is relatively simple: if a disagreement occurs between two epistemic peers, there is no grounds for explaining away the disagreement by assuming an error on the part of an epistemic novice. The likelihood of error is equally distributed between the parties in the disagreement. Given this, maintaining one's belief (or at least one's initial credence in that belief), as epistemic conservatism recommends, seems dogmatic. Disagreement with an epistemic peer alerts us to the possibility of being wrong, and it seems epistemically irresponsible not to adjust our credence in the relevant beliefs in response to this possibility.

Now, having generally characterized the EWV and the reasons one might hold this view, I am prepared to articulate the view in greater detail. In particular, I will consider two complementary principles for assessing and responding to disagreement:

- (1) I should assess explanations for disagreements in a way that's independent of my reasoning on the matter under dispute, and
- (2) to the extent that this sort of assessment provides reason for me to think that the explanation in terms of my own error is as good

⁴⁹ However, in what follows, when I refer to equal weight view I am referring to the strong conciliation view, since a weak conciliation view can easily slide into triviality. For one thing, any percentage we might choose on the weak view would be arbitrary. On what basis would we justify a 20% decrease/increase, rather than an 18% decrease/increase? Moreover, the weaker our view becomes, the less interesting it becomes as a recommendation for conduct. I think our automatic response to disagreement with sane people is a (fractional) decrease in credence regarding our own view, and a corresponding (fractional) increase in credence regarding the other view. Just as we cannot help but hear sentences in our own language as meaningful, so we cannot help responding to disagreement in this weakly conciliationist way.

as that in terms of my friend's error, I should move my belief toward my interlocutor's belief.⁵⁰

Thus articulated, the first principle of the EWW view stands in contrast to those who suggest that the mere presence of disagreement constitutes evidence of the other party being an epistemic novice. Suppose, for instance, I find myself in a disagreement regarding expenditures.⁵¹ Assume my interlocutor is generally adept with numbers, epistemically reliable, and well acquainted with the relevant evidence. I too am generally adept with numbers, epistemically reliable, and well acquainted with the relevant evidence. However, unlike my interlocutor, I have a first-personal perspective on my conclusion. That is, I know that I have been especially careful with my calculations; as a result, I feel certain that I have avoided mistakes in reasoning. Thus, despite my interlocutor's general reliability, the fact that she disagrees with me itself counts against her. In short, I am asking, "why shouldn't I take *this* difference [i.e. in belief] between us as a relevant difference, one which blocks the otherwise perfect symmetry [that would establish epistemic peer-dom]?"⁵²

However, although the above line of thinking can be helpful in cases of calculation that admit of careful double-checking ("I know that I've checked my work carefully, so it seems most likely that my friend has made the fluke error"), the view admits of a tension. It fails to acknowledge that disagreement *also* constitutes evidence that I am in the wrong.⁵³ After all, why should I privilege my own belief? Because it is mine? Isn't that a kind of arrogance?

⁵⁰ David Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News," *The Philosophical Review* 116 (2007): p. 199.

⁵¹ The example has incarnation in the work of many epistemologists. My own version resembles an example from "Disagreement, Question-Begging and Epistemic Self-Criticism," pp. 8-10.

⁵² "Epistemic Significance of Disagreement," p. 179

⁵³ "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News," pp. 195-7.

In contrast to the view that disagreement itself provides evidence for one's interlocutor being the novice, the EWV demands that we independently assess the parties involved in disagreement. That is, if I'm going to dismiss my interlocutor's position or conclude that she is an epistemic novice relative to this disagreement, I require some grounds for this conclusion that are independent of my own reasoning on the disputed matter. For instance, David Christensen proposes that we imagine a friend who vastly overestimates the musical ability of his child.⁵⁴ You have also heard the kid play, and she does not seem especially remarkable. Yet, according to her father, she is soon to be a prodigy. In this case, you have independent grounds for dismissing the beliefs of your friend, since you are also aware of general psychological mechanisms that incline (otherwise rational) parents to hold irrational beliefs about the capabilities of their children.

We can summarize the recommendations that follow from the two principles of the EWV as follows: in a given case of disagreement, consider the possibility of error both on your own part and your interlocutor's part. Are there any case-specific factors that might negatively influence her? You? (Do either of you have an emotional investment in your belief being right?) Are her intellectual faculties functioning normally? Yours? (Is either of you severely ill? Drunk? Sleep-deprived?) Is she generally epistemically reliable? You? (Is either of you especially thoughtful or hasty?) What's her relationship to the relevant evidence? Yours? (Does either of you have relevant expertise in this matter?) Pending a thorough evaluation of the parties involved, we could say something as to how likely each party is to have made an error. If one party is significantly more likely to be in error, the other party is justified in dismissing that party's view. On the other hand, if the two parties are equally likely to be in error (in which case they're epistemic peers), the second principle of the EWV demands that we balance the views

⁵⁴ "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News," pp. 188, 198.

accordingly. After all, what reason would we have for maintaining our initial beliefs? On the EWV, “It’s my belief” does not constitute appropriate ground for rejecting the other belief and maintaining your own.⁵⁵

Let us consider a final example that illustrates the plausibility of the EWV. Say you are on a committee trying to determine where to throw a citywide picnic. You have done some research and have concluded that Park Q is an ideal picnic location. However, at the meeting, another committee member offers an argument for holding the picnic at Park R. The person in question is a friend of yours, and you think he is an intelligent person with good ideas. Now, he has not changed your mind – you still think that there are reasons why Q is superior to R – but knowing that a peer disagrees with you has reduced your credence in Q’s suitability. We would still say that you believe Park Q to be the preferable location, but, well: you are less sure now. Park R appears a more plausible location than it did before.

This kind of scenario is common enough in our epistemic lives: we encounter beliefs and opinions that conflict with our own, and when someone we regard as an epistemic peer advances those beliefs, we often reduce confidence in our original position, and gain some confidence regarding the opposing position. On the other hand, there are some serious objections to the EWV, to which I will turn now.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Or, if this is too strong, we could adapt it as follows: “It’s my belief” is merely a *prima facie* reason for rejecting the other belief and maintaining your own, and can thereby be overridden when the other person is a peer, in which case the likelihood of error is equally distributed between the two parties.

⁵⁶ I will not be addressing all objections to the EWV. One objection that I want to highlight here argues that disagreement is a sociologically contingent fact and as such does not deserve consideration from epistemic agents who are already justified in their belief. This objection maintains that *argument* determines rationality or justification, and as such, if my interlocutor in a given disagreement fails to present me with new argumentation, I am justified in epistemically ignoring her. However, it seems to me that this objection admits of a two-fold problem. One, we’re not ideally rational. We may well form our beliefs on the basis of good argumentation and be fully justified in holding those beliefs, but this doesn’t mean that we’re *right* about our beliefs. Two, the objection fails to take seriously that the EWV treats of *peer* disagreement. The EWV theorist never says that one should allot full epistemic weight to the views of just anyone who disagrees with one; rather the disagreement of a peer, not a novice, should induce a reduction in credence. See “The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement,” pp. 180-1 for the original objection, and “Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News,” p. 206 for a response.

Objections to the Equal Weight View

Asymmetry in the criterion for peer-dom

One objection to the EWV would come in the form of an objection to the idea of “epistemic peers.”⁵⁷ Above, I defined epistemic peers as equals in terms of intellectual excellences (such as freedom from bias, intelligence, and thoughtfulness) *and* familiarity with the evidence. However, the criteria on which we evaluate two parties concerning peer-dom can point in different directions. Say a graduate student working in cellular biology is having a disagreement with brother about biology. Her brother is an undergraduate, studying business, so he does not have any particular expertise in biology. As regards familiarity with the relevant evidence, the graduate student is obviously the epistemic expert. However, she is incredibly biased towards the view of one of her current professors, and this view is controversial. She has also been known to stubbornly argue for whatever position she first inclines to, refusing to give ground to an interlocutor. In this respect, her brother is much more thoughtful; he is also considered an intelligent person. The problem, then, is that we have potentially divergent criteria for establishing the epistemic status of these two parties. We could write an algorithm for calculating one’s epistemic status in disagreements, although this formula would be arbitrary and ultimately unhelpful (not to mention slightly ridiculous). For example, we could begin our algorithm by assigning each party a point for their relevant qualities: in the above case, our graduate student would have a point in the column “acquainted with the relevant evidence,” whereas her younger brother would have a point in the column “has appropriate intellectual

⁵⁷ Actually, insofar as the conservative position also relies on the notion of an epistemic peer, the following criticism would also apply to conservative positions. However, I would argue that the notion of an “epistemic peer” isn’t nearly as central to the conservative position as it is in EWV. In some sense, EWV is motivated by the idea of an epistemic peer – “if your interlocutor is your peer, how could you justifiably maintain your position at its original credence?”, whereas the conservative position requires an approximate notion of peer-dom only as a restraint on what would otherwise be an excessively generous position.

excellences.” The problem, however, would be agreeing on what to privilege in our algorithm. Is acquaintance with the relevant evidence more important? (Answering this would require establishing a hierarchy of evidence. Some evidence is direct, some is background, or linking evidence.) Or are intellectual excellences, which involve how one handles the relevant evidence, more important? (As with evidence, answering this question would require establishing which intellectual excellences are most important.) However, even if we *could* agree on how to write such an algorithm and thus calculate epistemic peer-dom (and even if this algorithm turned out, no doubt mysteriously, to be accurate to the relevant phenomena), there is a further problem with the emphasis on epistemic peers in the EWV. Recall from above that the first principle of EWV demands an independent assessment of the parties in a disagreement, in order to determine whether they are peers. In the following section, I will consider the degree to which we are capable of independently assessing disagreements. Since I conclude that we can never (fully) assess disagreements from an independent standpoint, this means that judgments about epistemic peer-dom are always defeasible and incomplete.

Independent assessment and deep disagreements

Recall that one of the EWV’s principles is “I should assess explanations for the disagreement in a way that’s independent of my reasoning on the matter under dispute.” However, we do not have access to a thoroughly independent standpoint in epistemic matters. We are through and through “cloaked in belief.”⁵⁸ In what follows, I will flesh out this objection. The inability to independently assess is not a problem particular to the EWV; it is a problem for any view reliant upon strong foundationalism.^{59,60} However, as I’ve articulated the EWV, it is

⁵⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (Eerdmans 1984), p. 66.

⁵⁹ By “strong foundationalism,” I mean the view commonly associated with philosophical modernism, namely, the idea that to be fully rational we must subject all of our beliefs to rational scrutiny in order to build up a noetic structure from propositions self-evident to any rational agent. Independent assessment is required on strong

closely linked to a strong foundationalist outlook insofar as it requires an independent assessment of disagreements. In contrast, a recognized inability to independently assess disagreements might motivate someone to a kind of epistemic conservatism. The exact objection up for discussion is twofold. First, there is a practical question regarding our ability to independently assess in light of contingent psychological factors. Second, there are theoretical objections against the EWV theorist's uniform treatment of evidence.

Practical objections

Although I have not yet extracted specific instructions pertaining to disagreement from the EWV, we can imagine what these instructions might look like. (Since the EWV maintains that it is epistemically *unjustifiable* to maintain belief in the face of a peer disagreement, our set of instructions will mirror this point.) When in a disagreement that does not admit of easy and obvious resolution, step back and independently assess the epistemic status of those involved in the disagreement. Are all parties equally likely to be in error? If so, split the difference in credence, or attempt to do so in indirect ways. However, regardless of its promise as a purely epistemological theory, translation of the EWV into a set of practical instructions quickly results in problems. Most of these problems center on the fact that we are not, philosophical assumptions notwithstanding, ideally rational agents. It turns out that we will have difficulty independently assessing a disagreement in a thoroughly rational way.

Say I show you a list of names – “David Stenbill, Monica Bigoutski, Shana Tirana.”⁶¹ A few days from now, I hand you another list of names, some of which are minor celebrities and

foundationalism insofar as we must subject *all* beliefs to scrutiny – and when we examine our beliefs, we cannot do so from the perspective of another unexamined belief.

⁶⁰ Given this, the following objections also apply to any proponents of epistemic conservatism: “I establish my beliefs by reason and argumentation and they are thereby rational. I am thus excused from epistemic distress when I encounter disagreements with other people.”

⁶¹ Example drawn from Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking Fast and Slow* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux 2011), p. 60. For the original experiment, see Larry Jacoby and Colleen Kelley, “Becoming Famous Overnight: Limits on the Ability

some of which are made up. I ask you to identify the celebrities. If David Stenbill is on this list, it's likely that you'll mark him down as a minor celebrity. Why? Because his name is familiar to you. Usually, being familiar with a person (or place, activity etc.) means having prior experience and acquaintance with that person, and this is (minimally) comforting – on the whole, we like that with which we have experience. However, I can manipulate you to assume you have prior experience with a person, and thus incline you to like that person, simply by making that name familiar. This phenomenon of tagging familiar things as good or likeable things is known as the exposure effect.⁶² Returning to cases of disagreement, we might worry that the exposure effect will incline us to prefer our own positions simply because of their familiarity. That is, we might fool ourselves into thinking that another person is an epistemic inferior simply because he or she adheres to an unfamiliar position.

Similarly, we have a “tendency to seek out and interpret new evidence in ways that confirm[s] what [we] already think.”⁶³ This tendency is known as confirmation bias; we're prone to confirm what we already think. For instance, consider the following experiment⁶⁴: an experimenter gives a group of subjects a series of numbers (2-4-6) and asks them to guess the rule these triplets conform to by generating further series of triplets. Reasonably enough, our subject might guess, “8-10-12.” The experimenter responds affirmatively. Our subject keeps on guessing – “100-102-104”; “1-3-5,” and after a series of affirmations, suggests that the rule behind the triplets is “a series of numbers rising by two.” The experimenter says, “No.” The problem is that we fail to thoroughly test our hypotheses by generating contrary examples. For

to Avoid Unconscious Influences of the Past,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 56 (1989), pp. 326-338.

⁶² Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Religion and Politics* (Vintage Books: 2012), p. 65. For the original experiment, see Robert Zajonc's “Attitudinal Effects of Mere Exposure,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 9 (1968).

⁶³ *The Righteous Mind*, p. 93.

⁶⁴ *The Righteous Mind*, pp. 92-3.

instance, if our subject had guessed “1-2-3” (yes) and “3-2-1” (no), he or she would have received an important clue. (The rule: any series of ascending numbers.)

Now, we might wonder how much this experiment can teach us when it comes to disagreement. After all, isn't a disagreement exactly the sort of thing we need, since we are bad at generating contrary examples on our own? Yes. It is indeed. (This is why David Christensen's article is titled “Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News;” he thinks that disagreement is good news because it provides us with an opportunity for epistemic self-improvement.) The problem, however, is how we approach disagreement. That is, does disagreement prompt us to ask, “Does my interlocutor's disagreement show that I'm wrong?” Or, does disagreement provoke this response instead: “How can I show that my interlocutor is wrong?” The question we ask will give us a direction to go, a hypothesis to confirm.⁶⁵ If I ask the former question, I am open to seeing myself as the party in error. If I ask the latter question – and I suspect that this question is far more prevalent – I am perhaps inclined to see the other party as in error.⁶⁶ This does not mean that we can never get past our tendency to confirm our own opinion, but it does suggest that it is difficult to get past the confirmation bias. In summary, the exposure effect and confirmation bias do not entail our inability to independently assess disagreement, but they do suggest that we are bad at independently assessing disagreement. A thoroughgoing assessment of the parties to a disagreement takes cognitive energy, in which case we will require motivation in order to attempt such an evaluation.

⁶⁵ *Thinking Fast and Slow*, p. 81.

⁶⁶ However, I think there is reason to think that we can manipulate which question people ask in a given disagreement if we are able to manipulate the conditions of the disagreement. That is, when disagreement occurs under certain conditions, it is likely to be congenial rather than hostile. This fact is part of what motivates my social consideration of disagreement in the second half of this paper. Since a social approach to disagreement can help us to overcome the apparent threat of disagreement, one fortunate result of thinking about disagreement in social terms is a positive epistemic result, namely, asking the right questions about disagreement.

Above we noted several self-serving biases that affect our ability to be neutral in disagreement. However, we also noted that we can overcome these biases. Thus, the above-noted “objections” to the EWV are in fact problems to take into account if one wants to translate the EWV into a set of recommendations for practice. Ultimately, they are surmountable problems.

Independent assessment: strong and weak varieties

However, in addition to the practical issues that arise regarding the possibility of independent assessment of a disagreement, there are also hosts of structural issues that make independent assessment difficult. In the following, I will first distinguish between strong and weak independent assessment, suggesting that strong independent assessment is impossible. I will then propose that the EWV requires significant continuity among evidence bases in order to establish epistemic peer-dom or the lack thereof.

In regards to any one of my non-basic beliefs, we can speak of its having an “evidence base.”⁶⁷ Relative to any belief B, there is some set of beliefs, experiences, etc. that stand in a support-relationship to B. This support relationship is one of truth-conduciveness, or evidence. That which we would invoke in support of B constitutes its evidence base. In different circumstances, different subsets of this base will become salient. Recall that the EWV insists that I cannot allow the fact of disagreement to count against my interlocutor when I am assessing our disagreement, lest we find ourselves thinking, “Since he disagrees with me, he’s wrong.” Similarly, on the EWV I must set aside the subset of my evidence base that directly supports my position in disagreement. If I fail to do this, I will be stuck in another loop: “The convincing argument, piece of evidence, etc. relevant to this disagreement is *q*. And *q* supports my belief, so

⁶⁷ The term is drawn from Alvin Plantinga’s *Where The Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (Oxford 2011), p. 167-8. My definition varies slightly from the definition Plantinga provides (“My evidence base is the set of beliefs I use, or to which I appeal, in conducting an inquiry”; “One of the main functions of one’s evidence base, therefore, is that of evaluating possible hypotheses, evaluating them as plausible and probable or implausible and improbable”), but I don’t think they’re essentially different.

my interlocutor is wrong.” Instead, I should temporarily set aside my reasoning about the disagreement, creating space in which I can know my interlocutor’s reasoning.

However, this leaves us with a difficult question. Say I am having a political disagreement with one of my colleagues. On the recommendations of the EWV, I should independently assess which of us is more likely to be in error about the matter at hand. That is, I am to set aside the reasoning or the subsets of my evidence base that led me to my own belief, and consider whether my colleague might not have gotten it right. The problem, however, is this: how much do I have to set aside in order to assess independently? I will set aside some directly relevant beliefs, for sure, to “make room” for my colleague’s opinions and reasoning, but will I set aside *all* of the relevant evidence base? Surely not. This is impossible, as well is unhelpful.

I propose that we deal with this issue by drawing a line, albeit a fuzzy one, between strong and weak independent assessment. Strong independent assessment requires setting aside *all* evidence considerations relevant to a disagreement. This is too strong. Strong independent assessment would involve a kind of epistemic nihilism. However, weak independent assessment would involve setting aside only the subset of our evidence base that is directly relevant to a disagreement.⁶⁸ Which, exactly, are “directly relevant”? This will be a matter to determine on a case-by-case basis, but I think that we can draw functional distinctions between directly and indirectly relevant subsets of our evidence base.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Consider for example the process of dialogue across communities. One never thinks or converses from a tradition-neutral standpoint. Similarly, we can never set aside all evidential considerations relevant to disagreements, in which case strong independent assessment is impossible.

⁶⁹ Take my belief that beavers sometimes graze. The subset of my evidence base directly relevant to this belief is a set of memories, since I have watched beavers graze on my grandparents’ lawn. However, I can also identify a subset of my evidence base that is indirectly relevant to this belief, namely, the belief that my memories are generally reliable. If I was having a disagreement with someone about whether or not beavers graze, I would need to temporarily set aside my memory of having watched beavers do such in order to fairly assess the disagreement. I would not, however, set aside *all* of my evidence base.

In summary, insofar as we can successfully engage in weak independent assessment, the distinction I have drawn in this section does not constitute an objection to the EWV. However, it seems to me that the distinction between strong and weak independent assessment nonetheless constitutes a check on the EWV, since the distinction is a messy one. The EWV relies on a neat distinction between directly and indirectly relevant evidence, since on the EWV we are to set aside the directly relevant evidence. Since we in fact draw quasi-arbitrary lines about which evidence to set aside, this aspect of the EWV is perhaps more uncertain than EWV theorists would prefer.

Deep disagreements: divergent evidence bases and the impossibility of peer judgments

Thus far, I have spoken of evidence bases in terms of independently assessing disagreements. That is, my discussion thus far has been confined to the first-personal perspective, since it has dealt with the question, “What does fairly assessing my interlocutor require?” However, having a notion of evidence bases, there is a further point to highlight. In some disagreements, there is deep disparity between the evidences bases of the parties to the disagreement. For instance, consider an inter-community disagreement. Recall that in some cases, differing communities have importantly different modes of enquiry. This involves having different assumptions about which beliefs are authoritative, different modes of speaking, different patterns for interpreting the world. These disagreements involve a great deal of second-order disagreement, which we can also express as a deep difference in evidence bases.⁷⁰ How does this relate to the EWV?

Suppose I am in a disagreement. Assume I can set aside the subset of my evidence base directly relevant to this disagreement and begin to evaluate my interlocutor in a fair way. Upon

⁷⁰ In other words, I am happy to integrate my earlier discussion of disagreements in which there is low-consensus over belief-forming procedures with the current discussion, since it seems to me that the point up for discussion is essentially the same.

consideration of my interlocutor's reasoning, however, I find his thinking to be rather foreign.⁷¹ He has different assumptions, and finds things plausible that I would never have considered. His ways of speaking about the matter at hand are very different from mine. He claims a set of relevant experiences that do not align with my experiences. We might say that this is a disagreement involving a great deal of second-order disagreement, in addition to the original first-order disagreement. Now, say I try to evaluate my interlocutor in order to assess his position, intellectually speaking, as the EWV requires. Who is more likely to be in error, him or me? In this case, the question seems unanswerable. Rather, it seems more appropriate to say, "I don't know. There is too much second-order disagreement going on for me to make a fair judgment. My interlocutor's in a different ballpark. He plays by different rules. I'm not even sure I understand him fully, to be frank!"⁷²

In short, as a theory that relies crucially on the idea of epistemic peer-dom, the EWV also relies crucially on the possibility of determining if the parties to a disagreement are peers. However, as I illustrated above, it seems that this is not always possible. In some cases of "deep disagreements," or PPR disagreements that occur across communities, there is too much divergence for peer judgments.⁷³ Evaluating your interlocutor in order to see if she is an epistemic peer requires that some critical mass of evidence base be shared between the two of you. If, on a second-order level, you think relatively similarly, you will be able to make accurate

⁷¹ More troubling are cases in which we *ought* to find our interlocutor's modes of thinking foreign, since they are very different, but fail to do so, assuming instead that we are "on the same page," intellectually speaking.

⁷² This is a kind of incommensurability. However, in what follows I will refrain from explicitly using language of "incommensurability," in order to head off a conversation about what incommensurability entails. For instance, is incommensurability the inability to translate the positions of two interlocutors into the "language" of the other? Or, is incommensurability something further, the inability of these interlocutors to resolve their disagreement, given their deep communal divide? As I see it, both are forms of incommensurability. But which is incommensurability proper? That is a question for another day.

⁷³ "Deep disagreements," as I imply here, combine the classification scales developed earlier. Recall that we classified disagreements according to their level of ingression, their consensus over belief-forming procedures and whether or not they occurred within or across community boundaries. Deep disagreements have low consensus over belief-forming procedures, high levels of ingression, and they occur across community boundaries.

judgments about whom (if anyone) is more likely to be in error. On the other hand, if your disagreement involves a great deal of second-order disagreement, you will not have the common ground necessary for making peer judgments, and absent the ability to determine whether or not the parties to a disagreement are peers, the EWV loses its force. This means that the EWV is stymied by deep disagreements, those that involve a great deal of second-order disagreement and perhaps occur across communities. When we face such disagreements, the EWV will not apply.

Excessive demands

Perhaps the most deep-seated objection against the EWV⁷⁴ is that it is simply too skeptical: “Your insistence that I balance my credence with my interlocutor is skeptical and epistemically unhealthy. A well functioning epistemic life means not just giving in and splitting the difference every time you encounter disagreement. After all, we encounter peer disagreement all the time! If we always split the difference in credence, we would become agnostic about most points. That’s a problem, because one has to believe something.” However, this line of thinking should sound familiar: it sounds like a conservative line of thinking, on which practical considerations like epistemic integrity are of importance in disagreement.

In short, I think we find ourselves at somewhat of an impasse. Initially, we dismissed the conservative position because it seemed like mere arrogance. After all, when your intelligent classmate argues for a perspective contrary to your own, there would be something very odd about saying, “Well, my view’s my view and the fact that I believe it justifies my intention to keep on believing it.” In other words, if you are in a disagreement and the other party knows something that you do not, you would be a fool not to sit down, listen, and adjust your beliefs accordingly. This emphasis motivates conciliationism in general, as well as the EWV and its

⁷⁴ Note that I am speaking of the strong version of the EWV. If one were to weaken the EWV, this objection would correspondingly weaken in force. However, as I have already said, it seems to me that the weak version of the EWV is a rather anodyne view, so the fact that the objection is mitigated by weakening the EWV is not troubling to me.

insistence that one ought to reduce credence in the face of peer disagreement. Yet, as we saw just above, we do not always find the EWV so plausible. For one thing, it has significant practical limitations. I am doubtful about our ability to strongly independently assess disagreements, in which case the EWV becomes difficult to apply. How much do I have to set aside to evaluate disagreements fairly? Finally, the EWV tends toward excessive skepticism. The resulting conclusion is that we experience a pull toward both epistemic conservatism and the conciliationism, including the specific conciliationist view that is the EWV. Both trends find plausibility and support in everyday epistemic practice.

Conservatism *and* Conciliationism: Putting the Classification System to Work

At this point, we may find it helpful to consider the distinctions we drew among types of disagreement earlier in this thesis. This will not eliminate the complexity of our subject matter, but it can help us understand the senses in which we find both conciliationism and conservatism appealing. For instance, say that I am in a disagreement with an epistemic novice from my own community about a belief with a low-level of ingression. That is, among the evidence bases that bear on our disagreement, we share certain key evidence bases. In this case, I think we will find conciliationism appealing: the novice would do well to take our disagreement seriously, and it would be epistemically preferable for him to adjust his belief in response. Now, adjust the scenario slightly: say this person and I are in fact peers. In this case, I think the EWV in particular (i.e. as contrasted to conciliationism in general) is appropriate. Why? Since this is a disagreement involving a belief with a low level of ingression, the skeptical tendency typical of the EWV will not be problematic. There is not much at stake; my noetic structure will not be radically altered by reducing credence (whether the reduction is strong or weak, the latter case involving “splitting the difference” in credence) in my initial position. This means that I don’t

have anything that would justify ignoring my disagreement with an epistemic peer: there are no practical ramifications to reducing credence, and this person is my peer, in which case we're equally likely to be in error. Besides, this person is from my own epistemic community. This does not entail incapacity on our part to disagree, but intra-community disagreement is uniquely jarring insofar as we do not expect to disagree with those inside our community with as great a frequency.

In contrast to this case, one that I think motivates conciliationism, consider a different example. Suppose we have a student disagreeing with his professor. The professor, a theist, nearing the end of her career, is arguing that persons are ontologically unique. To be a person, on her view, is to be an importantly different kind of thing from other objects and organisms. On the other hand, the student, an atheist, is arguing for animalism, the view that human persons are essentially animals. There is nothing ontologically unique about personhood, in his mind. Now, assume that these two are peers.⁷⁵ I think it is also fair to assume that this belief has a relatively high level of ingression in the noetic structures of these two. (Our beliefs about human persons are, I assume, relatively important and formative beliefs, even if they are not articulated with philosophical sophistication in most instances.) Now, epistemic conservatism suggests that these two are justified in maintaining their initial beliefs. I think that epistemic conservatism is appropriate in this case, since we have a disagreement over a highly ingressed (and thus "high stakes") belief, between two people with very different epistemic situations, in which case they don't have much in the way of common ground. This does not mean that they should ignore each other, forgo dialogue, refuse to criticize, or never change their minds. However, if both parties maintain their initial position, they are nonetheless epistemically justified. In contrast, on the

⁷⁵ As I hope to have made clear, determining epistemic peer-dom (or the lack thereof) is a messy and difficult business. I am nonetheless optimistic about our capacity to use this term in a meaningful, if not neat, way.

EWV, the parties to this disagreement are epistemically culpable if they maintain their initial belief at full credence post disagreement with a peer.

Most cases of disagreement are far less clear-cut than the cases I have provided here. Even these cases, I suppose, have some remaining ambiguities. However, practical investigations that churn out simple and neat solutions warrant skepticism. The conditions in which we practice are extraordinarily complex, and it is only appropriate that our recommendations about *how* to practice (the aim of a practical investigation) should be complex as well. Given this, any complete regulative epistemology will have to account for the extent to which both conciliationism and conservatism can instruct us.

A Regulative Epistemology: Some Guidelines for Conduct in Disagreement

At this point, it should come as no surprise that I have relatively little to offer in the way of specific rules for conduct in disagreement. Rather, the bulk of my practical work for the epistemic portion of this paper occurs below, in a discussion of intellectual virtues. However, I nonetheless think it is worthwhile to try to turn out some instructions, however general, pertaining to disagreement.

I have already established that practical recommendations rely upon a prior theoretical account. That is, before we can offer any practical recommendations about how to conduct oneself in a disagreement, we need to consider the features of the disagreement, coming to some tentative conclusions about the kind of disagreement it is. In short, on the epistemological approach developed here, our first instruction is to reflect upon the kind of disagreement at hand. Does the belief relative to the disagreement have a high or low level of ingression? (For both parties?) Are second-order disagreements and conflict over belief-forming procedures involved? Or, what about the persons involved in this disagreement – no doubt they belong to multiple

epistemic communities, but on the whole, do these memberships converge or diverge, interpersonally? That is, can we accurately say of them that they belong to the same epistemic community? Finally, are the parties to the disagreement peers? Are they approximately equal concerning intellectual virtues, and approximately equal in their acquaintance with the relevant evidence?⁷⁶

Answering these questions well would be an impressive task of its own. Unfortunately, accurately answering these questions about a disagreement is only a first step. After answering these questions, we are left with the harder task of “applying” the appropriate theory of disagreement. Is the disagreement of the sort in which conservatism is more appropriate? Or, is this a disagreement in which a conciliationist approach would be preferred? Above, I have tried to provide paradigm cases for these two theories: conservatism makes sense when we have highly ingressed beliefs for which there is little consensus over belief-forming procedures (i.e. a PPR disagreement), especially if the interlocutors in question belong to importantly different epistemic communities. Conciliationism, on the other hand, is the right response when we have a disagreement that admits of obvious resolution (e.g. a disagreement about the right answer to a math problem) or a disagreement between two interlocutors whose relationship is that of an epistemic novice and an epistemic expert. Finally, the EWV in particular is appropriate when we have two peers disagreeing about a belief with a low depth of ingression and high-consensus over the relevant belief-forming procedures, especially if our interlocutors belong to the same epistemic community.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ This is an impressively long list of questions. I expect that it would be relatively easy to answer these questions about most disagreements; nonetheless, we might wonder if we are obliged to take time to analyze every disagreement in this way, or if it is sufficient to analyze only a few disagreements in this thoroughgoing manner. My opinion is that we need not analyze all, or even most, disagreements in this fashion, since at any given time we each face a variety of people and projects that are deserving of our time and attention.

⁷⁷ Why have I adopted this typology? My answer to this question is incomplete, but I will offer it anyways. Most simply, in deep disagreements, we have a great deal of second-order disagreement, in addition to the first-order

Yet, in most instances, disagreements will not conform to paradigms, and thoroughly classifying a disagreement will not obviously align it with an epistemic theory of disagreement. For instance, take a disagreement between non-peers with a low-level of consensus about belief-forming procedures – a political disagreement, perhaps. Moreover, say that this disagreement has a relatively moderate level of ingression. Now, what do we say about this disagreement? The fact that it is between non-peers inclines us towards conciliationism, perhaps, but the low-level of consensus about belief-forming procedures suggests conservatism instead – and we get little help at all from the fact that this belief has a moderate level of ingression. Does this leave us stranded, with no way to apply epistemic theories of disagreement to specific cases of disagreement? Well, if we were hoping for an algorithmic approach to disagreement, then we are indeed stranded. But, if we are not after an algorithmic account – disagreements are complex, after all – then perhaps the discussion has been worthwhile after all. In fact, we might wonder if there is a way to integrate the insights of the epistemic theories of disagreement, in which case there is no need to determine which one theory is relevant to any particular case of disagreement. There is a way to do this, namely, by appealing to intellectual virtues. This is the project of the following section.

However, before considering intellectual virtues, we can identify a few remaining specific instructions. Assume that we are able effectively to identify which epistemic theories are appropriate for individual cases of disagreement. What, exactly, does each theory instruct us to

disagreement. In such a case, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to determine who is more likely to be in error. There are too many variables to take into consideration. (Moreover, in some deep disagreements, it is not obvious if the interlocutors in fact disagree. Perhaps they are talking past each other, despite the apparent clash between two propositions that constitutes the first-order disagreement.) In short, in none of these cases do I see evidence of equally distributed probability of error sufficient to motivate the EWV's skepticism. On the other hand, in the cases that I have identified as appropriate for the EWV, there is good reason to think that both parties are equally likely to be in error. Moreover, we lack reasons for overriding the skeptical response (such as "this is a belief with a high level of ingression; significantly reducing my credence in it would effect a disintegration of my noetic structure") in the paradigmatic EWV cases. In short, realizing that one is equally as likely as one's interlocutor to be in error constitutes a *prima facie* reason for reducing credence in one's belief.

do in a given case of disagreement? On the conservative position, we are instructed (or permitted?) to maintain our initial belief. On conciliationism broadly conceived, we are to resolve the disagreement, whether this occurs by way of one party changing her mind or by way of recalculation. On conciliationism narrowly conceived as the EWV, we are to adjust our credence about the belief in question in response to our interlocutor. These are relatively straightforward instructions, I assume. However, they require at least one addition, namely, an account of our ability to exercise control over our beliefs in the relevant way. For instance, on the EWV, in certain kinds of disagreements I am *not* justified in maintaining my initial belief at my prior credence. However, we could not simply will ourselves to reduce credence in one proposition and raise credence in another. Insofar as the EWV tracks the ways in which we actually do believe, peer-disagreement will naturally incline us to lower credence in our own belief and raise credence in the belief of our interlocutors. But say this balancing doesn't occur – or perhaps it doesn't occur to a great enough degree. What then? Is there anything we can *do*? Indirectly, yes.

Consider an example. (Although I will use an example relevant to the EWV, I assume that the general pattern of my response could be applied to any of the epistemic theories of disagreement we have considered.) Say I am disagreeing with a peer about which policy will be most effective. This is a practical disagreement, a disagreement about how to best get a task done. Overall, this is a belief with a low-to-moderate level of ingression. Since this policy belief mostly constitutes a belief about effectiveness – we are arguing about how to achieve effectively some goal – we will have relatively high consensus over belief-forming procedures. Furthermore, assume the EWV generally applies in this scenario. However, I am not naturally responding as the EWV says I should. I continue to maintain my initial belief at its original

credence. My original question is now relevant: is there anything I can do to align myself with the recommendations of the EWV? As I have said, I cannot sit down and will myself to have a lowered credence in my position. But, I can act and speak *as if* I have a lowered credence for my position. I can force myself to keep in mind the fact that my interlocutor is a peer. I might also keep in mind the arguments my interlocutor has offered on behalf of his position. Or, I can temper my comments about this belief, saying, “Yes, although I hold policy belief *a*, I must confess that policy belief *c* appears to be very plausible as well.” Eventually, I suspect, this will lead to a lowering of credence in my initial position. But if my credence doesn’t lower? Acting “as if” seems good enough to me.

In this section, I have considered what specific recommendations result from the epistemic theories of disagreement that we have considered in this paper. Overall, I have only moderately successful results, since the epistemic theories of disagreement result in impartial rules that cannot fully address the complexity of disagreements.⁷⁸ However, since this paper has a practical aim, I will try to uncover some practical guidance from virtues in the following section.

Intellectual Virtues and Disagreement

Before we can understand the nature of an intellectual virtue in particular, we require a working concept of virtue in general. I will propose the following account: “a human virtue is an acquired base of excellent functioning in some generically human sphere of activity that is

⁷⁸ In fact, we might be suspicious of any practical approach to disagreement that culminated in a long list of highly specific rules. Rosalind Hursthouse, for instance, speaking of the difficulty of knowing what to do in particular hard cases, writes, “Knowledge of what one should do in a particular hard case is not knowledge that we expect adolescents, however clever, and however well armed with a normative ethics that have been given in a book, to have [...]” Living well requires experience of the sort that clever adolescents do not have, and it would be a fault of a theory if a clever adolescent were “living well” in virtue of her adherence to the rules of that theory. See Hursthouse’s *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press 1999), p. 61.

challenging and important.”⁷⁹ Intellectual virtues, in turn, are acquired bases of excellent functioning in epistemic (or intellectual) spheres.

Now, let us briefly return to our question about action-guidance. Above I suggested that the EWV and epistemic conservatism do not do justice to the phenomena of disagreement, and are too general and rough to be of much help when it comes to actually disagreeing. This might seem counter-intuitive, since the EWV and epistemic conservatism tell us exactly what to do in a disagreement. (“Maintain full credence.” “Split the difference in credence with your peer.”) Virtues, on the other hand, are broad and apparently vague recommendations: “Be intellectually generous.” One is tempted to respond, “Sure, but do you mind supplying a little more detail?” We might find it helpful at this point to remember that virtues are analogous to skills (“acquired bases of excellent functioning”). Given this, we are able to see how intellectual virtues are in fact better sources of guidance than are conciliationism and conservatism, given that the specific answers supplied by these rule-based approaches are difficult to put to work amidst the complexities of everyday disagreements.

Consider the skill of playing the organ. The skilled organist might try to compile a list of very specific instructions. Her list would be incomplete, but she might be able to approximate the actions required for playing the organ well in list form. Analogously, a thorough consideration of conciliationism and epistemic conservatism of the sort we initially engaged in above might result in a long and complex list of very specific instructions about how to approach disagreement. Again, this list would only be partial. Now, returning to our organ-playing example: say we give this list to a non-musician. Or, to be more fair, say we hand this list to a pianist. Do we expect

⁷⁹ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 59. I would note that there is a great deal of literature treating the nuances of “virtue.” I have chosen to use Roberts and Wood’s definition, not because I find it so incredibly insightful, but because their account is sufficiently representative of virtue accounts in general and because I will be using their work in what follows.

this person suddenly to become a competent organist? No. Far from it. Rather, playing the organ well requires practicing each instruction on the list, and then practicing various combinations of these instructions, in addition to learning the skills not captured by this list. Being a good organist is a learned skill. It requires time, development, and experience. Similarly, becoming a well-functioning epistemic agent requires more than a list of instructions about what to do in a disagreement of sort r and about what to do differently in a disagreement of sort s . It is not that the skilled epistemic agent (or, more appropriately, the virtuous epistemic agent) will not abide by this list of instructions. The skilled organist, after all, abides by the instructions on her list. However, the way in which she goes about following these instructions will not be formulaic. Her adherence to the instructions follows *from* the skills she has developed. In the same way, the virtuous intellectual agent's adherence to epistemic guidance will arise out of intellectual virtues.

Having briefly paused to establish that an intellectual virtue is an acquired base of excellent functioning in epistemic (or intellectual) spheres, we are now prepared to consider specific intellectual virtues. I will discuss two in what follows: firmness and humility. Firmness, I will suggest, is in rough alignment with epistemic conservatism, whereas humility parallels conciliationism. Assuming some congruence between these intellectual virtues and our epistemic theories hold, the virtues account does a nice job of highlighting the extent to which both theories track something important about disagreement. That is, recall that both conciliationism and conservatism are present in our day-to-day epistemic practice. In short, a final account should integrate the concerns of both perspectives. Since a virtues account allows for the congruence and integration of specific virtues, speaking of firmness and humility offers us a way in which to address the concerns of both the conciliationist and epistemic conservative.

Firmness

Roberts and Wood characterize firmness as the mean between flaccidity and rigidity.⁸⁰ In cases of disagreement, the firm person maintains her own beliefs. (Because of this, I have suggested that the virtue of firmness incorporates the concerns and intuitions of epistemic conservatism.) However, the tenacity to one's own position that characterizes firmness does not mean that firmness is rigidity. Rather, the firm person has a "basic respect for others" and is accordingly generous in her stance towards theoretical alternatives.⁸¹ This generosity and respect occurs by way of intellectual sympathy, "an ability to appreciate brilliance and greatness across divides of culture, theory, and time."⁸²

In contrast to the firm person, the flaccid person is uncommitted to her beliefs and "fails to stand for anything intellectually."⁸³ Perhaps she is ironically committed to intellectual non-commitment, lazy when it comes to defending her opinions, or simply intellectually immature. Or, more likely, flaccidity can occur in non-vicious form in those who are intellectually immature. The paradigmatic case of this flaccidity is perhaps a college freshman taking a course in introductory philosophy: within the course of fifteen weeks he is "a Platonist, an empiricist, a skeptic, a Cartesian, a Kantian, a utilitarian, a social contractor, a mind-body dualist, a Berkeleyan idealist, a reductive materialist, a theist, an atheist, and an agnostic."⁸⁴ In this case, we would not attribute culpability to our college freshman; we would simply say that he has yet to grow up, intellectual speaking. Indeed, we might think that confined to a short and intense period like a college semester, this kind of flaccidity is in fact a prerequisite to developing

⁸⁰ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 184.

⁸¹ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 206.

⁸² *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 205.

⁸³ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 190.

⁸⁴ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 188.

appropriate firmness. It may be that intellectual experimentation is a precursor to intellectual stability.

Since I have described firmness as analogous to epistemic conservatism, one might wonder if flaccidity represents the vicious tendencies of the EWV. Well, let us try it out. We know that we cannot accuse the EWV proponent of pitching his beliefs out the window willy-nilly, since the EWV involves caveats about epistemic peer-dom. Therefore, there is an important sense in which the EWV does not encourage flaccidity, since the EWV proponent does not abandon his beliefs at the slightest hint of disagreement. However, among our objection to the EWV was one regarding excessive skepticism. If this objection holds, then there is indeed a tendency within EWV to flaccidity, since skepticism constitutes a problematically loose attitude towards one's beliefs. However, it is important that this is merely a vicious *tendency*. The fact that the EWV has a problematic tendency does not mean that the view itself is unacceptable.

Having discussed flaccidity, we are now prepared to consider its opposing vice, rigidity. Roberts and Wood identify five types of rigidity: dogmatism, doxastic complacency, stolid perseverance, perceptual rigidity, and comprehensional rigidity.⁸⁵ For my purposes, it will suffice to consider dogmatism and perceptual and comprehensional rigidity only. Dogmatism is the species of rigidity most relevant to disagreement; it is a “disposition to *respond* irrationality to *oppositions* to the belief: anomalies, objections, evidence to the contrary, counterexamples, and the like. Intellectual challenge is dogmatism's native habitat [emphasis theirs].”⁸⁶ In particular, the sort of irrational response Roberts and Wood have in mind is that of being hardened and resistant to criticism. It is important to realize that dogmatism is not, on Roberts and Wood's account, a kind of excessive firmness. Neither is it adherence to a belief that is too

⁸⁵ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 194; discussion follows.

⁸⁶ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 195.

strong relative to one's available evidence; dogmatism is a property of people, not beliefs.⁸⁷ Most simply, dogmatism involves shutting one's ears to opposition: you will not hear anything said against your belief. Given this, on Roberts and Wood's account, it is *not* dogmatic (i.e. vicious) to listen to one's interlocutor in a disagreement and simultaneously maintain belief.

In addition to dogmatism, rigidity might consist in (or partly consist in) perceptual rigidity, which leads a person to structure his perceptions according to insufficient or misleading categories, or fail to perceive some phenomenon at all.⁸⁸ As an example of perceptual rigidity, Roberts and Wood cite an experiment in which subjects saw anomalous playing cards (black hearts and red spades) mixed in with normal cards.⁸⁹ Some subjects were never able to recognize the anomalous cards. The perceptual rigidity illustrated by this experiment is a kind of base line perceptual rigidity. That is, although this particular experiment does not involve any vicious behavior, the subjects highlight a natural tendency of ours that can result in vicious behavior, if ignored and unchecked. In addition to this basic and strongly perceptual form of rigidity, emotions can further perceptual resistance when we become attached to our views and fear their being proved wrong, in which case rigid perceptual categories will "protect" our opinions from disconfirming evidence.⁹⁰

If we transition away from robustly perceptual cases of rigidity, we discover what Roberts and Wood call "comprehensional rigidity," although there is no sharp divide between the two types. Roberts and Wood explain comprehensional rigidity in a two-fold manner.

Comprehensional rigidity is "a lack of acquaintance with and practice in the categories of the

⁸⁷ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 194.

⁸⁸ *Intellectual Virtues*, pp. 202-3.

⁸⁹ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 203.

⁹⁰ *Intellectual Virtues*, pp. 203-4.

alien framework” and “an emotional discomfort with the alternative ways of understanding.”⁹¹ Given this, the comprehensionally rigid person is unable to “grasp theoretical alternatives [to her own theoretical perspective].”⁹² These alternative views will likely seem uninteresting, if not infantile or stupid. In contrast, the firm person welcomes acquaintance with and practice in the categories of alien frameworks. Similarly, the firm person attempts to notice and subdue emotional discomfort in order to keep her this discomfort from undue interference.⁹³

Having described the virtue of firmness, we might wonder if firmness has fully accounted for the concerns of epistemic conservatism. In other words, is firmness a fair “substitute” for the instructions of epistemic conservatism regarding disagreement? This is a question best put to a proponent of epistemic conservatism, but we can, for the time being, try to imagine his answer. If we characterize epistemic conservatism in terms of a worry about excessive skepticism, then yes, firmness seems to be an apt response to that worry. That is, the virtue of firmness relies on the idea that it is a good thing to have (relatively) stable beliefs. We might think of the firm person as someone with an epistemic home, in contrast to the skeptic who is an epistemic nomad.

Humility

Earlier I criticized epistemic conservatism as potentially a kind of intellectual arrogance, and suggested that the EWW might help us to avoid intellectual arrogance in disagreement. It is appropriate, then, to consider humility as the virtue correlate of the EWW.

Perhaps oddly, Roberts and Wood do not articulate humility as a mean between two vices.⁹⁴ They do offer a set of vices to which humility is opposed, but all of these vices can be

⁹¹ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 205.

⁹² *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 204.

⁹³ Insofar as this is possible, that is. There is an interesting discussion to be had as to how much voluntary control we have over our emotions. My intuition is that we have little direct control over our emotions but significant indirect control.

⁹⁴ Actually, since not all Aristotelian virtues are constructed in terms of a mean, this is not odd.

lumped under the vice “arrogance.” This arrogance can be manifested as an excessive desire for others to think well of you (vainglory), or an illicit sense of self-entitlement.⁹⁵ Intellectually speaking, this might translate into a desire for others to recognize you as being right, or more subtly, arrogance might involve a desire for *you* to get the truth – not a desire for the truth, period.⁹⁶ Or, intellectual arrogance might take the form of a policy that excludes a class of people from being acknowledged epistemic agents, a form of testimonial prejudice. For example, Miranda Fricker in her book *Epistemic Injustice* quotes a line from the screenplay *The Talented Mr. Ripley* in which one character, Herbert Greenleaf, tells his future daughter-in-law, “Marge, there’s female intuition, and then there are facts.”⁹⁷ With this put-down, Greenleaf exhibits the latter form of intellectual arrogance, privileging his own gender as having superior intellectual capacity.

Although Roberts and Wood do not offer a second vice opposing humility, I think we can say a few tentative words as to what sort of vice might belong at the other extreme. Servility and pusillanimity come to mind. Servility involves placing a low value on the respect one is due.⁹⁸ For instance, if Marge believes her future father-in-law when he belittles her suggestions and ideas, suggesting that they are mere intuition rather than factual, she exhibits intellectual servility, failing to realize that she deserves more respect intellectually speaking than she has been given. (However, if Marge were ignorant of the fact that she deserves this respect, we would not describe her as culpably servile.) Likewise, pusillanimity is literally “smallness of

⁹⁵ *Intellectual Virtues*, pp. 237, 243.

⁹⁶ Paul Griffiths suggests that a Christian understanding of knowledge must attend carefully to this fact. He argues that curiosity is, for Augustine, a vice insofar as curiosity represents a desire for the possession of knowledge (and possibly a desire for illicit knowledge as well). A Christian understanding of knowledge would treat of knowledge as a kind of iconography, and the aim of knowledge is always ultimately God. See *The Vice of Curiosity: An Essay on Intellectual Appetite* (Canadian Mennonite University Press 2006).

⁹⁷ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice* (Oxford University Press 2009), p. 9.

⁹⁸ See Thomas Hill’s “Servility and Self-Respect” in *Theories of Ethics*, ed. P. Newberry (Mayfield 1999), pp. 544-553.

soul.” The pusillanimous knower does not trust his own epistemic agency; he gives up his opinions at the first sign of opposition, not because he does not care, or because he is afraid, but because he thinks badly of himself as an intellectual agent.

Having seen what humility is not, we are prepared to say something positive about it. Humility is appropriately limited concern and attention towards one’s value and status.⁹⁹ So, in an intellectual context, the intellectually humble person is freed from the burden of excessive self-concern such that he is more concerned with intellectual goods than with his own standing. In situations of disagreement, then, “the humble inquirer has more potential teachers than his less humble counterparts.”¹⁰⁰ In short, the humble person is predisposed to listen to the views of others and eager to learn from others, rather than to dismiss potential interlocutors out of hand, because he “knows” that an individual or group has nothing to offer in the way of epistemic goods. Consider, for instance, an analogous kind of humility, humility before a text. This kind of humility “is to hope, even to expect, that the text will illumine its subject matter for us from a perspective we haven’t yet occupied.”¹⁰¹ Similarly, a person humble in the face of disagreement has more potential teachers because he is hoping and expecting to learn from his interlocutors. Unlike the person who struggles with perceptual or comprehensional rigidity, the humble person keeps self-affirming emotions (whether fear or attraction) at bay such that engaging with alternative frameworks becomes possible and even desirable.

Admittedly, this account of humility is in some ways at odds with conciliationism in general and the EWV in particular. For example, the EWV is concerned to split the difference, and favor neither party in disagreements, but humility as an intellectual virtue is something other than this, since it is a setting-aside of status concerns in the interest of truth. Certainly, there is

⁹⁹*Intellectual Virtues*, p. 239.

¹⁰⁰ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 253.

¹⁰¹ Merold Westphal, *Whose Community, Which Interpretation?* (Baker Academic 2009), p. 85

nothing in humility that entails balancing credences in disagreement. However, if we set aside the exact wording of the EWV and reflect more generally on its tendencies, I think we can find substantive congruity between humility as an intellectual virtue and the EWV. For instance, if we take the heart of the EWV to be the intuition that “the fact that it’s your view doesn’t count when it comes to epistemic justification; it’s not epistemically permissible simply to favor oneself,” then humility is its correlate. After all, I have noted that a key component of humility is “truth for truth’s sake,” not “truth for *my* sake,” or worse, “my view for truth.”¹⁰²

Part Two: The Social Approach to Disagreement

It is now time to pause and take stock of where we have been. This paper began with the hope that we might uncover some guidance about how to conduct ourselves in disagreement. Our excursion into a theoretical discipline (the epistemology of disagreement) had, ultimately, practical aim, namely, doing disagreement well. Within the epistemology of disagreement, there are two main “options,” conciliationism (specifically, the EWV) and epistemic conservatism. The latter view recommends maintaining one’s own belief in the face of disagreement; the former recommends splitting the difference in credence when disagreeing with a peer. After considering both views and objections to both views, we came to an impasse, noting the plausibility of both views.

One way around this “impasse,” it seemed, was to articulate a classification system for disagreements. Disagreements with certain characteristics would fall under the territory of conciliationism or the EWV; disagreements with certain other characteristics would fall under the domain of epistemic conservatism. The relevant characteristics would be level of ingression, consensus on belief forming procedures, and community membership. However, it is not obvious

¹⁰² However, I do not speak for all EWV theorists. Although I see points of affinity between humility and the EWV, this may be an effect of the fact that I have construed them in ways conducive to making these parallels. In short, the parallels I have drawn here are more tentative than those I drew between epistemic conservatism and firmness.

that, even with this division of labor, the EWV and epistemic conservatism offer the kind of guidance required by a regulative epistemology, since the two views are too broad and rigid to guide action well. Finally, we considered intellectual virtues, hoping that they could capture the insights of the EWV and epistemic conservatism while guiding action more successfully.

Readers can form their own opinions as to the success of our previous ventures. But, regardless of above successes or failures, I wish to suggest that until now I have ignored something crucial to our conduct in disagreement. That is, at the beginning of this paper I posed the question, “How should we conduct ourselves in disagreement?” Thus far, the answers we have explored have been entirely epistemological in focus and content. This is perfectly acceptable, since a disagreement involves a conflict in belief. *Qua* reasoners, we disagree. However, I have also argued that disagreement is a social phenomenon, as well as an epistemic one. Given this, in what follows, I will consider several problems that arise when one treats disagreement in purely epistemic terms, with the aim of motivating a treatment of disagreement from a social point of view, in which friendship is the focal point.

Case Studies for the Social Approach to Disagreement

It will be helpful to motivate the shortcomings of a purely epistemological approach to disagreement by way of a few examples.¹⁰³

(A) Say I am spending the summer working with and supervising a group of teenagers.

One of them, Aweso, is a Muslim. I am a Christian. The difference in our religious

beliefs is particularly salient because it is Ramadan, and Aweso is fasting in spite of the

¹⁰³ It is worth noting now that these three examples are all factual and (or so I would argue) PPR disagreements. In general, I will be considering PPR disagreements in the second half of the paper. That is not to say that more shallow disagreements (those involving beliefs with a low level of ingression and high consensus over belief forming procedures) have nothing to do with friendship; we have a knack for allowing even trivial disagreements to have disproportionate importance in our lives. However, since our main task in shallow disagreements is to keep them in proportion, I think the more interesting discussion revolves around PPR and other deep disagreements. At least, these are the disagreements that I shall consider in the second half of this thesis.

summer heat. While I am stopping to drink water and take my lunch break, Aweso is abstaining from all food and drink while the sun is up.

Now, on the epistemological approach, I assume that this case is a paradigm disagreement for epistemic conservatism.¹⁰⁴ The beliefs involved have a high depth of ingression, there is little consensus over belief-forming procedures when it comes to religious belief, and Aweso and I belong to importantly different epistemic communities. In short, the correct thing to do in this scenario seems to be for Aweso and me to maintain our positions.

However, in a case like this, it is obvious that the request for guidance in the face of disagreement extends beyond belief. Aweso and I are working with each other over the course of a summer, which means that we face a host of questions about how we will treat each other. That is, in addition to epistemological questions – “what should I believe, given my disagreement with Aweso?” -- this scenario provokes a host of social questions, such as “how should I behave around Aweso, given our disagreement?”¹⁰⁵ For instance, I may find my disagreement with Aweso unnerving, and be inclined to avoid him because he makes me anxious. (He might also feel this way about me.) Or, I might be aggressive about our disagreement, frequently making defensive remarks about my own rightness. Or, somewhere between these two extremes, I might take a nonchalant attitude towards Aweso. Even then, however, we will have a question as to whether I am merely nonchalant (recall the live-and-let-live attitude) or whether I should be sympathetic to Aweso’s view. In short, there is more going on than a question of inconsistent

¹⁰⁴ Perhaps my own biases are evident at this point: in a religious disagreement of this sort, I find the EWV helpful only as a descriptive principle – “upon meeting an intelligent adherent of another religion and coming to respect him, my credence in my own religion will go down x percent.” However, to claim that the EWV carries normative weight in a scenario like this, so we would say that Aweso and I *should* lower our respective credences in our religious beliefs seems plainly misguided to me.

¹⁰⁵ This question strikes me as rather odd, insofar as it suggests that we must find disagreement very troubling in order to ask a question about right conduct. We could reword it as follows: “How can I treat Aweso well in the face of disagreement?”

beliefs. In addition, there is a question of how (and if) two people, from different epistemic communities, can learn how to live together in spite of their disagreement.

(B) Continuing from (A), say that part of my summer involves watching documentaries with these teenagers, in an attempt to provoke discussion about various social and environmental issues. One day we watch a documentary about industrial farming. A man interviewed in this documentary talks about how he left a high-paying (but stressful) job and now delivers food to farmers' markets for a small farm. One of the teenagers, Xavier, is vocal in his incredulity: "That idiot! How could he leave a high-powered business job to drive a van around?!" Meanwhile, I think that this story has something valuable to convey about the limited value of a high paycheck.

Epistemologically speaking, unlike my disagreement with Aweso, I think that in this case there is an asymmetry between Xavier and me with regard to our epistemic status. Xavier lacks intellectual virtues like thoughtfulness and lucidity; in fact, he is argumentative and intellectually hasty. He also lacks experience with the subject matter: living, and living well. He is young. Given this, I am justified in ignoring him and maintaining my own belief. (However, I might also decide to "improve" Xavier by giving him a lecture about life, although this course of action would be ironic, considering my own youth.) Now, the social questions in this case are more subtle than those in (A), but the case does involve social questions. For instance, irony aside, I might think that Xavier's outburst does present an opportunity for epistemic improvement, if I can get a bright teenager to slow down and think his ideas over. However, Xavier is an unfamiliar teenager. If I call him out for saying something foolish, he might well be humiliated, angry, or mistrustful. On the other hand, if I can establish a good rapport with Xavier, he might be receptive to appropriate criticism down the road. Thus, unlike (A) above, the primary question

here is *not* “How can we be friends in the face of this disagreement, since it’s not going away?” but rather, “How can we establish a friendship so that we can disagree better in the future?”

(C) Say I am attending the wedding of an old roommate, HollyAnne. I have arrived a week early in order to help her finish last-minute preparations. Before this occasion, I knew that HollyAnne and I disagreed about a variety of points, and this visit only confirms our disagreement: I think her large mega-church is disgustingly extravagant, she thinks that my socially progressive opinions are flippant departures from traditional interpretations of scripture, I try not to cough loudly when her wedding sermon includes an admonition for the wife to submit, she thinks that “my kind” are too dismissive of women who want to stay at home. Yet, the visit is not miserable. We happily prepare for her wedding together, and both of us are glad that I am there.

Now, unlike (A), what is notable about this case is the degree to which HollyAnne and I share extensive subsets of our evidence base. After all, we also share a variety of epistemic communities. We both identify as protestants (moreover, we both have a Reformed bent to our Christianity); we are both products of Western and American society; we are equally well-educated. Thus, although religious and political disagreements do not in general admit of consensus concerning belief-forming procedures, we would expect HollyAnne and me to exhibit more consensus concerning belief-forming procedures than Aweso and me, for instance. Moreover, I think we count as epistemic peers. All of this suggests that HollyAnne and I do not have immediate recourse to a conservative course of conduct. For instance, we would expect that my disagreement with HollyAnne would prompt me to lower my credence in my divergent opinions, even if only slightly, and the same for her. Moreover, the evidence bases that HollyAnne and I share suggest that there is some possibility of (partial) resolution available to

us, in which case proper conduct might place some conversational demands on us to try to mediate our positions.

However, all of this has been to think about the case from an epistemological standpoint. What are the social dimensions of this disagreement? If our question in (A) was “As a social agent, how should I conduct myself relative to someone I disagree with, who is also from a different community?” (or more colloquially, “What does it look like to be friends with someone from another community in the face of disagreement?”), the question in (C) seems to be “As a social agent, how should I conduct myself relative to a person within my own community with whom I disagree?” Now, I have said that HollyAnne and I are friends in spite of our disagreement, and I have even claimed that we are successful in this friendship, to at least some degree. Nonetheless, we can ask questions about how this friendship in particular works, and how to sustain it.

If the possibility of my friendship with HollyAnne seems obvious, I can perhaps motivate the sense in which this friendship is *not* obvious by relating the following story. A different friend of mine once said to me, “I can’t imagine being friends with someone who thought that way,” to which I replied, “Well, there’s more to her than that set of beliefs.” Now, the relationship between a person and her beliefs is a question about personal identity, one outside the boundaries of this project. However, we can draw a conceptual distinction between a person and her beliefs, although the two deeply intertwine. Although there is more to HollyAnne than those particular beliefs with which I disagree, those beliefs are nonetheless relevant to my friendship with her. As rational animals, part of our friendship will include conversation and debate, to which our beliefs are obviously relevant. Moreover, our beliefs are action guiding, and

since friends act in relation to each other (at least at times), our difference in belief may pose problems for us as we try to *act* together.

Although the epistemology of disagreement guides our conduct in cases like (A), (B) and (C), an epistemological approach to disagreement will only ever provide recommendations about how we should *believe* in a disagreement. Since the cases we have just considered require an additional kind of guidance, namely, how to live well in relation to another person in the face of disagreement, we will have to look outside the epistemology of disagreement for further guidance.

However, we might wonder how much can be said in favor of the social approach to disagreement. Sure, we *can* think about disagreement in this way, but is there any particular reason to do so? What benefits come from the social approach? In what follows, I will consider some motivations for engaging the social approach to disagreement. In particular, I motivate the social approach to disagreement by highlighting several problems relevant to disagreement and noting how the social approach is uniquely equipped to deal with these problems.

Social and Epistemic Goods

Both the social and epistemic approaches to disagreement fall under the general question, “How should we conduct ourselves in the face of disagreement?” This question, in turn, falls under the jurisdiction of “the” ethical question, “How ought I to live?” That is, the ethical question is about human flourishing in the broadest possible sense. Under this question, we can subsume questions about specific situation-types (such as disagreement), as well as questions about specific components of flourishing, or goods. (On my conception, the realization of goods constitutes flourishing.) Obviously, this paper considers a certain situation-type – disagreement -

from two different perspectives, the social and the epistemological.¹⁰⁶ A chief difference between these two perspectives is the fact that they orient to two different sets of goods. Goods are such relative to human nature; there are no abstract “goods.” We realize human goods and flourish (or fail to do so) relative to the kind of being we have. Moreover, since we can identify different facets of our nature, we can ask specific questions, such as, “*Qua* epistemic agent, what does flourishing look like for me?” and “*Qua* social agent, what does flourishing look like for me?” Generally speaking, epistemology is oriented towards the good of knowledge, in which case an epistemological approach to disagreement will seek to preserve goods related to knowledge. A social approach to disagreement, however, will consider the good of friendship, or more generally, goods related to other people and our relationships with them. In what follows, I will develop an account of the social and epistemic goods relevant to disagreement in order to motivate a social approach to disagreement, since without the social approach, we risk neglecting the social goods at stake in disagreement.

Broadly speaking, the epistemological approach to disagreement seeks to preserve the good of knowledge (warranted true belief).¹⁰⁷ More specifically, since regulative epistemology

¹⁰⁶ My distinction here parallels the traditional distinction between moral and intellectual virtues/goods in certain ways, but I also want to be clear that the traditional distinction is *not* mine, at least not straightforwardly. On the traditional account, we distinguish between moral and intellectual virtues given the two kinds of human faculties, reason and appetite. The former is perfected through intellectual virtues, the latter through moral virtues. This in turn motivates another common way of distinguishing between intellectual and moral virtues; namely, that intellectual virtues are teachable whereas moral virtues require habituation. However, my account is goods-oriented, not faculty-oriented, in which case the traditional delineation of the virtues does not apply. It will, however, surface in the following when I discuss the adverse effects of certain emotions on disagreement. On the traditional distinction between moral and intellectual virtues, see Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II 58, 2-3; translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa>. For a neo-traditional account of the distinction between moral and intellectual virtues, see Julia Annas’s “The Structure of Virtue” in *Intellectual Virtue*, eds. M. DePaul and L. Zagzebski (Oxford 2003), pp. 15-33.

¹⁰⁷ Several objections might arise at this point. For instance, it is not clear to me that all – or even most – epistemologists think of their disciplines in terms of “goods.” This is, I take it, their loss. Epistemology is at least in part a normative discipline, in which case it is aimed at protecting or realizing goods, and we would do well to recognize. One might also object to my characterization of epistemology’s good, arguing that the good of epistemology is in fact truth, truth being the object of knowledge. However, I would suggest that epistemology is more so concerned with our relationship to truth, namely knowledge. (Nonetheless, we might distinguish between epistemology as a philosophical discipline, the good of which is knowledge, and our own intellect, the good of

deals with epistemic practices, the good at stake in regulative epistemology is that of knowing well. Or, if you do not think that knowing is an action, we could say that the good at stake in regulative epistemology is that of engaging in intellectual practices well, since this will indirectly further knowledge. For example, we can see the good of knowledge at play in certain objections EWW theorists make towards conservatism: “Your view allows pragmatic considerations, which ought not to have a place in an epistemological discourse. *Qua* epistemologist, I am interested in truth, in which case I cannot recommend that you maintain belief because it will be distressing for you to change your mind. This disagreement is evidence that you might be wrong, and as an epistemologist, I’m interesting in believing rightly!” Thus, the epistemologist treats disagreement as an opportunity for improvement in belief. Engaging with an interlocutor with whom you disagree is a chance to access a new vantage point, consider new evidence, and consider the possibility of error on one’s own part. In a disagreement between epistemic “novice” and “expert,” the less mature party can learn from the more mature, and in a disagreement between peers, we would expect that each could learn from the other.¹⁰⁸ Thus, we might say that disagreement itself is an instrumental epistemic good, at least insofar as it contributes to knowledge. However, it seems that disagreement is ultimately merely instrumental on the epistemic approach. It is something to be gotten over. However, Roberts and Wood have proposed a broadened account of epistemic goods that allows us to identify some intrinsic value in disagreement. It is to this broadened account that I now turn.

which may well be truth.) Finally, I want to clarify that epistemologists are not concerned with amassing large quantities of true propositions, or increasing knowledge. That is, you would not be especially praiseworthy from an epistemic standpoint if you went out and memorized a large number of facts. Rather, epistemologists are concerned with knowing well, and, when epistemology is couched within a broader perspective on flourishing, we might find it helpful to stipulate that epistemology is concerned with “securing truth about important matters, truths that have a bearing on our own well-being and the happiness of others.” See W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology* (IVP Academic 1998), p. 29.

¹⁰⁸ This is not to suggest that experts have *nothing* to learn from novices. However, relative to any one disagreement, we would expect that in an asymmetrical epistemic relationship one party would have substantially more to offer the other in terms of epistemic improvement.

Roberts and Wood suggest that when epistemology allows for only one good – knowledge – it becomes problematically narrow. If we focus only on the good of knowledge, we “sideline some of the epistemic goods that must be kept in mind if one is to see ‘knowledge’ fully in the context of the fullest human life.”¹⁰⁹ The three categories of goods Roberts and Wood propose are warranted true belief, acquaintance, and understanding.¹¹⁰ The first is the good of knowledge, which we have already discussed. The second good, understanding, is like knowledge in that understanding must be adequate to its object. That is, in understanding, I am responsible to my object. I must understand rightly. However, unlike knowledge, the object of understanding is not necessarily true.¹¹¹ We frequently understand propositions, stories, or theories that are false. Once we have recognized understanding as an epistemic good, we are able to see how there might be some intrinsic value in disagreement, namely, gaining new understanding as one comes to understand the position of one’s interlocutor.

Acquaintance, in turn, is an experiential good, a kind of “cognitive contact with reality.”¹¹² Most simply, acquaintance involves having experienced something for oneself. It may be helpful to think of acquaintance in contrast to propositional knowledge, or knowledge-that. Take my relationship with my sister Cora. I can recite a great many propositions about my sister: I can tell you that she has long blonde hair, that she plays the piano, that she prefers houses to be neatly kept, and that she is a good runner. Now, I can transfer my propositional knowledge about Cora to others, but I cannot transfer my acquaintance with her. Acquaintance comes from experience, which one has to have for oneself. However, there is an important relationship between acquaintance and propositional knowledge. On the traditional account of knowledge,

¹⁰⁹ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 35.

¹¹⁰ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 33.

¹¹¹ *Intellectual Virtues*, pp. 43-4, 47.

¹¹² *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 51

experience – or acquaintance with some person, place, or skill – functions to justify knowledge. (Thus, I am justified in making the above claims about Cora because I am acquainted with her. My readers, on the other hand, are justified in making these claims about Cora in case my testimony is trustworthy.) However, on Roberts and Wood’s account, acquaintance is not just an instrumental good, a good insofar as it justifies knowledge. Rather, acquaintance is an epistemic good in its own right.¹¹³ For instance, say I am aurally acquainted with a chorale from the *Orgelbüchlein*. It is not clear that my acquaintance leads to any particular belief at all, but the acquaintance nonetheless has value.¹¹⁴ I have acquaintance-knowledge of this chorale, an epistemic good in its own right.

In short, on the epistemological approach there are three goods relevant to disagreement: knowledge, understanding, and acquaintance. Knowledge is the good at stake in a disagreement, since the disagreement constitutes evidence that one or more party is in error. More positively, understanding and acquaintance are intrinsic goods relevant to disagreement, since in disagreement we have an opportunity to understand alien beliefs and acquaint ourselves with a person who believes differently.

Social goods

In addition to these epistemic goods, I propose that we consider another class of goods relevant to disagreement, social goods. I have already said that the paradigmatic social good is friendship, but I have yet to clarify my conception of friendship. Friendship involves wishing one’s friend well for her own sake (reciprocal goodwill),¹¹⁵ in addition to enjoying the company

¹¹³ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 55. Roberts and Wood make similar points about understanding. Although understanding can serve to further knowledge, they insist that it is also an intellectual good in its own right.

¹¹⁴ *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 51.

¹¹⁵ I should admit now that my idea of “wishing another person well” is modern and Kantian in inheritance. That is, when I say that friends “wish each other well,” I include autonomy under that which I wish for my friends. I see this as a protective boundary against paternalism, in line with Nicholas Wolterstorff’s thinking on the apartheid in South Africa as a phenomenon born out of paternalism, or goodwill absent any respect for autonomy. See Nicholas

of one's friend.¹¹⁶ Most significantly, in friendship there is a re-identification of one's self with the friend.¹¹⁷ (The result of this is the collapse of the egoism/altruism divide. In friendship, one's own good is inseparable from the good of one's friend.) Although friendship in an age of long-distance communication has been strengthened and extended in interesting ways, I would argue that friendship paradigmatically involves living together (or in proximity to one another), preferably over an extended period of time. Without these latter two components, we have goodwill, not friendship in the fullest sense.¹¹⁸ However, I am happy to describe a scenario that Aristotle would identify as "mere" goodwill as being an instance of friendship by extension. After all, if the boundaries of friendship I have identified were strict, we would be extremely limited in our capacity to have friends. One can only know, wish well, and live with (or around) so many people. Thus, in this thesis, the term "friendship" refers to friendship in its original, paradigmatic sense, but also includes an extended sense of friendship as mere goodwill and/or respectful welcome. After all, friendship relies upon a prior attitude of friendliness, and I would argue that friendliness, as the attitude conducive to the formation of friendship proper, essentially involves goodwill and respectful welcome.

Wolterstorff, "Justice in Theory and Practice: From Honduras to Your Own Community," (Public Lecture, LaGrave Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, September 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsnvsPQIK1k>. Last access March 23, 2014.)

¹¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.3, 1156b10-30; VIII.5, 1157b20-25. Trans. T. Irwin. (Hackett 1999). However, it's important to note that my account of friendship diverges from Aristotle, since I don't think of friendship as robustly egalitarian. Aristotle writes, "Clearly, however, only good people can be friends to each other because of the other person himself; for bad people find no enjoyment in one another if they get no benefit." (See *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.4 1157a19-21.) Although I'm willing to admit that the most complete kind of friendship occurs between two virtuous people, I also think that it's important to allow for the possibility of asymmetrical friendship on a Christian account of friendship. That is, an eschatological perspective on friendship enables us to be friends with the less virtuous, since we love that which *will* be good about the other person. Of course, this directly mirrors our (admittedly impartial) friendship with God.

¹¹⁷ Christine Korsgaard writes, "the thought of oneself as a certain person's friend or lover or parent or child can be a particularly deep form of practical identity." (Practical identity refers to a "description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions worth taking.") See *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge University Press 1996), pp. 128, 101.

¹¹⁸ Aristotle writes, "Those who welcome each other but do not live together would seem to have goodwill rather than friendship. For nothing is as proper to friends as living together." See *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII.5, 1157b19-21.

Can the epistemological approach to disagreement properly protect and recognize the social good relevant to disagreement, namely, friendship? Well, consider an example. Recall my disagreement with Xavier. From an epistemic perspective, I would argue that I am justified in ignoring Xavier's protests and/or informing him that he has not had enough experience. "Xavier," I might say, "You're talking like a contrarian and a teenager. Give yourself awhile, get a little experience under your belt, and I think you will change your mind. Or, you could just believe me when I say that it might be worthwhile to choose a lower paycheck if it means doing more satisfying work." That is, on an epistemic perspective, there is no reason for me to treat Xavier as a worthwhile intellectual agent in his own right. He simply is not one, at least not yet. However, on a social perspective, we might think that there is some reason for me to treat Xavier as a worthwhile intellectual agent, as if he were a peer. (Below I will suggest that we ought to do just this in some disagreements.) On this approach, I will treat Xavier as an autonomous epistemic agent, asking him to tell me what is on his mind, and hopefully, we will have a conversation together. Taking Xavier and his disagreement seriously will incline him to trust me, the strange "white girl" who is in charge of him for the summer. That is, a certain kind of epistemic and social conduct – treating Xavier like a worthwhile intellectual agent even when he does not deserve such, and using our disagreement as a conduit along which to establish a friendship – will further a social good, namely, a flourishing friendship with Xavier.

In particular, attention to the social goods at stake in disagreement can highlight the problematic power structures at play in disagreement and our epistemic lives in general. An analogous problem might arise within the epistemology of disagreement, if in a non-peer disagreement we allow the epistemic superior to dismiss his counterpart, an epistemic novice. On a purely epistemological approach, the practicing of ignoring a non-peer interlocutor is perfectly

justified, since overall the practice protects the good of knowledge. However, if we attend to the social aspects of disagreement, we may realize that dismissing one's interlocutor can have adverse affects on that interlocutor and one's relationship with this person. Lorraine Code addresses this problem, writing, "[...] acknowledgment granted or withheld confers or thwarts membership in groups and communities of would-be knowers, grants knowledge claims a hearing or dismisses them out of hand, valorizes or discredits epistemic agency, and much more."¹¹⁹ Now, although there is nothing in the epistemology of disagreement that requires us to ignore and dismiss our interlocutors, withholding any acknowledgement of them, neither is the epistemology of disagreement well equipped to attend to and protect autonomy, since it is not an epistemic good. However, if we approach disagreement from the perspective of flourishing human relationships, there is room on this approach to be wary about paternalism in epistemic guise, since misuse of (epistemic) power is a deterrent to flourishing human relationships.¹²⁰

Now, I do not wish to suggest that disagreements are always, or even usually, dilemmas in which one must choose between social and intellectual goods. For instance, in (B), if I choose to privilege social goods in my conduct towards Xavier, this conduct should have important epistemic payoffs, namely, becoming better acquainted with Xavier as a person and coming to understand his opinions. Furthermore, treating Xavier like a full-fledged epistemic agent may "call forth" from him intellectual virtues. Pursuing a friendship with Xavier will indirectly promote epistemic goods.¹²¹ However, in spite of the fact that pursuing social goods can

¹¹⁹ Lorraine Code, "Feminist Epistemologies and Women's Lives" in *The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy*, eds. L.M. Alcoff and E.F. Kittay (Blackwell Publishing 2007), p. 215.

¹²⁰ Thus my recommendation to take seriously the intellectual autonomy of one's interlocutor. For more on the importance of valuing autonomy in order to avoid paternalism, see Onora O'Neill, "Kantian Ethics and World Hunger" in *Moral Philosophy: A Reader* (Hackett Publishing Company 2009), pp. 421-433 and Nicholas Wolterstorff's "Justice in Theory and Practice: From Honduras to Your Own Community."

¹²¹ Interestingly, it is not clear to me that privileging an epistemic response would eventually or indirectly support social goods in a parallel way. This consideration may prove to be important when we weigh our options as to which goods to privilege in disagreements.

instrumentally support epistemic goods, our time is limited; the ways in which we respond to disagreements may inevitably privilege social or epistemic goods.

Suppose a counselor is speaking to a teenager with a track record of petty crime.¹²² The counselor, unlike a member of the police force, is more interested in developing a relationship of trust with the teenager than learning the truth. Given this, she takes the teenager's word at face value, assuming that what he says is true. Epistemologically speaking, this might seem worrisome. After all, the counselor is speaking to someone of whom we have reason to be suspicious, but she is taking his word as truth. Yet, we would not accuse this counselor of behaving viciously because she is interested in social goods to the potential detriment of intellectual goods. Rather, she exhibits that in some cases we may privilege one set of goods over the other, the social over the epistemological or vice-versa. Which goods to privilege is a matter to determine on a case-by-case basis.

Deep Disagreements and the Epistemological Approach

In our discussion of the EWV, I suggested that deep disagreements (those with little consensus over belief-forming procedures, high levels of ingression for the beliefs involved, and two diverging communities involved) pose a problem for the EWV, since these disagreements are not conducive to peer judgments of the sort required by the EWV. Here, I want to reconsider the kind of incommensurability at work in deep disagreements, note the problems related to this kind of incommensurability, and consider how friendship can address these problems.

There is a two-fold kind of incommensurability at play in deep disagreements. The first sort is that of untranslatability, the second that of irresolvable disagreements.¹²³ However, since

¹²² *Epistemic Injustice*, p. 122-6.

¹²³ The second kind of incommensurability relevant to deep disagreements assumes that translation has occurred and the parties to the disagreement are speaking to one another with comprehension. However, the ability to understand and speak to one another does not always (or even usually?) include the ability to resolve the disagreement. For

we only require the first sort, I will only consider untranslatability in what follows.

Untranslatability involves an inability even to understand what the other person is saying, a sense of “talking past each other.” Now, I hold that disagreements are all in fact translatable.¹²⁴ Even deep disagreements admit of translation; the parties to a deep disagreement can learn to speak to one another. However, coming to this point might be very difficult. We may decide that the hard work of translation is not worth our time and energy, in some disagreements. However, regardless our need to forgo translation in some cases, there are two problems that arise when we are inattentive to translation. I will refer to these two ways as “the assumed commensurability problem” and “the disinterest problem,” and I will consider them in that order.

The assumed commensurability problem

In order to understand why the assumed commensurability problem is problematic, consider a religious skeptic and his relationship to the faith community in which he has grown up. Say this community tells the skeptic something like the following: “It’s okay to doubt; doubts strengthen your faith. This is all a part of the path that will make you a better believer.” On the surface, the faith community appears to be gaining sympathetic insights into the skeptic’s alien outlook; they are recognizing how doubt can eventually serve to strengthen religious commitment. Yet, on second look, this response is also refusing to validate the skeptic as he is. It affords him respect only as “on the way” to identification with the community’s beliefs. The

example, resolving the disagreement might come in the form of an “ah-ha” moment that follows upon translation: “Ah, *now* I understand! And look, we’re thinking so similarly after all. Before, I assumed that your point was contrary to mine. But now that I see where you’re coming from, I realize that our opinions on the matter are almost congruous,” or, “This is so helpful! I’ve never felt fully satisfied with my belief on this matter; it never seemed to do justice to the relevant experience. But your way of thinking about this question presents me with a new, and better, way to talk about these experiences.” However, it seems just as likely (if not more likely) that we should have the following kind of response instead: “Well, suddenly I can see that your view does make sense. Prior to now I’d found it a bit absurd. Still, though, I don’t agree. You have concerns that I don’t share, despite me having learned to recognize them.”

¹²⁴ Some of my readers might object at this point, arguing that translatable disagreements, as such, are not properly described as incommensurable. This may be. Such readers can choose another word for the phenomena of disagreements that require translation, albeit translation that is possible (if not easy).

religious community is too readily assuming commensurability between these two outlooks, and insofar as they are doing so, they are furthering a form of injustice, that of failing to welcome the skeptic *qua* skeptic.¹²⁵ This religious community is failing to acknowledge important social goods and epistemic goods both. Epistemically speaking, they have failed to understand the perspective of the skeptic. They are distorting his beliefs by assuming commensurability in their outlooks. In terms of social goods, foremost among the relevant goods is the good of respecting and caring about the person who disagrees with you *qua* person-who-believes-otherwise (more elegantly, “*qua* other”). Respecting and caring for one’s interlocutor as anything less than “other” in fact constitutes a failure to welcome him at all. He disagrees with you, and if you treat this disagreement as merely apparent when in fact it is not, you have done injustice to him as your interlocutor. In summary, we require some sensitivity to the need for translation in disagreement, lest we assume commensurability where it does not in fact exist and thereby enact injustice.

The disinterest problem

Unlike the assumed commensurability problem, on which we fail to notice the need for translation in certain disagreements, the disinterest problem occurs after we have realized the need for translation. Consider for instance the perspective of epistemic conservatism, on which we should maintain our original belief in the face of deep disagreement. Overall, this seems to me to be an apt recommendation. However, we might wonder if this response encourages a problematic disinterest in deep disagreements. That is, just as one might criticize the live-and-let-live attitude as ignoring the possibility of epistemic improvement, certain forms of epistemic

¹²⁵All of this assumes that the skeptic has provided the religious community with ample opportunity to understand him. If he has been problematically closed off about his opinions, failing to speak in a way that represents accurately his thinking, we will describe his behavior as problematic as well. The community cannot be held responsible for their failure to know him as he is if the skeptic has hidden his “true self” from them.

conservatism may fail to engage fully with interlocutors: “You go your way; I’ll go mine. We’re just speaking past each other anyway.”¹²⁶ In short, the possibility of epistemic conservatism inclining us to ignore our interlocutors is what I call “the disinterest problem.” Above we noted that the assumed commensurability problem is problematic because it involves claiming to understand another person, when in fact the “understanding” is distorting the perspective of the other person. Here, the problem is a lack of interest in understanding.¹²⁷ Again, this has adverse effects of social and epistemological goods both. Epistemologically speaking, the problem is obvious: understanding is an epistemic good; ceasing to care about it represents a failure to care about an epistemic good. On the social approach, we notice that blanket disinterest in understanding one’s interlocutor in a deep disagreement represents a failure to be friendly towards one’s interlocutors. Friendship requires some minimal understanding of who one’s friend is. Since deep disagreements require some translation in order to understand one’s friend, disinterest in translation is by extension a disinterest in understanding one’s interlocutor, which cuts off the possibility of friendship with that person.

Friendship and deep disagreement

Having observed several ways in which we can behave badly in deep disagreements, I turn now to a more positive account of deep disagreements and the work of translation. Fostering friendship (or friendliness) in the face of deep disagreement acts as a corrective to the problems of disinterest and assumed commensurability. For instance, when I respect and care for my

¹²⁶ The disinterest problem perhaps mirrors what MacIntyre identifies as a relativist challenge to dialogue and debate between traditions: “[This] challenge rests upon a denial that rational debate between and rational choice among rival traditions is possible.” Relative to disagreement, we might say that this challenge involves apathy in the face of disagreement – “Not like we’ll get anywhere.” This, I take it, is essentially the same as the disinterest problem. See *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 352.

¹²⁷ We need to distinguish carefully the disinterest problem from choosing to privilege other goods over that of translation and understanding. For example, given that translation (with the goal of understanding) takes a great deal of time, in most cases of possible translation we choose to forego translation. This seems perfectly appropriate. The disinterest problem, in contrast, involves a blanket disinterest in the work of translation and a problematic dismissal of the personhood involved in disagreement.

interlocutor in a disagreement, I become sensitive to the damage involved in hastily assuming commensurability. Rather, I will want to allow my friend to speak “for herself,” from her perspective, and in her own words, in order to properly understand her. Moreover, if I attune to the goods involved in friendship, I will be less inclined to ignore my interlocutor and behave with disinterest towards her. This is another person! Even if I forgo a translation project in order to understand her position, I owe her the acknowledgement that such a project is nonetheless worthwhile. She and her beliefs are worth understanding.

Moreover, if in the face of disagreement we can establish the beginnings of a friendship;¹²⁸ this friendship will aid and correct the translation project. For instance, consider my disagreement with Aweso. Certainly, there is a great deal about Aweso that I do not yet understand, and coming to understand such will require some translation on my part. However, as I become friends with Aweso, I will see that he is worth understanding, and this realization will motivate me to pursue translation, rather than risk distorting his position. Friendship is two-sided. As I gain partial understanding of Aweso and begin to converse with him, he can help me to understand him further. For instance, he might say, “No, that’s not quite what I mean. How about this way of putting it? Does that make sense to you?” or “No. You’ve made this assumption about me several times, but it’s a false assumption. I don’t think that way.”

Deep disagreements present a unique problem, epistemologically speaking. In deep disagreements, the common ground needed for peer judgments is lacking (and the EWV requires such, recall), in which case epistemic conservatism takes hold and recommends that the parties maintain their initial beliefs. However, both approaches are problematic if they fail to distinguish between disagreement prior to translation (in which case there is no understanding) and disagreement post-translation (in which case there is understanding, but not resolution). Failing

¹²⁸ See for instance “Practicing Openness: Common Projects & Intergroup Contact Theory” below.

to draw this line increases the chance that we will assume commensurability where we ought not or become problematically disinterested in our interlocutor. Although our limitations prevent us from pursuing translation in every case of disagreement, translation is nonetheless important insofar as it furthers both epistemic and social goods. Attending to friendship, a social good, helps to highlight the importance of translation, and (even partial) friendship aids in the translation process.

Problematic Emotions for Disagreement: Anxiety and Anger

In the first half of the paper, one of my objections to the EWV involved the idea that we may find it difficult to evaluate disagreements fairly, given contingent facts of our psychology. One such fact is our capacity to experience emotion, since in some cases emotions problematically distort our perception of disagreements. At this point, I want to develop this idea with the aim of showing how the social approach to disagreement can helpfully supplement the epistemological approach.

Emotions are “concern-based construals,” not feelings.¹²⁹ That is, emotions as construals are a seeing-as, a grasping of one thing in terms of another, and in the case of emotions, the construal is imbued with concerns, which should be understood in terms of our interests, or desires and aversions.¹³⁰ When I experience the emotion of sorrow, I am construing my situation as one in which I have lost something of great value and worth (something about which I have concern or interest). Thus, against a popular understanding of emotions as flimsy feelings of little import, a philosophical account of emotion should take seriously the cognitive power of emotions. In and of itself, this power is neither good nor bad. (I note this because I do not wish to suggest that emotions are suboptimal aspects of human nature or misleading states to fight at

¹²⁹ Robert C. Roberts. “What an Emotion Is: A Sketch,” *The Philosophical Review* 97 (1988), p. 184.

¹³⁰ “What an Emotion is: A Sketch,” pp. 187, 190, 191, 202.

every second.) However, there is potential for emotions to go awry, since our concern can lead us to construe the world in misleading ways and in turn act according to these misguided construals. Although there are a great many cases of disagreement in which emotions (whether “positive” or “negative”) are not salient, there is no doubt some degree of emotion, or concern-based construing, at work in all disagreements. Our task here is to notice those cases in which emotion is powerfully *misconstruing* a disagreement and effecting negative social and epistemological results. From the social perspective, certain emotional responses to disagreement can incline us to behave badly towards the other people involved, and from an epistemological perspective, emotions can skew our appraisal of disagreements. For example, if I am (excessively) favorable towards my own position in disagreements, I will be inclined to evaluate my interlocutor more harshly, noticing the flaws in his arguments and his lack of intellectual virtues, whereas I will incline to treat myself with greater leniency. In particular, two emotions tend to be problematic for disagreements, anxiety and anger.¹³¹

Anxiety, I will suggest, is most salient in deep disagreements. In general, disagreements present us with the possibility of being wrong (which is perhaps in itself anxiety-provoking), but deep disagreements in particular provoke anxiety insofar as there is no easy way to mediate and resolve the disagreement. The epistemologist will perhaps recommend a conservative approach to such disagreements, but in some cases, we may be unable to overcome our uncertainty and follow through with the recommendations of epistemic conservatism. If this happens, we will be

¹³¹ A large number of emotions arise in disagreements, and no doubt, some of these emotions carry with them their own sets of problems. For instance, although I suggest below that PPR disagreements are likely characterized by anxiety, they might also be characterized by indifference: “Ah, well, we disagree. I don’t want to get riled up though, so let’s just forget about it.” Indifference, in turn, can lead to epistemic problems insofar as it inclines us not to engage further with the belief(s) in question, and indifference can be a social issue too, especially one party is indifferent to a disagreement about which the other person feels strongly. However, it seems to me that the stakes are lower regarding indifference than with anxiety and anger. In contrast, given the high-stakes nature of anxiety and anger, I have chosen to focus my attention on these two emotions. However, in what follows I do not wish to claim that there is an intrinsic connection between a certain kind of disagreement and anxiety or anger, since it seems that people might respond to a great variety of disagreements with a great variety of emotions.

anxious, thinking, “But she still disagrees with me, and I don’t know what to say about that! I don’t like living with the looming possibility that I’m wrong about these important beliefs!” Now, this concern – whether expressed as an aversion to being wrong or the desire to be correct – can become a problem when it leads us to misconstrue situations. For instance, aversion to being wrong may very well incline us to distort our interlocutor’s epistemic status, whether we overestimate or underestimate. (“Oh no! She’s so smart! And she knows so much! She has to be right!” or “Remember that time he answered a question very badly in class? He’s obviously not a very reliable epistemic agent. No need to take him seriously.”) Neither is anxiety helpful from a social perspective. It seems most likely that anxiety would incline us to avoid our interlocutor, but anxiety might also incline us to interact with a posture of excessive submission or aggression.

Anger, in turn, seems to be more of a problem in cases such as my disagreement with HollyAnne. Recall that HollyAnne and I share an epistemic community. Given this, it seems plausible that I will be angry (or perhaps frustrated) with HollyAnne over our disagreement. That is, whereas I am not likely to be angry with Aweso – I would not expect him to share my beliefs, after all, because of our differences in background – I may be angry with HollyAnne, since I have some expectation that she will think similarly to me. The concern, in this case, is a desire for those that I perceive as within my epistemic community to agree with me, and it may motivate me to construe those within the community who disagree with me as sub-par group members. “What’s wrong with her?” I might think. “She’s an intelligent and well-educated woman, with goals of her own. Why is she saying all of these things about the need for women to submit to their husbands? How is it that she doesn’t get what I get?” Although anger is not in itself opposed to a fair evaluation of one’s interlocutor (in some cases anger might arise *after* the evaluation: “Really? She’s a philosophy major and yet a sloppy epistemic agent? I don’t want to

be associated with her”), anger can also motivate hasty conclusions about one’s interlocutor. For instance, if I were angry over my disagreement with HollyAnne, we would probably say that my anger derives from the fact that I dislike and disagree with her view. This, in turn, will incline me to allow the disagreement itself to count as evidence for HollyAnne’s error: “Well, if she holds a view this awful, surely she isn’t a very reliable epistemic agent. No need to consider her opinion further.” This is illicit from an epistemological perspective. I cannot dismiss HollyAnne’s view simply because I disagree with it; if I am going to dismiss her view I require an epistemic story, whether that story is “here’s why I’m better informed on this matter than she is” or “this disagreement involves a great deal of conflict over belief-forming procedures; I’m justified in maintaining my initial belief.” Finally, the adverse social effects of anger are, I take it, undisputed.

Fostering Friendship: Common Projects and Intergroup Contact Theory

Having considered two problematic emotions that often arise in disagreement, I want to consider a very practical question, namely, how is one supposed to get past such emotions? “Work with her, when she thinks y ? No thank you.” “Invite him over for dinner, after he’s argued for x at work? Never.” Our problem is that without some initial friendship, it can be hard to cultivate further friendship in the face of disagreement. Perhaps there is a vicious circle in the neighborhood: lacking friendship with your interlocutor in a disagreement inclines you to behave in an antagonistic way (no repercussions, after all!), whether aggressively antagonistic (anger) or passively antagonistic (anxiety), but once a pattern of antagonism is established, the possibility of friendship ever developing becomes even bleaker. I will call the disagreements that are subject to this circle “socially difficult disagreements.” If we wish to overcome socially difficult disagreements, I suggest that we first consider the idea of “common projects.”

Common projects

Common projects are “projects that we share with other people.”¹³² Some common projects are relatively dull, like a committee with a common project of rewriting their organization’s bylaws. Other common projects have more affective charge, like the project “being a fan of team *z* and cheering them on to victory.” There are also deep, life-long common projects, like the project of raising children with one’s spouse. Common projects have a two-fold relevance to disagreement. First, common projects are relevant to disagreement insofar as the parties to a socially difficult disagreement require some end external to the disagreement, if friendship or friendliness is to become a viable possibility. This is, perhaps, an obvious point. When two people are in a disagreement, their attention may lock on to the fact that there is an inconsistency between their beliefs. Thus, we find the stubborn, “But she thinks differently!” and “But he thinks differently!” However, if these two people have a common project, some goal in which they are both invested, their attention redirects, at least in part, away from the disagreement and towards the common project. Their interests have merged, and they will frustrate their pursuit of the common project if their disagreement continues to be antagonistic.

The second way in which common projects relate to socially difficult disagreements is through friendship, which is itself a common project. That is, the friendship itself is a common project, in addition to the (partial) investment in the friend’s projects that accompanies friendship. This means that common projects are both a conduit and an end, on the social approach to disagreement. We engage in common projects in order to help foster friendliness towards our interlocutors, and in some cases, a new common project emerges, namely, friendship with one’s interlocutor. In this case, our concern transforms to include the well-being of the friend. I take it that this represents the final blow against problematic emotions in disagreement,

¹³² Robert Adams, *A Theory of Virtue* (Oxford University Press 2006), p. 85.

since these emotions rely on disagreement being a threat. However, when the person with whom we disagree becomes a friend, and is thereby included in our concern, disagreement with that person can only be so threatening, since our interlocutor herself is an object of our concern.

Intergroup contact theory

In addition to pursuing common projects, we can keep socially difficult disagreements from becoming viciously circular in several other concrete ways. I draw these methods from intergroup contact theory, a theory about how to overcome conflict between groups. Most succinctly, intergroup contact theory hypothesizes that contact or interaction between hostile groups will result in a lessening of the conflict, as long as their interaction adheres to certain conditions.¹³³ Now, although intergroup contact theory is not about disagreement, I think there are relevant lessons to take from the theory, since the socially insurmountable disagreements I have been worrying about in this section are structurally similar to intergroup conflict. (The main difference between them is that intergroup conflict necessarily occurs between groups, not individuals, and unlike disagreement, does not necessarily involve a noetic component.)

The first condition of intergroup contact theory is shared goals – common projects, in short. (There are also intergroup contact conditions that I am ignoring, for our purposes, since I think they fall under the topic, “how to effectively engage in common projects,” and the latter is not always relevant to disagreement between individuals. They are “friendly setting” and “authority sanction of contact.”) The condition we will consider, however, is equal status during contact. In terms of disagreement, what does equal status look like? Well, a focal point in the first half of the thesis was the idea of an “epistemic peer.” However, not all disagreements occur between epistemic peers. On the epistemological approach, this means that we are justified in

¹³³ See Miriam Koschate and Rolf van Dick’s “A multilevel test of Allport’s contact conditions,” *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 14 (2011), pp. 769-787.

ignoring our interlocutor when that person is not a peer. However, on the social approach, I would argue that in disagreement it is preferable to act *as if* one's interlocutor is an epistemic peer.¹³⁴ This does not mean conceding your interlocutor's point, giving up your own belief, and refraining from criticism. Rather, equal status in disagreement requires treating one's interlocutor as a worthwhile intellectual agent, with respect and graciousness. This is an effective deterrent to antagonistic behavior, since few people will respond negatively to being treated as an epistemic peer.

Disagreement Mediated by Narrative

Thus far, I have considered several concrete instructions for cultivating friendship in the face of disagreement; instructions also intended to counteract problematic emotions sometimes found in disagreement. Here I want to consider a further concrete instruction, namely, that we should read stories about those with whom we disagree, from the perspective with which we disagree. This instruction supplements the above recommendations for overcoming socially insurmountable disagreements; additionally, I would suggest that reading fiction is particularly helpful in deep disagreements and/or inter-community disagreements.¹³⁵

Most simply, when we read fiction we vicariously experience what we read. This is intuitively familiar. At some time, most of us have been transported into a story, becoming utterly absorbed in its outcome as we grow to identify strongly with the story's protagonists. That is, fiction tends to take us beyond the position of disinterested observer, leading us to

¹³⁴ One might object that this is deceitful, since your interlocutor is *not* an epistemic peer: given this, how can you justify treating her as such? To such an objector, I would respond by describing the ways in which we can "call forth" excellence from those we live among by expecting such from them, acting *as if* they were excellent. Consider a simple but important illustration of this. Teachers who treat their students *as if* they are capable of doing good work (or capable of sitting still, or refraining from name-calling, etc.) are more likely to have students who in fact do good work. Similarly, treating one's interlocutor *as if* she were an epistemic peer will call forth from her the intellectual excellences she lacks – or, at least, the beginnings of these excellences.

¹³⁵ Another boon of fiction reading is its accessibility. For example, in some cases of inter-community disagreement, it is practically impossible to cultivate friendships with those from other communities given geographical restrictions. Fiction can be helpful in such circumstances.

“identify so closely with the struggles of the protagonists that we don’t just sympathize with them; we strongly empathize with them. We *feel* their happiness and desire and fear.”¹³⁶

Moreover, our first-personal sense of identifying with the characters we read about has a physical counterpart. Brain imaging research suggests that when we read a passage in a novel (or, for that matter, watch a commercial on TV, or even watch a child across the park), our brain registers what we are reading (or watching) as if we were experiencing it ourselves.¹³⁷

Now, how is our ability to become utterly absorbed in a story related to disagreement? Most generally, story is useful in disagreement because the practice of reading stories that are sympathetic to viewpoints with which we disagree trains us to become empathetic to these viewpoints.¹³⁸ We gain understanding of foreign viewpoints¹³⁹ and lose any propensity we might have to become angry or anxious in the presence of those viewpoints when we read stories from and about those perspectives.^{140,141} Additionally, for those of us in sociological and

¹³⁶ Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal* (Mariner Books 2012), p. 67. Emphasis his.

¹³⁷ *The Storytelling Animal*, pp. 59-61; *The Righteous Mind*, pp. 272-3; Huth, Lori. “The Creative Necessity of Doubt: Encountering the Other in Art” (chapel talk, Houghton College, Houghton, NY, January 30, 2013, <http://www.houghton.edu/spiritual-life/chapel/chapel-recordings/january-30-2013/143/>. Last access March 22, 2014).

¹³⁸ This is an important caveat. Although we need not read fiction that is essentially propaganda for some foreign viewpoint, neither will it be of help to read fiction that is antagonistic towards viewpoints with which we disagree. Such fiction will only further habituate us in a closed-off attitude towards those with whom we disagree.

¹³⁹ Although I will not highlight the epistemic benefits of story in what follows, these benefits undeniably exist. Chief among them, I would argue, is the benefit of understanding. Stories that offer us access to a new world offer us understanding of a new viewpoint – and perhaps even a kind of acquaintance with this new “world” and those who live in it. Marilyn McEntyre highlights this when she writes, “[Stories] invite and challenge us and tease us into understanding and take us places we might not otherwise consent to go.” See *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies* (Eerdmans 2009), p. 126.

¹⁴⁰ This is a point drawn from Lori Huth’s “The Creative Necessity of Doubt.” She states, “In order to encounter each other, and especially “the Other,” knowledgably, and in love, we must read and write *against* cognitive ease and *toward* empathetic exploration. We must participate in the experiences of others and practice the capacity for seeing their truths through their own experiences and frames of reference.” [emphasis hers].

¹⁴¹ In fact, certain social psychologists who work in inter-group contact theory have struggled with the fact that anxiety towards out-group members inclines people to avoid contact with out-group members, which is exactly what they need. As a result, these social psychologists have proposed various extended and indirect methods of contact (one such method being fiction reading), hoping that these other methods can reduce anxiety and lead to more productive direct contact later on. For instance, see Lindsey Cameron and Adam Rutland, “Extended Contact through Story Reading in School: Reducing Children’s Prejudice toward the Disabled,” *Journal of Social Issues* 62 (2006): 469-488; Dan Johnson, “Transportation into a story increases empathy, prosocial behavior, and perceptual

geographical situations that make out-group friendship difficult, the practice of reading stories about out-groups is a practical boon. When it is practically difficult to have out-group friendships, reading is a helpful means of practicing welcome and respect towards other persons, even in the face of disagreement. In short, reading stories about those with whom we disagree is one way to habituate ourselves in openness (a social virtue relevant to disagreement that we will consider below). It is difficult to be antagonistic to a belief or viewpoint when one has vicariously experienced life through that viewpoint through a story.

As an example of the way in which fiction can allow us to experience different viewpoints, consider these comments from Mark O’Connell about the work of Marilynne Robinson. O’Connell is an atheist, but he writes appreciatively of the extent to which Robinson’s fiction enables him to understand and identify with the Christianity infused in her writing.

The second reason why I love Robinson, then, is how her writing puts me inside an apprehension of the world that is totally foreign to me, and that I have often approached with borderline hostility. [...] She makes an atheist reader like myself capable of identifying with the sense of a fallen world that is filled with pain and sadness but also suffused with divine grace. [...] I’ll never share her way of seeing and thinking about the world and our place in it, but her writing has shown me the value and beauty of these perspectives.¹⁴²

Although it seems unduly optimistic to hope that fiction can have such positive results in every case, I would suggest that the empathy Robinson provokes from O’Connell is not entirely atypical of fiction. If, through narrative, an atheist can recognize the internal rationality of

bias toward fearful expressions,” *Personality and Individual Difference* 52 (2012): 150-155; and Namita Pande and Praveera Srivasta, “The Role of Affective Imagery in Changing Negative Attitudes,” *Journal of Mental Imagery* 35 (2010): 25-46.

¹⁴² Mark O’Connell, “The First Church of Marilynne Robinson,” *New Yorker*, May 30, 2012, accessed April 5, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2012/05/marilynne-robinson.html>.

Christianity and appreciate the Christian perspective on the world, I am hopeful that fiction could play a similar role in other disagreements.

Openness: A Social Virtue for Disagreement

We are now prepared to answer the question, “*Qua* social agent, how should I conduct myself in disagreements?” Most simply, my answer to this question is, “Conduct yourself in a way conducive to friendship with your interlocutors.” However, this answer is far too general to be of much help to us, just as the recommendations provided by the epistemology of disagreement were too broad and inflexible to be of much use above. Given this, I will again turn to a virtue account, this time describing a social virtue relevant to disagreement, openness.

Openness: A Social Virtue for Disagreement

The virtue in question is “openness.” Openness is a virtue concerning feelings of welcome and rejection, with the aim of fostering friendship in disagreement. These feelings are affective stances: the person with an affective stance of welcome is accepting of the object in question and comfortable with its presence.¹⁴³ The object of openness is another person; the open person welcomes her interlocutor as a person valuable in himself. However, as we have already seen, disagreement involves both persons and beliefs. Thus, in contexts of disagreement, openness towards one’s interlocutor as a person entails openness towards the interlocutor’s beliefs as well as the evidence bases that have shaped these beliefs. However, it is imperative to note that openness to perspectives depends upon and occurs within a more basic openness directed to persons *qua* persons.¹⁴⁴ For instance, Merold Westphal suggests that an open person

¹⁴³ Readers familiar with Miroslav Volf’s *Exclusion and Embrace* may recognize the metaphors of embrace and exclusion in this description. Thus, openness is an open-armed welcome, whereas a posture of exclusion intends to cut off and reject its object. See *Exclusion and Embrace* (Abingdon Press 1996).

¹⁴⁴ The distinction between openness to a person and openness to that person’s perspective becomes crucial when articulating the limitations of openness. For instance, there seem to be cases in which openness to another’s perspective is unjust: it would be wrong to extend welcome to the beliefs of a misogynistic co-worker. However, in such situations it may nonetheless be appropriate to extend openness to the interlocutor *qua* person, insofar as this is

is “not just willing but eager to let the others have their say – in their language and from their perspective.”¹⁴⁵ This instruction nicely highlights the relationship between openness towards persons as a stance that has important epistemic components: a desire to do well by another person *qua* person includes the desire to do well by another person *qua* epistemic agent, which means letting her state her beliefs, “from her language and her perspective.” Finally, although openness is required both within and between epistemic communities, the limit case that best reveals openness is a PPR or other “deep” disagreement, in which case the deep disparity between the persons and evidence bases involved will highlight the working (or lack thereof) of openness.

What are the vices opposing openness? The vice of deficiency regarding openness is rigidity.¹⁴⁶ The rigid person refuses to welcome or consider another person’s perspective; her affective stance towards other perspectives is one of rejection. In contrast, the vice of excess regarding openness is spinelessness. The spineless person is welcoming to an absurd degree; he too easily identifies with the object of his welcome, collapsing what should be a conversation or relationship between two perspectives into one perspective. He has no perspectival “spine” of his own.¹⁴⁷

possible. For the most part, questions about openness’s limitations (i.e. when to abstain from openness for the sake of justice) are outside the scope of this paper.

¹⁴⁵ *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?*, p. 140. Westphal is speaking of openness as an attitude propaedeutic to the virtue of good listening.

¹⁴⁶ The term is identical to a vice Roberts and Wood describe as opposing firmness. I am happy for their account of rigidity (and, in turn, flaccidity) to carry over into my own. However, the crucial difference between our virtue matrices are 1) I articulate the mean as openness and 2) I think of openness as a moral virtue relevant to intellectual goods.

¹⁴⁷ Careful readers will notice the presence of hospitality metaphors throughout my account of openness. At this point, it’s helpful to keep in mind how firmness, as a virtue – or spinelessness, as a vice -- is in fact opposed to openness as hospitality, insofar as one requires a home in which to welcome others before one can properly exercise hospitality. That is, absent self-integration and unity in epistemic outlook (a goal of epistemic conservatism, recall), there is no possibility of welcoming others into one’s epistemic “space,” since epistemic disintegration and disunity constitutes a failure to establish an epistemic space of one’s own.

Because openness is oriented towards social goods, like friendship, openness is a social virtue. However, on our account, openness is a virtue proper to disagreement, and it has important epistemic effects, such as becoming better acquainted with one's interlocutor. Is this a problematic tension? If so, it can be resolved by describing openness as a modular virtue, as a subcomponent of some other virtue.¹⁴⁸ In this case, openness specifies a module of a social virtue, a module pertinent to epistemic situations. Of which virtue is openness a module? Charity or love, but in particular, openness relates to Aquinas's account of charity as a kind of friendship.¹⁴⁹ Openness, when exercised mutually, both fosters friendship in the face of disagreement and may even constitute a kind of intellectual friendship. That is, the focus of the open person is not merely on the intellectual goods she can or cannot gain from her conversation partner; rather, the open person is oriented towards the presence of social goods in the midst of disagreement.

Admittedly, to describe openness as a modular virtue of love is to depart substantially from our usual intuitions about virtues relevant to intellectual matters. Isn't it sufficient to describe openness as a kind of welcoming respect for another person's perspective, or a valuing of another person as a worthwhile intellectual agent? After all, resources are limited, and if openness is a kind of friendship, our capacity to exercise openness will be limited. Moreover, in

¹⁴⁸ *A Theory of Virtue*, pp. 125-130.

¹⁴⁹ *Summa theologiae* II-II 23, 1. One could object that my appropriation of Aquinas here is distorting, since for Aquinas, charity is first and foremost a theological virtue, the object of which is God, in which case it's not appropriate to claim that openness is a module of charity, since the object of openness is not God. This would be an accurate objection, since insofar as my paper treats charity and openness *apart* from any theological commitments, I am distorting Aquinas's account of charity. However, I think there is room for openness to be subsumed under charity on a Thomistic account. Such an account would appropriate Aquinas's account of charity as directed towards others secondarily. We love other humans for God's sake, as God loves them. This account would also emphasize that knowledge is not about our possession of intellectual goods. (Recall our earlier discussion of intellectual arrogance and the desire for *me* to possess the truth.) Rather, on this account, knowledge is best realized in the context of contemplation, in which we contemplate and know the world as an image of God and a gift from God. In this case, openness would be a virtue that would help us to love God in intellectual contexts by opening us up to God's presence in the perspectives of others. For more on the account of knowledge as contemplation, not possession, see *The Vice of Curiosity: An Essay on Intellectual Appetite*, pp. 66-67, 74-76.

my initial account of friendship I suggested that we have relatively few friends, although we might have an extension of friendship – friendliness - with a greater number of people. These are legitimate concerns. Although I maintain that the paradigmatic expression of openness occurs in the context of friendship or fosters friendship proper, I am content to describe “mere” respectful welcome towards other perspectives as an expression of openness. Just as we might say that I show a kind of love for those I am not personally invested in by valuing and respecting them appropriately, I think that openness is expressed when we are welcoming of and respectful towards any person (and, in turn, her beliefs), even if our interaction is brief. However, since respect is an extension of openness and not its paradigmatic expression, a person *merely* respectful of different perspectives is not paradigmatically open. Above and beyond respect, paradigmatic openness requires wishing the other person well, for her own sake, and enjoying her company.¹⁵⁰

One important matter still requires clarification: openness is supposed to be a virtue that enables us to maintain friendship (or the possibility of such) in the face of disagreement, but one might wonder whether openness in fact precludes disagreement. That is, can one be virtuously open and yet reject another’s belief(s)? Can openness function in the face of disagreement, or is openness opposed to disagreement as such? We can easily imagine a social virtue similar to openness that protects friendship by opposing disagreement, but this sort of virtue is not our aim here. We are looking for a social virtue that can co-exist with disagreement, especially some of the most difficult cases of disagreement.

¹⁵⁰One might wonder if mere tolerance suffices, on my account. Is tolerance a kind of friendliness? I think not. Recall the discussion of the live-and-let-live attitude under epistemic conservatism. There, I criticized the live-and-let-live attitude because it is too apathetic: “I’ll have my opinion; you’ll have yours. We can tolerate each other and get along just fine.” We might say that it refuses to take seriously the epistemic and social goods that can arise from engaging with one’s interlocutor in a disagreement, rather than each going their separate ways. Moreover, unlike goodwill and respectful welcome, which foster friendship or the possibility of such, tolerance does not have this further aim. As I see it, tolerance is thoroughly “thin,” unlike goodwill and respectful welcome, both of which lend themselves to thick friendship should the circumstances allow.

One simple way to answer this question would be to think of openness as temporally confined, in which case it is properly exercised prior to a conversation.¹⁵¹ However, why should openness become irrelevant once a conversation has begun? (Does hospitality become irrelevant once your guest is inside your house?) This would seem to ignore the social goods at stake in openness, suggesting that we can ignore the value of other persons after conversation has begun.

Having rejected the idea that openness is temporally confined, I would contend that openness does not preclude disagreement. One can continue to welcome a person's perspective while disagreeing with propositions to which that person assents. Consider my disagreement with HollyAnne, since in this case I have claimed to be friends with HollyAnne (suggesting some residue of openness, at least) in spite of our disagreements. Since the primary object of openness is another person *qua* person, and only secondarily is openness directed towards beliefs, openness requires that I have a welcoming stance towards HollyAnne, but it is important that this stance be directed primarily towards the person that is HollyAnne. Only secondarily do I welcome HollyAnne's beliefs, and insofar as I "welcome" those beliefs of HollyAnne's that I disagree with, I welcome them as aspects of HollyAnne.

However, it is helpful to recall that even at the level of propositions standing in tension, there is room for a kind of epistemic openness in disagreement. That is, although I continue to maintain that openness is paradigmatically welcome directed towards *persons*, we can see how a related kind of openness on the epistemic level might interface nicely with openness as a social virtue. Usually, philosophers speak of this "epistemic openness" as the "principle of charity." Not only does your interlocutor herself deserve your respect – her position also does. Regardless of whether or not you actually agree with your interlocutor's conclusions, you must be fair to

¹⁵¹ In what follows, I use conversation in a loose and general sense, referring to something like a temporally extended exchange of communication.

your interlocutor's thinking, considering his beliefs and his reasons for them in the best possible light.¹⁵² One particularly helpful way to do this is to highlight the internal rationality of your interlocutor's position, to seek to understand *why* your interlocutor believes as he does.¹⁵³

Unsurprisingly, epistemic openness (understood in terms of the principle of charity and internal rationality) does not usually resolve disagreements, but epistemic openness does tend to take the bite out of disagreements. In this sense, epistemic openness is helpful in mitigating the apparent opposition between openness proper (as a social virtue) and disagreement.

Conversation: Integrating Epistemic and Social Ideals

I want to close with a brief reflection on the idea of a conversation, since the idea of a conversation integrates the dual concerns of this thesis. Conversation is entirely at home in friendship; in fact, conversation may well be required for friendship. However, without some kind of difference (disagreement being merely one form of difference), there is not much to be had by way of conversation. Rather, good conversation is a dialogue, give-and-take between two persons, two perspectives. In short, it seems that conversation is an ideal image under which to subsume *both* our epistemological and social concerns. Conversation cannot occur absent the right social contexts. One cannot converse in an antagonistic environment, and the best conversations happen between friends. On the other hand, conversations involve the truth seeking proper to epistemological concerns, but in conversational mode, the truth seeking occurs jointly. Marilyn McEntyre describes the process of conversation as follows:

Good conversation serves the truth. It clarifies and nuances. It corrects and refines. To be in conversation is, ideally, to be seeking a deeper or more comprehensive grasp of some truth by means of dialogue, so that it proceeds on the assumption that no one of us is at

¹⁵² See Lee Hardy et. al., "The Ethics of Argument" in *The Little Logic Book* (Calvin College Press 2013).

¹⁵³ Relativizing condescension – "you would believe that, wouldn't you" – is not a virtuous way of understanding an interlocutor's hermeneutic situation.

any point in possession of the ‘whole truth,’ but rather that each of us may bring a perspective to bear that may complement and modify the perspective of others.¹⁵⁴

Conclusion

In this thesis, we have considered disagreement in a practical light. Since disagreement involves two people assenting to conflicting propositions, I have written about disagreement from both a social and epistemological perspective. In the first half, I began by treating various epistemological theories about disagreement, the two main types of which are conservatism and conciliationism. However, since these theories are too vague and rigid to be of practical use, my recommendations for conduct in disagreement took the form of two intellectual virtues, firmness and humility. The second half of the thesis has considered disagreement in a social light; on this approach, my goal has been friendship or the possibility of such in the face of disagreement. Attending to friendship in the face of disagreement is worthwhile in its own right, but it has also proven epistemologically fruitful, since friendship furthers epistemic goods such as understanding and acquaintance and counteracts problematic emotions like anxiety and anger. Since friendship is difficult to establish in some disagreements, I also offered various concrete instructions about fostering friendship in the face of antagonistic disagreements. These instructions involved emphasizing common projects, treating interlocutors as *if* they are epistemic peers, and using narrative to cultivate empathy with the perspective of our interlocutor. Finally, I considered a social virtue relevant to disagreement, openness. The open person is welcoming of his interlocutor, eager to let his interlocutor speak from his perspective and in his language, and in this way the open person values his interlocutor *qua* person, even in the face of disagreement.

¹⁵⁴ *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies*, pp. 103-4.

The goal of this paper, recall, was to offer some practical recommendations about how we ought to conduct ourselves in disagreement. Given the complexity of the subject matter, I have refrained from giving any rule-based instructions about how to act in disagreement. Rather, a trio of virtues has borne the practical weight of this thesis. Firmness tracks the value of epistemic unity, humility counteracts arrogance and self-privilege, and openness fosters the possibility of friendship in disagreement. Since my practical conclusions have come in the form of virtues, any reader who wishes to apply the conclusions of this thesis faces hard work. Virtuous living requires habituation and experience. However, in spite of our inevitable need for ongoing character formation, we shall know that we are disagreeing well when we find ourselves conversing over a disagreement. Conversation, in the end, is the ideal form of disagreement, since in conversation friends pursue truth together.

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