RESOLVING RELIGIOUS DISAGREEMENTS: EVIDENCE AND BIAS

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Abstract. Resolving religious disagreements is difficult, for beliefs about religion tend to come with strong biases against other views and the people who hold them. Evidence can help, but there is no agreed-upon policy for weighting it, and moreover bias affects the content of our evidence itself. Another complicating factor is that some biases are reliable and others unreliable. What we need is an evidence-weighting policy geared toward negotiating the effects of bias. I consider three evidence-weighting policies in the philosophy of religion and advocate one of them as the best for promoting the resolution of religious disagreements.

I. Introduction

In response to theological contentions in the Church of England, Archbishop Justin Welby addressed the General Synod in 2014 with a plea for "good disagreement". Welby was mainly encouraging tolerance – he took disagreement as a foregone conclusion. But we needn't always do this; another aspect of good disagreement is the search for resolution. By "resolution" I mean agreement on a truth, not just on what both parties agree is a truth.

In a disagreement, which I'll understand for simplicity as one party believing that *p* and the other believing that *~p* (or a proposition that entails *~p*), at least one party believes a falsehood. Of course, neither thinks it's them. But regardless of who is right, both stand to gain from trying to resolve their disagreement. If they succeed, the advantage is most obvious for the person with the false belief: she acquires a true one, along with some reasons for it. But the person with the true belief stands to benefit too, for she may be challenged to better understand the reasons for and against her view. Unsuccessful attempts at resolution can have this effect too (Anderson, 1995; Solomon, 2001, chapters 5 and 6; Longino, 2002).

Disagreements about religion – which can arise between atheists and theists, adherents of different religions, and (as in Welby's case) within a single denomination – do not lend themselves to resolution. One reason is that beliefs about religion are enmeshed in large-scale worldviews in which people are personally, socially, and existentially invested. As a result, people often have strong biases -- even when they don't realize it -- both *for* their own view and the people who share it, as well as *against* the view of their disagreeing interlocutor and indeed that interlocutor herself. Although the term "biased" has negative connotations, biases can be truth-conducive as well as truth-detracting (Antony, 2016). But either way they promote entrenchment in one's own view and impede resolution.

How can two parties interested in resolving a religious disagreement deal with the effects of bias? A natural suggestion is to heed their evidence. This is a good start, but more is needed. Evidence does not typically come with ready-made instructions about how to weight it, for much evidence is non-deductive: think of a jury weighing evidence for and against a verdict. On top of this, biases affect the ways in which we are naturally disposed to weight our evidence, as well as the content of the beliefs and experiences comprising it. These effects are compounded when the topic at issue is something as personally involving as religion.

So attention to evidence is only part of the story. If we are to resolve a religious disagreement, we need a policy for weighting our evidence, and that policy must negotiate the epistemic effects of bias. This paper seeks an evidence-weighting policy to perform this task. To this end I tap into the philosophy-of-religion debate on evidence-weighting. This debate is geared toward disagreements between theists and atheists, but is generalizable. It can be read, I argue, as concerning whether to avoid unreliable biases about religion or foster reliable ones. One view, which I call *impartialism*

(Locke, 1690/1997; Schellenberg, 2007; Martin, 1990; Philipse, 2012; Schellenberg, 2007; Mackie, 1982), recommends ascribing the greatest evidential weight to evidence that meets criteria drawn from scientific reasoning and is thus less likely to be affected by unreliable bias. A second view, which I call *partialism* (Plantinga, 2000; Alston, 1991; Gellman, 2000; Moser, 2010; Evans, 2011; Tucker, 2011), recommends giving greater weight instead to certain forms of evidence that fall short of these criteria and can thus be expected to exhibit reliable and unreliable biases alike. The third view, which I call *egalitarianism* (Swinburne, 2005, 2004; Greco, 1993; Wainwright, 2000), recommends weighting both kinds of evidence about the same. Can any view deliver what we need to negotiate bias in religious disagreements? I'll argue that egalitarianism is the best suited to the task.

Section II defends the epistemic aim of resolving disagreements and shows how bias complicates matters. Section III discusses some features of disagreements specifically about religion. Section IV outlines the two different types of evidence about religion. Section V outlines the three evidence-weighting policies in the literature, section VI adjudicates among them, and section VII concludes.

II. Resolution, Evidence, and Bias

Engaging in disagreement can have many laudable epistemic aims, but I'll focus on resolution. Resolution entails consensus but goes beyond it – for consensus can be about a falsehood, whereas resolution, in the sense at issue here, achieves mutual true belief. Resolution is a long-term goal that will often, at least in religious disagreements, remain unreached. But both parties stand to benefit epistemically in attempting it, for disagreeing interlocutors are well placed to provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of each other's positions (Basinger, 2002; Anderson, 1995; Solomon, 2001, chapters 5 and 6).[1] This is so regardless of whether the parties are epistemic peers. If they are, their disagreement has the potential to be epistemically fruitful, but perhaps harder to resolve. If the parties consist instead in an epistemic "inferior" and "superior", their disagreement might in some cases be easier to resolve, but even when unresolved, each stands to learn something from the other. For example, both can improve their understanding of the evidence: the one by newly grasping it, the other by articulating it clearly to someone unfamiliar with it and inclined to disagree.

Some might hesitate to call resolution a universal epistemic good. For it can be serendipitous, resting on false or ill-founded assumptions which a measure of irresolution is often needed to challenge (Solomon, 2001, chapters 5 and 6). This objection is correct as far as it goes. But the response is not to discard resolution as an epistemic aim altogether. If a disagreement goes unresolved, then one party remains mistaken in perpetuity, even if other aspects of her dissenting view are correct. Hence resolution is an epistemic good, but the goodness of a particular resolution admits of degree along a variety of dimensions.

Heeding evidence is one way to approach the aim of resolution (there may be others). No policy for weighting evidence can guarantee resolution, but it can optimize the use of evidence in moving both parties closer toward it. I'll understand *evidence*[2] as the content of a person's representational experiences[3] and of her evidence-proportioned beliefs (the latter being determined, of course, by the operative evidence-weighting policy). I'll call the former *experiential* and the latter *propositional*. Evidence is restricted to representational content, because only this presents things as being one way rather than another way.[4] Evidence-weighting policies have the function of helping people achieve epistemic aims. Because people are cognitively and environmentally situated, an evidence-weighting policy must be sensitive to the situational features that promote or impede the epistemic aims that it is supposed to further (Antony, 2016).

When our epistemic aim is resolving a religious disagreement, an important situational feature to take account of bias. A *bias* is an agent's mental association between a type of object or person, and a valenced property or feeling.[5] One might for example associate beaches with happiness, spiders with disgust, or BMWs with prestige. Bias disposes agents, but does not determine them, to cognize in certain ways before they receive any evidence. Bias can occur implicitly (i.e., at a less than fully conscious level), even when the agent disavows the association (Machery, 2016; Holroyd and Sweetman, 2016).

How can an evidence-weighting policy geared toward resolution take account of bias? The answer

is not straightforward, for two reasons. The first is that bias affects the very *content* of our evidence, as well as *the way that we are disposed to weight it*. Bias affects the content of our experiential evidence by influencing the things we attend to (Mack and Rock, 1998; Chabris and Simons, 2010, chapter 1), and by "coloring" our perceptions of those things (Fricker, 2007, 71; Mills, 2007, 27; Roberts, 1992; Cottingham, 2005, chapter 1; Dougherty, 2014a). For example, an aversion to spiders disposes us to notice spiders (or things that move across the floor like them) and to perceive them *as* dangerous; and an affinity for chocolate disposes us to notice confectioneries and to perceive them *as* inviting. As for bias's influence on the ways in which we are inclined to weight our evidence (Kahneman, 2011, parts II and III; Chabris and Simons, 2010, chapter 5), it disposes us to prefer some beliefs or explanations, given some body of evidence, over others. For example, if the physical features of our new acquaintance, Sam, remind me of my childhood best friend whereas they remind you of the neighborhood bully, then I will have positive associations with Sam, whereas you will have negative ones. So given the evidence of Sam's swerving her car, I will be disposed to believe charitably that she was trying not to hit something, whereas you will be disposed to believe uncharitably that she is reckless.

One might think that the best way to promote the resolution of disagreements, religious or otherwise, is to minimize the effects of bias altogether. On the one hand, the effects of *some* biases should indeed be minimized, for the function of bias – namely, to help us quickly process daunting swathes of information (Kahneman 2011, part I) – is not straightforwardly epistemic; it has pragmatic dimensions too.[6] For example, you may associate snakes with danger. This bias arguably succeeds if it prompts you to avoid the dangerous snakes, even if you also believe falsely that harmless snakes you encounter (in fact the vast majority) are dangerous. Another example is status-quo bias, which disposes us to associate goodness with social hierarchies (Hundleby, 2016). This bias arguably functions by sustaining social order, even if it also disposes us to believe that justice prevails when it does not.[7] When a bias disposes us to form more false beliefs than true ones (even if in crucial yet occasional cases, like that of poisonous snake, we form true ones), I'll call it *epistemically unreliable*.[8]

However – and this brings me to the second reason why matters are not straightforward – a bias can also be *epistemically reliable*: the beliefs that it disposes us to form can be mostly true (Gigerenzer *et al*. 2000; Antony, 2016).[9] For example, many of us are biased to believe what smiling people tell us (Vaughan and Hogg, 2014, 45-49). This often helps us quickly form true beliefs: smiling typically indicates a testifier's good intentions toward you, so barring utter epistemic incompetence on his part, what he tells you will usually be true. *Usually*.

The problem is that epistemic reliability is rarely perfect. Biases respond to superficial features of situations without attending to specifics (Blum, 2004, 258-265; 271-277; Vaughan and Hogg, 2014, 45-61). Reliable biases dispose us to draw conclusions that are probably true, yet probability is compatible with falsehood.[10] For example, our reliable disposition to associate smiling with trustworthy testimony can mislead: smiling testifiers sometimes overestimate their knowledge, and in some cultures (so I have heard) it is considered polite to direct a person (smilingly) anywhere at all rather than refuse his request for help. I'll call a false belief formed because of an otherwise reliable bias a *false-positive belief*. In simple cases, false-positive beliefs are easily corrected by other evidence. But in complex cases they are more recalcitrant. For example, given the background belief that I have poor orientation, if, when visiting the abovementioned culture, I get lost whenever I follow smiling testifiers' directions, I may be apt to conclude that I failed to follow them correctly, not that smiling does not correlate with truth in this society. False-positive beliefs, then, can be hard to uproot. Most reliable biases are merely roughly reliable.

The job of an evidence-weighting policy aimed at promoting resolution is thus complex. It must discourage unreliable biases, while encouraging reliable ones insofar as they dispose us to true beliefs but not to false-positive ones. No evidence-weighting policy can perfectly meet these demands: policies are general, whereas evidential situations are particular. But some policies are better than others. In order to adjudicate among the three evidence-weighting policies in the literature, let's consider more closely the particular bias-related challenges that arise in religious disagreements.

III. Bias in Religious Disagreement

Biases about religion tend to be especially strong; that is, they tend to resist being overturned by counter-instances. The reason is that our views on religion tend to function as a large-scale "worldview", making sense of the world for us. We are apt to be attracted to the sense of coherence that our beliefs about religion provide and thus to anything appearing to support them, and to be repelled by anything appearing to undermine them (Solomon *et al.*, 1991).

A religious disagreement presents a person with an interlocutor who holds a view about religion that is (at least in some ways) incompatible with her own. Especially if the differences are important, she will incline toward strong biases against his view and the considerations that he adduces to support it. In addition, she will incline toward strong biases against *him*, particularly if they cast aspersion on him as an epistemic agent. To see what this amounts to, consider the example of the culturally prevalent stereotype of the "dumb blond"; this may prime someone to perceive a blond person (especially a woman) as unintelligent, and thus to epistemically devalue her arguments and opinion (Fricker, 2007; Saul, 2013, 248). We may contrast this epistemic downgrading with the example from section II, in which we are prone to epistemically *up*grade smiling interlocutors. If we are epistemically biased against someone, we are apt to attend to those of her features that we associate with a lack of intelligence, and to perceive her *as* unintelligent. We may remember her argument as less impressive than it was at the time. And we will be inclined to interpret her argument, or evidence about her epistemic credentials, in maximally uncharitable ways. Moreover, we will often not realize that we are doing it, thinking instead that we are giving her and her arguments a neutral hearing (Saul, 2013, 248).

Systems of worldview beliefs by no means have a monopoly on epistemic downgrading. But many have tools that cement epistemic bias. For one, many employ concepts with epistemically valenced overtones. Think of notions such as *inspired*, *fundamentalist*, *scientific*, *heretical*, *enlightened*, or *noetically sinful*. Consider how these might easily align with categories into which you or a disagreeing interlocutor may fall – such as *atheist*, *evangelical*, *Sunni*, *Orthodox Jew*, or *non-Christian*. Moreover, beliefs about religion are often accompanied by error theories explaining outsiders' nonbelief (Bergmann, 2009, 338-340; Lackey, 2014, 304-307). Think of the claim that atheism is scientific whereas belief in God arises from unreliable psychological processes (Martin, 1990, chapter 6), or the claim that belief in God is divinely inspired whereas nonbelief comes from the noetic effects of sin (Plantinga, 2000, chapter 7).

Such error theories are not *ipso facto* epistemically problematic. Insofar as any belief system is confronted with people who do not share it, error theories improve its coherence, and even stand to be true if the belief system more generally is. And certain categories *are* relevant to our epistemic assessment of an interlocutor. We want to know, for example, whether she is epistemically responsible, prone to distorting biases of her own, and whether she is our epistemic peer. An error theory is problematic mainly insofar as we use it as a "discrediting mechanism" (McKim, 2001) that epistemically downgrades disagreeing interlocutors a priori. That is, an error theory is problematic if you assume that it fully explains every disagreement you might encounter, or that it precludes your interlocutor from having any insights at all. An evidence-weighting policy geared toward resolving religious disagreements, then, must discourage biases from turning error theories into discrediting mechanisms.

Moreover, bias can persist implicitly even against interlocutors whom one respects personally or intellectually, and even explicit epistemic biases can be localized to an interlocutor's views about religion (e.g., "she's a great logician, but ..."). So an evidence-weighting policy has its work cut out for it.

IV. Two Types of Evidence about Religion

The philosophy-of-religion debate over evidence-weighting can be framed in terms of the proponents' approaches to bias. On this reading it concerns how much weight to accord to evidence designed to be as free as possible of religion-related bias, as opposed to evidence that encodes

certain biases thought to be reliable. I'll outline the two types of evidence here, and the evidence-weighting policies in section V.

Impartialist evidence[11] is modeled after evidence in science;[12] it is designed to be as free as possible of any biases about the matter that the evidence concerns. It meets the following necessary conditions:

> **Intersubjective Transparency:** *Propositional* evidence is impartialist only if any competent person is able to entertain the proposition in question. *Experiential* evidence is impartialist only if any competent person would be able, were she in the right place at the right time, to undergo the experience (type) in question.[13]

> **Non-Question-Beggingness:** *Propositional* evidence is impartialist only if it does not beg the question about the matter that it concerns.[14]

The intersubjective-transparency condition applies to propositional and experiential evidence; the non-question-beggingness condition applies only to propositional evidence (for experiences, being psychologically prior to judgments, are not the kinds of things that can be question-begging). I'll illustrate the conditions with examples from science, and then apply them to religion.

Evidence meeting the *intersubjective-transparency condition* is accessible to all manner of people, including those with mutually conflicting biases. Propositional evidence need merely be entertained to be accessible. Scientific examples include statements of experimental results or background assumptions. Experiential evidence, by contrast, is strictly speaking inaccessible to those who have not had the experience in question. For epistemic purposes, however, it suffices that the *type* of experience be repeatable in suitable conditions. Two experiences count as being of the same type if they have the same epistemically relevant properties concerning the matter at hand, such as the experience of looking at a type of specimen under a microscope. The thought is that repeatable experience-types will typically be those in which idiosyncratic biases about the matter under investigation do not feature.

The intersubjective-transparency condition restricts the range of people to whom impartialist evidence must be accessible: they must be *competent*. We should not, for instance, disqualify the evidence delivered by a particle accelerator on the grounds that non-physicists cannot entertain it. One might wonder whether the competence requirement trivializes the condition. For competence is determined within a doxastic practice, and there seems little to stop a doxastic practice from defining competence as it likes. In particular, a practice might define competence as the possession of biases favoring a certain conclusion on the matter that the evidence concerns. However, claims about competence are themselves a form of evidence, and as we'll see, the second condition places constraints on them.

The *non-question-beggingness condition* aims to exclude any assumptions that encode bias in favor of a particular hypothesis or conclusion. Such assumptions might feature as the premises (or hidden premises) of an argument; they can concern the methodology of an investigation; or they can be presupposed by the concepts used to frame a problem (Longino, 2002; Anderson, 1995). Question-begging evidence might presuppose a single, specific, conclusion or outcome (as when an argument uses its conclusion to support a premise); or it might be compatible with a range of conclusions while foreclosing some specific one (as when an investigation is designed in a way that excludes a particular result). Importantly, evidence might beg the question by defining competence in terms of an ability to achieve a result confirming a specific view. For example: when the matter under investigation is Mayan geography, it would be question-begging to count an archaeologist as competent simply because her bias in favor of a Mayan-settlement hypothesis disposes her to perceive artifacts from most sites as Mayan. Her judgment would be a bad reason to believe that a given site is a Mayan settlement. In answer to the above worry that doxastic practices may define competence as they please, the non-question-begging condition ensures that criteria for competence do not favor some conclusions over others.

Let's consider whether evidence-types standardly brought to bear on religion count as impartialist.

A salient form of propositional evidence are the premises and conclusions of deductive and probabilistic inferences. This evidence is intersubjectively transparent to those competent in the relevant logics. And it can be non-question-begging: deductive inferences if they avoid using their own conclusions as premises or necessary support for premises, and probabilistic inferences if they assign competing hypotheses the same prior probability (unless they offer non-question-begging reasons for doing otherwise).[15] Inferences, then, can be impartialist evidence.

Let's turn to religious experiences, which we may understand as anything from full-blown mystical encounters to subdued intimations of transcendence in nature. Only the intersubjective-transparency condition is relevant here. One might think that religious experiences can meet it, on the grounds that there is a special "mystical competence" for undergoing religious experiences. But this suggestion is overhasty, for the non-question-beggingness condition places constraints on claims about competence. And it excludes mystical competence. The reason is that mystical competence is a predisposition to have not just any type of religious experience, but rather experiences matching the beliefs of a specific religious worldview. One would not be regarded as competent in the *Christian* mystical practice, for instance, if one had experiences of Poseidon. So the claim that one can possess a mystical competence forecloses the possibility that people regarded as doing so have experiences confirming any other religious worldview. But even if a non-question-begging notion of mystical competence could be found, religious experiences would still violate the intersubjective-transparency condition. For they are not the kinds of experience that one can have simply by being in the right place at the right time.[16] At least as they are construed in Western philosophy of religion, they are "a matter of *divine cognitive grace* rather than human meritorious earning or even humanly controllable evidence" (Moser, 2010, 30). Religious experiences then, do not count as impartialist evidence (Schellenberg, 2010, 189; Martin, 1990, chapter 6; Philipse, 2012, chapter 15).

Beliefs about the occurrence of religious experiences, however, can sometimes count. They do not count when they are of the form "I had *that* experience", where "that" refers to a phenomenal character accessible only to the person who had the experience; for such beliefs fail to meet the intersubjective-transparency condition. Nor do beliefs of the form "So-and-so had an experience of God", for these presuppose that God exists and are thus question-begging. However, beliefs of the form "So-and-so had an experience *apparently* of God" are acceptable. For their content is intersubjectively transparent to any linguistically competent hearer, and it does not presuppose anything about God's existence. (Schellenberg, 2010, 160-161).

Another source of evidence about religion is testimony, for example from parents or scripture. Testimony provides experiential evidence of the testifier's asserting that p, where p is a proposition about religion; it also provides the propositional evidence (grounded in this experience) that the testifier asserted that p. How do these fare on the impartialist criteria?

The experiential evidence violates the intersubjective-transparency criterion. This may come as a surprise: can't anyone who understands the testifier's language undergo the relevant experience-type? Not the *epistemically relevant* one. Let me explain. Granted, anyone can indeed have the coarse-grained experience-type "Testifier t asserts that p". So the experience counts as evidence for the belief that t asserted that p. But when the testimonial experience is individuated more finely, in a way that places in relief the properties relevant to whether p is true, it does not meet the intersubjective-transparency condition. For these properties include hard-to-articulate phenomenological properties arising from epistemically laden ways of perceiving the testifier (see section III). When the experience-type is individuated this way, *not* just anyone would have the same one. Those inclined to believe that p would tend to experience the testifier as epistemically trustworthy, whereas those inclined to disbelieve that p would tend to experience him as epistemically untrustworthy. Like religious experiences, testimonial ones are too bias-prone to count as impartialist evidence.

However, the propositional evidence *that t asserted that p* can count as impartialist evidence. This meets the intersubjective-transparency condition (as long as p can be grasped by any linguistically competent person); it also meets the non-question-beggingness condition, for the belief

that *t* asserted that *p* does not presuppose the truth of *p*. We must note, however, that beliefs of this form do not speak for or against *p* on their own; they can only do so in conjunction with other beliefs about the epistemic properties of *t* himself. Another way to put this is that impartialist evidence can only legitimate *inferential* testimonial belief.

This brings us to a final salient type of evidence about religion: beliefs that feature in inferences about the trustworthiness of testifiers. An example is a belief concerning whether a testifier who disagrees with you about religion is your epistemic peer. Such a belief meets the intersubjective-transparency condition as long as the criteria for peerhood can be grasped by any competent person. As for the non-question-beggingness condition, a belief about peerhood only meets this condition as long as it is not derived from your own views about religion. For example, the belief that your interlocutor is *not* a peer, based on your favorite question-begging error theory, does not count as impartialist evidence. So some beliefs about peerhood can count as impartialist evidence.

Let's turn more briefly to the second category of evidence, *partialist* evidence. Partialist evidence is a subset of the evidence weeded out by the two criteria. It includes, particularly, evidence likely to be affected by one's religion-related biases, including emotional tendencies to perceive things or testifiers in value-laden ways.[17] It includes religious and experiences (as opposed to merely beliefs about their occurrence). And it includes question-begging assumptions about the veridicality of a religious experience, the trustworthiness or peer status of a testifier, the higher prior probability of one hypothesis over another, or question-begging claims about mystical competence (Plantinga, 1983 and 2000; Alston, 1991; Moser, 2010, chapter 3).

The idea is that such evidence, though prone to bias about religion, can be prone to *reliable* bias. Accounts vary, but they share the theme that reliable biases can be divinely caused and that God may prefer to communicate by means of them. For example, Alston (1991, chapter 6) argues that a "mystical practice" can reliably point to its divine source. Plantinga (2000, chapter 8) argues that non-inferential religious belief on the basis of experiences and testimony can be a manifestation of proper cognitive function. Moser argues that the only "conclusive" evidence for God consists in experiences mediated by a person's conscience (2010, 182-183).

The next section presents the three evidence-weighting policies, and section VI considers how effectively each policy promotes the resolution of religious disagreements.

V. Evidence-Weighting Policies

Evidence-weighting policies are coarse epistemic tools, whereas belief-forming situations are extremely fine-grained. Because of this, evidence-weighting policies are not guaranteed to yield the optimal outcome across all situations; they are more like *rules of thumb*. Rules of thumb home in on a small number of salient variables and issue a general recommendation that is not guaranteed to perfectly achieve the desired result. Because of this they admit of exception but should usually be highly effective at achieving the aim in question.[18]

What is evidential weight? As I understand it here, it is a measure of the epistemic influence that a piece of evidence should have in determining your doxastic attitude toward a given proposition. Consider for example two scenarios. In the first, a reliable weather forecaster, Sanchez, predicts a 95% chance of rain. Supposing that you lack other information, this evidence arguably justifies a probability assignment to rain of around 95%. In the second scenario, there is in addition to Sanchez a second forecaster, Smith, who is less reliable than Sanchez but not wholly unreliable, and who predicts a 50% chance of rain. Lacking additional information, what probability do these forecasts justify together? Arguably one somewhere between 95% and 50%, but skewed closer to 95%. The reason is that Sanchez is more reliable, so her 95% prediction should receive greater weight than Smith's 50% prediction: it should play a more influential role in forming your doxastic attitude.

Evidential weighting can be modeled in various ways. One example follows a three-step procedure.[19] First, you assign the proposition in question a conditional probability for each piece of relevant evidence. Second, you assign a numeric weight to each of these conditional probabilities; the evidence-weighting polices discussed here do so on the basis of whether the evidence is impartialist or partialist. Third, you calculate the weighted average of those conditional probabilities.

What results is the appropriate doxastic attitude given your total evidence. Evidential weighting may be modeled in other ways, and an important job for future research is to spell this out (see section VI.4).

Let's turn to the three policies. Impartialism, as we saw, is motivated to expunge any effects of bias on evidence. For this reason it ascribes the most epistemic weight to impartialist evidence and little or no weight to partialist evidence:

> **Impartialist Evidence-Weighting:** In general, when forming beliefs about religion,
> you should give any impartialist evidence that you have a good deal of weight
> and any partialist evidence that you have little or no weight.

Atheists tend to endorse impartialism (Martin, 1990, chapter 6; Schellenberg, 2007, 190; Mackie, 1982); Philipse argues for instance that "rational or natural theology has an epistemological priority over revelation" (2012, 5). But some theists are impartialists too: Locke (1690/1997) wants to ensure that no partialist "enthusiasm" can influence beliefs about religion (Bk. IV, ch. 19; Bk. IV, ch. 18, sec. 4).

Partialists take the opposite approach. They argue that science is the wrong model for beliefs about religion (Moser, 2010, chapter 1), and that the impartialist conditions exclude precisely the evidence most apt to yield knowledge or true belief about religion (Wolterstorff, 2010, 156; Moser, 2010, 205; Gellman, 2000, 410). Partialism, which tends to correlate strongly with theism, is best construed as strongly affirming the epistemic value of partialist evidence. A partialist may value impartialist evidence too, as long as this value does not extend to *requiring* agents to give it any non-negligible weight.[20] Here is the partialist evidence-weighting policy (Plantinga, 2000; Alston, 1991; Moser, 2010; Wolterstorff, 2010):[21]

> **Partialist Evidence-Weighting:** In general, when forming beliefs about religion,
> you are permitted to give any partialist evidence that you have predominant
> weight and any impartialist evidence that you have little if any weight.

Partialism differs from impartialism in stating permission rather than obligation. Although partialists permit the heavy weighting of impartialist evidence, they would look askance at religious believers who opted to do this (Plantinga, 1983, 64-71).

Egalitarianism eschews what it sees as the extremes of its competitors. It claims that *both* kinds of evidence have significant drawbacks and significant strengths, and that each is therefore required as a complement to the other.

Swinburne is an egalitarian. He writes on the one hand that, "[i]n an age of religious skepticism when there are good arguments against theism known to most people, and there are so often authoritative theists, most theists need arguments for the existence of God which start from rightly basic beliefs held very strongly by theist and atheist alike, and proceed thence by criteria shared between theist and atheist" (2005, 91). But he also argues that "[o]ne who has had a religious experience apparently of God has good reason for believing that there is a God – other things being equal – especially if it is a forceful experience" (2004, 325). Wainwright is arguably an egalitarian too. He emphasizes the importance of impartialist evidence: "Whether one is committed to a mystical practice or not, metaphysical and empirical argumentation of a familiar sort … is probably needed to show that commitment to [such a practice] is fully rational" (2000, 224). Yet he suggests that partialist evidence is crucial too: "There is no reason to think that a person who refuses to allow herself to be influenced by her moral and aesthetic proclivities, sentiments, and feelings is more likely to arrive at the truth about moral and aesthetic matters than someone who doesn't or, indeed, is even *as* likely to do so. And in fact the contrary seems to be true" (2011, 91-92).[22] Greco (1993) can be classed as an egalitarian, arguing that the impartialist evidence of natural theology is necessary but insufficient for religious knowledge.

Here is the egalitarian evidence-weighting policy:

Egalitarian Evidence-Weighting: In general, when forming beliefs about religion,
you should give any impartialist evidence and partialist evidence that you have approximately
equal weight.

Egalitarianism, like impartialism, obligates rather than merely permits. This is a consequence of its taking each type of evidence to have important strengths that compensate for unfortunate weaknesses in the other.

Like the other views, there is a measure of imprecision in what egalitarianism recommends. It can be construed as licensing some non-inferential belief on the basis of experiences or testimony, albeit with a strong sensitivity to defeaters. It legitimates some reliance on one's prior viewpoint in assigning prior probabilities, as long as alternative explanations are still taken seriously; and so forth. More than this, egalitarianism *requires* attention to all of these considerations, with the impartialist and partialist ones complementing and constraining each other.

These policies concern only evidence that you *have*. They say nothing on their own about what sorts of evidence one should strive to have (although we can expect what proponents of each view would say). Pending future work on this issue, I will assume in the following, for the sake of illustration, that the agents in my examples have roughly equal amounts of impartialist and partialist evidence.

Let's now adjudicate among these three policies.

VI. Which Policy is Best for Resolving Religious Disagreements?

Disagreements are often construed as involving two competing views (Bergmann, 2009; Elga, 2007; Kelly, 2010; Lackey, 2010). Yet disagreements can also arise among a plurality of viewpoints; indeed, the problem of *religious* disagreement (or diversity) is often framed this way (McKim, 2001; Basinger, 2002; Philipse, 2012; Schellenberg, 2007). I will start, for simplicity, by considering disagreements with only two alternatives, but section VI.4 will lift this restriction and consider disagreements among multiple views.

<u>1. Impartialism</u>

The impartialist will claim that, because her view weeds out the evidence most prone to the effects of bias, it is well placed to resolve religious disagreements. It prohibits the use of question-begging error theories and checks our natural tendency to heavily weight evidence favoring our preferred views about religion. The impartialist will grant that her view stifles reliable biases along with unreliable ones – but she will plead that this is the best alternative, given that religion is so strongly bias-prone in both directions. And she will note that there is no shortage of impartialist evidence about religion for interlocutors to work with.

But impartialism does its bias-depleting job too well. It leaves us with a preponderance of evidence that is largely neutral of religious content, often too neutral to decide a question about religion either way. The best that agents can usually do, on impartialism, is form tentative or uncertain doxastic attitudes hovering around a 50% level of confidence.[23] A fortiori, the best that two disagreeing interlocutors can do is to agree not on a true belief about religion (which resolution in the sense at issue requires) but on an attitude of uncertainty.

To see why, consider two interlocutors who disagree about whether *p*, a proposition about religion, is true. Frieda is reliably biased and as a result believes truly that *p*. Fred is unreliably biased and as a result believes (falsely) that not-*p*. They apply impartialism, hoping to resolve their disagreement.

Consider the effect of impartialism on Frieda's doxastic state. Impartialism strips her epistemic basis of her partialist evidence, leaving her with evidence largely unaffected by her reliable bias. We may suppose that this evidence includes some sound arguments for *p*, but that it also contains some impressive (though ultimately unsound) arguments against *p*. Impartialism makes it very hard for Frieda to dismiss the latter and continue believing that *p* on the basis of the former. One reason is

that Frieda, stripped of the background perspective supplied by her partialist evidence, is not in a position to have an impartialist-sanctioned belief that the arguments against *p* may have flaws that she cannot yet detect. Another reason is that a salient piece of impartialist evidence is the fact that many intelligent people (including Fred) assess the same arguments differently than she does. Indeed, impartialism makes it difficult to dismiss people you disagree with as not being your epistemic peer. For although question-begging notions of peerhood are inadmissible, impartialist notions of peerhood are admissible, such as the notion of a peer as anyone equally likely to have a justified belief about religion (Lackey, 2014). If Fred is Frieda's peer (to say nothing of her epistemic "superior"), her disagreement with him will be an obstacle to evidence-proportioned belief that *p* (Feldman, 2007). And even if Fred is not her peer or "superior", Frieda is likely to know that other people are.[24]

Moreover, many responses to the disagreement of a peer (or a "superior") are closed to Frieda on impartialism. She cannot avail herself of the testimony of scholars in her belief community, at least not without a non-question-begging argument that their epistemic credentials are better than disagreeing scholars'. Nor can she posit tie-breaking "incommunicable insights" into *p*-favoring arguments (van Inwagen, 1996, 138), for such insights are not intersubjectively available. We need not go as far as to claim that the evidence of disagreement *outweighs* Frieda's sound arguments for *p* (let alone trumps them; see Kelly, 2010) in order to see that, together with the arguments against *p*, it significantly weakens the confidence in *p* that Frieda, on impartialism, can enjoy.

Impartialists might argue that, although Frieda cannot use her religious experiences themselves as evidence (recall from section V), she can use certain beliefs about their occurrence, which might suffice for firm belief that *p*. But even though such beliefs count as impartialist evidence, impartialism makes firm belief on their basis very difficult. For the most salient sorts of inference in which they feature are probabilistic (Martin, 1990; Schellenberg, 2007, 160-161): religious experiences are regarded as a phenomenon to predict, where the hypothesis that predicts them the most strongly wins out, barring non-question-begging reasons to assign a higher prior probability to competing hypotheses. Frieda's challenge would be either to supply non-question-begging reasons to prefer religious hypotheses a priori over naturalistic ones (Schellenberg, *ibid*.), or to argue in a non-question-begging way that the former have a predictive edge.[25] These tasks are rendered especially difficult by the counterevidence supplied by the fact that experiences across religions often have incompatible content or character (Philipse, 2012, 14-15; Schellenberg, 2007, 169). So beliefs about the occurrence of religious experiences, on impartialism, will not typically justify firm beliefs about religion.

A symmetrical point holds for the unreliably biased Fred. Just as impartialism muffles Frieda's reliable biases and pulls her away from true belief and toward agnosticism, it muffles Fred's *un*reliable ones and pulls him toward agnosticism too. However, the state that it pulls Fred away from is *false* belief. This means that, whereas impartialism worsens Frieda's epistemic situation, it improves Fred's, for agnosticism is better than false belief. Be that as it may, however, impartialism is a flawed tool for promoting the *resolution* of Frieda and Fred's religious disagreement. Mutual agnosticism is far from our stated epistemic aim of resolution on a true belief about religion.[26]

The impartialist might respond that this is the best we can do, given the deeply controversial nature of religion – indeed, agreement that the evidence is inconclusive is at least resolution about something. The impartialist has a point here. But whether this outcome is the best on offer depends on how the other two policies compare.

2. Partialism

Partialism's stated aim is not to resolve disagreements. Rather, it is to epistemically safeguard any true beliefs about religion that people might already hold.[27] If your biases about religion are reliable, then weighting partialist evidence heavily will tend to yield strong confidence in a true belief about religion. It will thus come as no surprise that partialism not only fails to promote resolution, but actively impedes it. This is what I'll argue; but I will show too that this fact *also* reduces partialism's effectiveness in meeting its own aim of safeguarding true beliefs about religion.

Partialism impedes resolution because it promotes epistemic entrenchment. The confident beliefs about religion that it licenses will further strengthen Frieda's (reliable) biases and thus also the force of her error theories and other partialist evidence. Lacking a requirement to give much weight to her impartialist evidence (including evidence against her confident belief), she will have little epistemic reason to pay it much heed, unless it favors her belief. This includes the impartialist evidence of her disagreement with Fred, as well as any counterarguments that he might supply. Resolution is further stymied by the fact that the unreliably biased Fred is in a symmetrical position. There is nothing to curtail, and everything to motivate, his ever deeper entrenchment in his false beliefs about religion. Entrenched interlocutors are unlikely to resolve a disagreement.

Partialists will object that their view, being permissive, does not *force* agents to weight their evidence in ways that lead to entrenchment; those who desire can weight it in more resolution-friendly ways. But recall that there are other incentives toward entrenchment: apparent threats to worldview-beliefs create unpleasant, even frightening, cognitive dissonance (section III; Solomon *et al.*, 1991). So if we are permitted to weight evidence in a way that buttresses our beliefs about religion, we will tend to do so. Consider an analogy: a child who is allowed to have chocolate for dinner is unlikely to have anything else.[28]

Partialists might object further that peer disagreement lessens the risk of entrenchment. There are some senses of peerhood on which Frieda and Fred, even on partialism, can count as epistemic peers, such as Lackey's (2014) sense of being equally likely to be epistemically justified. And will not evidence of peer disagreement modulate their entrenchment and promote resolution? It could, but it need not. For recall (from section IV) that the belief that someone is your peer is itself impartialist evidence. On partialism, it need not receive significant weight.[29]

Not only is the licensing of epistemic entrenchment not conducive to resolving religious disagreements, it hampers partialism's own aim of supporting true religious beliefs. We may grant that partialism can license true religious beliefs that one has already formed, but it also makes truly believing agents susceptible to forming additional, false, beliefs. Unless the biases of an agent like Frieda are *perfectly* reliable (which is statistically highly improbable), entrenchment is an epistemic minefield for her. For even if many of her general convictions about religion are true, she will be susceptible to false-positive beliefs about particulars (see section II). Suppose for example that atheism is true and that Frieda is an atheist. She will likely incline toward the (we'll suppose) false beliefs that *this* theist interlocutor won't have insightful objections to atheism, or that conflicting statements in religious texts make those texts flat-out contradictory, without regard to historical context or literary genre. A modicum of challenge from a disagreeing interlocutor, or from impartialist evidence (such as the fact that false-positive beliefs are a real danger), could lessen this risk, but partialism absolves agents of the need to weight such evidence heavily. Taking resolution more seriously as an epistemic aim, I suggest, could help achieve partialism's stated goal, upholding true religious beliefs, more effectively.

Let's return to the unreliably biased agent, Fred. Partialism's aim of upholding true religious beliefs for those who already have them does not even pretend to an interest in his epistemic welfare.[30] Indeed, partialism even licenses Fred in a false sense of security: as far as he is concerned, in weighting his partialist evidence heavily, he has done all that epistemology requires. The way in which partialism tries to achieve its stated goal, then, is not only inimical to resolution but has an outworking that might even be described as epistemically elitist: it makes the unreliably biased Fred a casualty of the epistemic entitlement accorded to the reliably biased Frieda.

Partialists might respond that Plantinga's version of partialism (2000) contains the tools to lessen the risk of entrenchment. For he requires agents to deal with any impartialist counterevidence (i.e., defeaters) that they come across; surely this will keep agents like Fred from being too confident in falsehoods, and agents like Frieda from getting carried away with false-positives. But this suggestion does not help. Partialism lets agents give their partialist evidence more weight than their impartialist evidence; a fortiori it lets them give their question-begging prior beliefs more weight than their counterevidence.[31] We can see this in a case that Plantinga describes of an agent confronted with impartialist counterevidence. She implements partialism by giving heavy weight to a type of partialist evidence that Plantinga calls "doxastic experience", which amounts to a phenomenal sense of

conviction. Because this agent has a "powerful inclination to believe [the great truths of the Gospel] and hence has strong doxastic evidence [i.e., doxastic experience] for them", her religious beliefs "remain thus convincing even after she has considered the objections she has encountered". So she keeps them as before (203-204). Plantinga's requirement to address defeaters has not made this believer less entrenched.

Partialists might also respond, in the spirit of (Alston, 1991), that the right doxastic practice can at least keep agents like Frieda from forming too many false-positive beliefs. I concur that effective doxastic practices do this sort of thing – indeed, it is at least conceivable that some practices are so sophisticated that they nearly always distinguish reliable from unreliable partialist evidence. Yet such doxastic practices are statistically very unlikely. The sheer variety of incompatible belief systems indicates that most doxastic practices have blind spots (Fales, 2003, 362; Schellenberg, 2007, 169). Answerability to impartialist evidence provides a natural safeguard. Moreover, even if some doxastic practice is perfect, this does not compensate for the many deeply flawed practices that partialism licenses alongside it.

In summary, partialism – and its disinterest in resolution – has important epistemic costs for everyone: the unreliably biased believer who is likely to wind up entrenched in false beliefs, the reliably biased believer likely to be riddled with false-positive beliefs, and the community as a whole, which will squander the epistemic opportunity furnished by the disagreement of its members. Partialism is not the evidence-weighting policy we need if we are interested in resolution, but nor is it the policy for upholding true beliefs about religion more generally.

3. Egalitarianism

We have seen that each kind of evidence has benefits and liabilities. Partialist evidence can be a unique vehicle for reliable biases, but also for unreliable biases and false-positive beliefs. Impartialist evidence can temper these effects, but it also stifles reliable biases. Whereas impartialism and partialism both opt for a plus and a minus, egalitarianism tries to hold them in balance.

As a result, egalitarianism tends to land our disagreeing agents, Frieda and Fred, squarely in between the place where the other two policies land them. We saw that impartialism tends to push their beliefs away from the poles of truth and falsehood and toward agnosticism, inhibiting the true belief aspect of resolution; and we saw that partialism lets them drift toward those poles, inhibiting the agreement aspect. Egalitarianism, by contrast, tends to land agents somewhere in between, with *moderately* confident beliefs – Frieda in a truth and Fred in a falsehood. I'll argue that this result promotes the resolution of religious disagreements more effectively than either of the other policies.

Egalitarianism is clearly better than partialism in this regard. Moderate confidence in opposing beliefs leaves much more room for open-minded discussion than does entrenchment. On partialism, error theories can easily become discrediting mechanisms; this result is much less likely on egalitarianism, which holds agents strongly responsible to impartialist evidence.

However, it may be less evident that egalitarianism promotes resolution more effectively than does impartialism. Granted, impartialism has the disadvantage of making mutual true belief, as opposed to agnosticism, hard to attain. But egalitarianism seems to have the disadvantage of fostering continued disagreement (albeit not in as polarized a fashion as partialism). For egalitarianism, in mandating that partialist evidence receive roughly equal weight, still allows agents significant scope to apply question-begging error theories to their interlocutors. Should the interlocutors be epistemic peers, egalitarianism tempers the weight that this piece of impartialist evidence needs to receive.[32]

Yet egalitarianism nevertheless does promote resolution more effectively than impartialism. Moreover, it does so *precisely because* it requires a measure of evidential weight to be given to partialist evidence, error theories notwithstanding. To see this, note that, although partialist evidence is more likely to be unreliably biased than impartialist evidence, it is also more likely to reveal aspects of reality that are unavailable on impartialist evidence alone. For human cognition, like it or not, is perspectival, and perspectives can complement and correct each other. We saw that differently biased people will have different experiences. First, they will attend to different aspects of

the same situation: a policewoman on a street will notice suspicious people and objects, whereas an enthusiastic father will notice children and toystores. Second, two people may perceive the same object differently: whereas you perceive my brother's facial expression as angry, I (who know him better) perceive it as ironic. Comparing perspectives will teach you that my brother is in fact being ironic, and it will teach me that his irony can come across as anger. Egalitarianism's requirement to give partialist evidence significant weight capitalizes on the perspectival nature of human cognition, while its requirement to give just as much weight to impartialist evidence maintains sight of a common reality.

Impartialism, by contrast, strives to eliminate all perspective from our evidence. It does so ostensibly in the service of mind-independent reality, but in fact at the expense of the aspects of reality that differently biased people can uniquely pick up on. Impartialism denudes each person's perspective of the aspects that may correct or complement the other's.

Let's return to Frieda and Fred. Should they choose to engage with each other, their situation on egalitarianism has much more epistemic potential than on impartialism. Consider Frieda. Egalitarianism, over and above leaving her with enough partialist evidence to maintain a moderately confident true belief, gives her a moderately confident interlocutor, Fred, with his own solid perspective from which to highlight flaws in her reasoning and challenge her to support her beliefs better. Now consider Fred. Even though egalitarianism leaves him with moderate confidence in a falsehood, it nonetheless puts him in a good position to advance from there. He need only discuss matters open-mindedly with Frieda.

But the impartialist will remind us of her objection: will not Frieda and Fred's discussion be hampered, on egalitarianism, by their continued adherence to their respective error theories, which impartialism does away with entirely? I do not think so. For if the agents have enough impartialist evidence (including, if applicable, the evidence that their interlocutor is an epistemic peer), they may be moderately confident that their error theories apply to their interlocutors – but their impartialist evidence should prevent them from discounting their interlocutor's views a priori. How will it do this? Assuming that there is no impartialist reason to epistemically downgrade each other, Frieda's and Fred's respective impartialist evidence is likely to nudge each to take the other's perspective seriously. Indeed, one important piece of impartialist evidence that a person engaging in disagreement is likely to have is the belief that different perspectives can complement and correct each other.

Egalitarianism, then, strikes the epistemic Goldilocks spot: neither too hot nor too cold, but just right. Impartialism compels an epistemically impoverished a-perspectivalism that stymies progress toward the truth, and partialism legitimates closed-minded entrenchment. Egalitarianism, by contrast, affirms the epistemic importance of perspectives while holding different perspectives accountable to each other, as well as to inter-perspectival considerations that anchor them in a common reality.

4. Objections and Remaining Questions

One might object that, although the above results hold in disagreements between two views, they do not apply when the menu of incompatible beliefs is larger. Consider a disagreement arising among five different viewpoints; these might include, for example, forms of exclusivist monotheism, non-monotheistic forms of supernaturalism, secular naturalism, or Hick-style pluralism. The objector will sketch the following picture of the way in which the three policies fare on this scenario:[33]

Impartialism, she will say, plausibly nudges interlocutors toward a level of confidence of around 20% in each of the five alternatives (supposing that none of the views is knocked out by impartialist evidence). And this is a far cry from the 50% confidence yielded by the two-alternative case: whereas 50% confidence can be classed as agnosticism, 20% looks like *dis*belief. For partialism, by contrast, a larger number of alternatives changes little. You can still weight your partialist evidence as you please, and so may wind up with a confidence level of around 90%, perhaps higher. What about egalitarianism? Because this policy nudges interlocutors toward a confidence falling between that sanctioned by the other two views, it would tend here to yield a confidence of roughly 55% (taking

the average confidence yielded by the other views). The objector will say that this is a far cry from the moderate confidence that egalitarianism yields in the two-alternative case. Indeed, it looks more like agnosticism or at best *very* weak belief. The upshot seems to be that, on the multiple-alternative scenario, only partialism can hope to reliably yield true *belief*, let alone anything even close to moderate confidence in a truth. Impartialism yields disbelief and egalitarianism something like agnosticism.[34]

However, matters are not as dire for egalitarianism or impartialism as they may appear. For argument's sake let us grant the objector the respective levels of confidence yielded by each of the policies. It does not follow that impartialism yields disbelief and egalitarianism something like agnosticism. These claims would only follow if 50% confidence were always the minimum threshold for belief. But when a plurality of options is on the table, belief can be compatible with less than 50% confidence. For belief is contrastive: whether you count as believing that *p* depends not only on how confident you are that *p*, but also on how confident you are in the alternatives to *p*. Swinburne illustrates this point by imagining a discussion of which team will win the FA Cup. The contestants include Liverpool, Manchester United, Leeds, and so forth. The subject *S* believes that Liverpool is more likely to win than the other teams, but his confidence that it will win is less than 50%. "If we asked *S* 'Who do you believe will win the Cup?'", Swinburne says, "he would surely not be lying if he said 'Liverpool' rather than 'I do not believe of any particular team that it will win'" (2005, 6).

If this is so, then someone who is more confident in one religious outlook than in each of a number of others, even if her confidence is less than 50%, can count as believing that outlook. Moreover, if her confidence in it exceeds her confidence in other outlooks by some non-negligible amount, she may count as being moderately confident in it – and this is analogous to the egalitarian result in the two-alternatives case. (We may make a similar point for impartialism: on a multi-alternative setup, an approximately even distribution of confidence can plausibly count as agnosticism rather than disbelief in every option.) Perhaps relative confidence is not as psychologically satisfying as confidence *simpliciter*, and it may not be held in comparably high esteem by religious traditions that construe confident belief as a virtue. But from an epistemological standpoint it can be a perfectly acceptable form of belief, and it can achieve the same kind of result in the multiple-alternative case as confidence *simpliciter* does in the two-alternative case: it gives you a definite perspective, yet without licensing entrenchment.

A final question is whether and how egalitarianism and the other policies can be modeled formally. One salient issue concerns whether, to yield the sorts of result I have mooted, the policies can be modeled as respecting conditionalization. I do not have the space to discuss this here. But one thing that I can say is that, if they are to be modeled as respecting conditionalization, we would need to supplement them with additional assumptions. For a formal, in particular a probabilistic, model would likely need constraints on the initial probability of the proposition under consideration – that is, on its probability prior to the receipt of any evidence. The policies as presented informally here, by contrast, are silent on initial probability; they concern only the role of evidence. So the formal modeling of these policies is an important step for future research. I hope here to have established some important principles and priorities to guide it.

VII. Conclusion

Bias is an important factor to negotiate in promoting the resolution of religious disagreements. One reason is that bias affects not only the content of our evidence (the first natural go-to in resolving a disagreement) but also the ways in which we incline to weight it. An additional complication is that, although many biases are epistemically unreliable (though they may accomplish their practical function), many others are epistemically reliable, though still apt to facilitate false-positive beliefs.

The three evidence-weighting policies in the philosophy of religion differ over their response to bias. Impartialism, by ascribing the most weight to impartialist evidence, aims to expunge it entirely. Partialism, by allowing agents to ascribe overweening weight to partialist evidence, aims to capitalize on reliable biases for those lucky enough to have them. I have argued, by contrast, that both impartialist and partialist evidence play important roles. Impartialist evidence holds agents

accountable to a common reality, whereas partialist evidence reveals aspects of that reality to some that may be hidden from others. But both kinds of evidence also have drawbacks: impartialist evidence is blind to important perspectival information, and partialist evidence facilitates exaggerated confirmation biases.

The answer is an evidence-weighting policy that values both types of evidence while mandating that they be held accountable to each other. That evidence-weighting policy is egalitarianism – at least, as long as what we are aiming for is "good disagreement", in the sense of a disagreement that lends itself to resolution on a true belief about religion.[35]

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NOTES

[1] Basinger, *Religious Diversity* even argues that attempting to resolve religious disagreements is sometimes epistemically obligatory; cf. McKim (2012).

[2] This standard view of evidence is articulated in Conee and Feldman, *Evidentialism* (cf. Dougherty, *Evidentialism and Its Discontents*; Dougherty, "Faith"). It encompasses what Plantinga (*Warranted Christian Belief*) calls "evidence" and "grounds". It is internalist, though my argument can probably be made compatible with externalist constraints on evidence, e.g. Williamson's *Knowledge and Its Limits*.

[3] "Representational experience" is construed broadly, to include sensory or emotional experiences, intellectual seemings, etc. Memories are evidence too but space prohibits discussing them separately.

[4] I am not assuming that representational content is propositional.

[5] See Vaughan and Hogg (*Social Psychology*, 49-61), Machery ("De-Freuding"), Holroyd and Sweetman ("Heterogeneity of Implicit Bias").

[6] Antony ("Saulish Skepticism", 186-187); De Cruz and De Smedt ("Reformed and Evolutionary Epistemology", 55-57).

[7] It is desirable to maintain our knee-jerk fear of snakes; less so our knee-jerk affirmation of social hierarchies.

[8] There is a question concerning which reference class is relevant to determining the reliability of a bias; I don't have space to discuss this here.

[9] For an application to religion see Dougherty, "Faith", 102.

[10] Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness*; Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?*. For application to religious beliefs see Clark and Barrett (*Reidian Religious Epistemology*) and De Cruz and De Smedt ("Reformed and Evolutionary Epistemology"), 55-57.

[11] I won't call it "impartial", because some argue that a view favoring this kind of evidence is itself partial to scientific methodology (Moser, *Evidence for God*, 27; 2008, 101-105; *Elusive God*).

[12] For example, Philipse (*God in the Age of Science?*) frames his discussion in terms of the "context of discovery" and "context of justification" (14-15), and Schellenberg (*Wisdom to Doubt*) refers to epistemic agents as "investigators" (170). See Moser (*Evidence for God*, chapter 1) and Cottingham (*Spiritual Dimension*, chapter 1).

[13] Scientific reasons are often argued to be "public" (Elgin, *True Enough*, chapter 5). An analogous condition for evidence about religion is endorsed, for example, by Philipse (Part I, *God in the Age of Science?*), Schellenberg (*Prolegomena*, 160-161, 165); and Locke (*Essays*, Bk. IV, ch. 18).

[14] This condition is endorsed for evidence about religion by (for example) Philipse (*God in the Age of Science?* 14-15); Locke (*Essays*, Bk. IV, ch. 18).

[15] Schellenberg (*Wisdom to Doubt*, 160-161) applies this point to the religious case.

[16] Certain experiences can be caused by brain manipulation, but they tend not to be regarded as *religious*.

[17] Roberts ("Emotions as Access") and Cottingham (*Spiritual Dimension*, chapter 1) argue that emotions are essential for perceiving religious aspects of reality.

[18] I am committed neither to the Uniqueness Thesis nor to its denial (Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements").

[19] Dougherty (*Zagzebski, Authority, Faith*; 56) uses this method to weight the opinions of multiple testifiers with differing degrees of expertise.

[20] Evans ("Religious Experience") and Moser (*Evidence for God*) are both partialists, yet Evans affirms, whereas Moser (chapters 1 and 3) disparages, the epistemic value of impartialist evidence. Partialism is compatible with minimalist (impartialist) logical constraints (Alston, *Perceiving God*).

[21] Other partialists are Wolterstorff, *Inquiring about God*, chapter 15; Gellman, "Contented Religious Exclusivism"; Evans, "Religious Experience"; Tucker, "Phenomenal Conservatism".

[22] I take it that religious matters can be classed with moral ones.

[23] Swinburne (*Existence of God*) argues for instance that impartialist evidence alone yields a probability assignment to theism of ½.

[24] Impartialism is thus at home with a "conciliationist" approach to peer disagreement like those of Elga, "Reflection and Disagreement"; or Feldman ("Reasonable Religious Disagreement").

[25] Moser (*Elusive God*, 102-105) argues that theism predicts religious experiences, but does not discuss whether it does so more strongly than a promising naturalistic hypotheses would.

[26] Impartialism does not *entail* mutual agnosticism; cf. Thurow ("Does Religious Disagreement Aid Theism?").

[27] Plantinga for instance says that natural theology, though maybe useful to help nonbelievers arrive at Christian faith (*Reason and Belief*, 71), "is not of great importance for my project…. [which] was to show how it could be that Christian belief might have warrant" (2001, 220). But Christian belief has warrant only if produced by a cognitive faculty designed by God (*Warranted Christian Belief*, chapter 7), which it can only be if one's Christian worldview is largely true already; cf. Plantinga, *Reason and Belief*, 67-69.

[28] Of course, just as the child might revise this policy given enough indigestion, an entrenched agent might abandon partialism on finding that her beliefs about religion do not "work" very well. But due to the psychological importance of religious worldviews and their role as perceptual "lenses" (see sections II and III), it will take much to unseat them.

[29] Partialism thus sits naturally with a "steadfast" approach to peer disagreement along the lines of Kelly, "Epistemic Significance".

[30] Baker, "Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology", surveys similar critiques of Plantinga's partialism; cf. Goldberg ("Does Externalist Epistemology Rationalize Religious Commitment?" 2014).

[31] Similarly, Gellman, "Contented Religious Exclusivism", argues that it is epistemically acceptable to evaluate counterevidence in terms of your religious framework, as long as you "rationally [possess] the requisite confidence in" that framework (404), where rationality amounts to minimalist adherence to "procedures of reasoning such as deduction and induction" (414).

[32] Egalitarianism is thus at home with a middle-ground view of the epistemology of peer disagreement, like that of Lackey, "Justificationist View", or Kelly, "Higher-Order Evidence".

[33] Thanks to an anonymous referee for *Faith and Philosophy*.

[34] Talk of levels of confidence can be cashed out in probabilistic terms; I am not working in probabilistic terms here simply because I want to avoid the assumption that the agents in question meet ideal probabilistic standards.