

THESIS

SAVING THE EQUAL WEIGHT VIEW FROM ITSELF:  
A MODEST APPROACH TO STRONG CONCILIATION

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## ABSTRACT

### SAVING THE EQUAL WEIGHT VIEW FROM ITSELF: A MODEST APPROACH TO STRONG CONCILIATION

The central question of the epistemology disagreement focuses on how, if at all, we should update our belief about  $p$  when we find ourselves party to a disagreement about  $p$  with someone whom we take to be our epistemic peer. In other words, how should we respond to disagreements with those whom we take to be just as intelligent, informed, free from bias, and likely to get things right in the field  $p$  occurs in? One response to this question, the Equal Weight View, holds that in typical cases of peer disagreements one is epistemically required to ascribe equal epistemic weight to each party's opinion and then split the difference between the two parties' respective degrees of belief. However, it is thought that the Equal Weight View faces a problem of being self-defeating, since there appear to be disagreements about the view amongst epistemic peers. Some proponents of the view have attempted to defuse this charge of self-defeat, but, as I will show, these attempts are less than satisfying. The aim of this project is to discuss the Equal Weight View's relation to the charge of self-defeat in hopes of sketching out a solution that is more promising than what has been put forth in the literature so far.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

There are numerous cases of disagreement in our world. We see them ranging from disagreements over mundane affairs, such as the ones over who played what role in a movie, to more interesting matters, such as those within the domains of religion, politics, philosophy, and even the sciences.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, many of these disagreements occur between individuals who seem to be just as intelligent and informed on the matter as one another. In other words, these disagreements seem to even occur amongst peers. In fact, many of us as academic philosophers needn't look far to find an individual whom we regard as our peer who holds a philosophical opinion incompatible with our own. On a more troubling note, in some of these cases it is not at all clear that either party has an epistemic advantage over the other that would provide an obvious reason for regarding the other's opinion as less likely to be true. Take for instance the example provided by Peter van Inwagen (2010: 23-24):

I [Peter van Inwagen] ask you to consider the case of David Lewis and me and the problem of free will. I am an incompatibilist and David was a compatibilist. David and I had many conversations and engaged in a rather lengthy correspondence on the matter of compatibilism and incompatibilism, and, on the basis of these exchanges – not to mention his wonderful paper “Are We Free to Break the Laws?” – I am convinced beyond all possibility of doubt that David understood perfectly all the arguments for incompatibilism that I am aware of – and all other philosophical considerations relevant

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<sup>1</sup> One may notice that by grouping the disagreements in the domains of religion, politics, philosophy and science together I am assuming that they all have something in common, namely that they can be disagreed about. Accordingly, those who hold a non-cognitive view about certain philosophical, religious, or political matters may wonder whether the scope of disagreements that I am concerned with includes “disagreements” in the sense of two individuals having clashing attitudes towards non-cognitive utterances. However, I would like to point out that I am not concerned with non-cognitive “disagreements” in this sense. Instead, I am only concerned with disagreements in the sense of two individuals holding incompatible beliefs. And so despite the appearance that I may be concerned with disagreements in the looser sense, I am actually just following much of the literature in regarding certain philosophical, religious, and political positions as being cognitive.

to the free-will problem.... It seems difficult, therefore, to contend that, in this matter, he was in epistemic circumstances inferior to mine.... And one could hardly maintain that David was stupid or lacking in philosophical ability or that he labored under any cognitive deficiency relevant to thinking about the problem of free will....

Finding ourselves in what appear to be similar circumstances (especially as individuals who value having philosophical, political, and other interesting beliefs with a positive epistemic status) raises the central question of the epistemology of disagreement: how, if at all, does being aware of being party to a disagreement about p with someone whom one takes to be just as informed and intelligent as one's self affect what one ought to believe with regard to p? Providing an overview of this question and some of the various answers that have been put forth in the literature is the focus of this chapter.<sup>2</sup>

In the first section, I clarify the way this question will be understood by specifying the sense of 'ought' and the particular use of the term 'peer disagreement'. In the second section, I explain the spectrum of responses to this question, and how we will understand its opposing Steadfast and Conciliatory poles.<sup>3</sup> In sections three through six, I provide an overview of the reasons for and against the main answers to our question that have been put forth in the literature, which are a steadfast view from relativism, the Right Reasons View, the Total Evidence View, and the Equal Weight View. Lastly, I conclude that the Equal Weight View's ability to avoid the

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<sup>2</sup> I would like to take the time here to point out that this is not a question about how to respond to a disagreement about p that is merely possible. Merely possible disagreements with a peer do not raise any special epistemic concern for one's belief that p. The mere possibility of a disagreement, peer or otherwise, only highlights one's own fallibility. In contrast, an actual peer disagreement may not just highlight the mere possibility of being wrong. It may bring to light that one has a reason for thinking that one is actually wrong. And it is this characteristic of actual peer disagreements that provides us with an interesting philosophical puzzle to solve. Accordingly, our focus is not on merely possible disagreements, but the disagreements that seem like they can provide one with a reason to think that one is actually wrong about their p belief.

<sup>3</sup> I'll be following the literature by adopting these terms for labeling the opposing sides of the spectrum on this issue. See Christensen (2009) and Elga (2010).

charges of question-begging and permitting epistemic arbitrariness that other views seem to face makes it a potentially promising answer to our question that is worth investigating further.

### 1.1 The Central Question

As just stated, the central question of the epistemology of disagreement is concerned with how being aware of being party to a disagreement about *p* with one's peer ought to affect one's belief about *p*. However, what exactly this question is asking partly depends on the way 'ought' is being used. One sense of 'ought' refers to what one ought to believe according to the relationship between one's given context and the demands of *all* of the norms related to belief formation. This would make our question one about what one ought to believe in light of a peer disagreement, all things considered. However, this is not the sense of 'ought' that our question is concerned with. Rather, our use of 'ought' will be understood as only taking into consideration *one* of these types of norms. In particular, our use of 'ought' will be the ought of epistemic norms rather than moral or pragmatic norms.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, it is important to note that this sense of 'ought' is not the type of ought that requires one to be capable of voluntarily following the obligation. Instead, it is concerned with what an epistemic agent must do if one's belief is to meet the epistemic standard of being in accord with what one's evidence supports. For instance, if Sam's evidence does not justify the

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<sup>4</sup> One may notice that by making this statement I am passing over a controversial issue as to whether epistemic norms are entirely separate from pragmatic and moral norms. But, this is a complicated issue that is worthy of a paper on its own. For the sake of keeping things focused on this particular project, I will be helping myself to the traditional understanding within epistemology that these norms are separate. However, another way of reading this project is to replace what I'm calling epistemic norms with evidential norms without making the further assumption that epistemic norms are exhausted by evidential norms. This should not remove the significance of the project, since it is not unreasonable to think that learning something new about one's evidence can affect the relevant belief's epistemic status, even if epistemic norms are not exhausted by evidential norms.



belief that the government is out to get her, then the epistemic norms that we are concerned with hold that she shouldn't believe that the government is out to get her. And even if she is psychologically incapable of respecting her evidence in this way, such as if she has paranoid schizophrenia, she is still subject to obligations enjoining her to refrain from forming the belief. After all, her belief is falling short of the epistemic standard of being justified by her evidence, even if she is not blameworthy for this shortcoming.<sup>5</sup> With this use of 'ought' in mind, let us now turn to defining the technical use of 'peer disagreement' within the literature.

First, let us begin by defining the way that 'epistemic peer' has been used within the literature before moving to the types of disagreements between peers that count as a case of peer disagreement. The term 'epistemic peer' in the literature has been roughly defined in the following way. S is one's epistemic peer with respect to p iff S is (roughly) just as intelligent, clever, free from bias, exposed to the relevant evidence, and reliable with respect to getting things right in the field that p belongs to as one's self.<sup>6</sup> In other words, epistemic peers are individuals who are more or less equally disposed to get things right in the field peerhood obtains in, all other things being equal.

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<sup>5</sup> This understanding of epistemic norms is endorsed by Richard Feldman and Earl Conee (2009).

<sup>6</sup> This definition of an epistemic peer follows David Christensen's use of the term. See Christensen (2009: 756-57).

Moreover, these qualifications should be considered in a positive sense, where being equally reliable does not include cases of two individuals who are equally incompetent. In cases such as these, it's not clear that peer disagreement provides an interesting issue. After all, if neither party is entitled to an opinion on the matter, then it doesn't seem that they should take either opinion as one that is credible. This issue is addressed by Thune (2010: 359). Furthermore, one may notice that the qualification of 'roughly' results in epistemic peerhood permitting vague relations between individuals. This qualification allows for cases where it is unclear as to who exactly is more reliable as long as it is clear enough that the parties are more or less on par. And as we get to our overview of the positions on disagreement, one may wonder if this vagueness weakens the plausibility of the positions on the Conciliatory side of the spectrum. However, once we get to the basic overview of Conciliatory views I will explain why this is not the case.

It is this notion of epistemic peers being on roughly the same epistemic playing field with regard to  $p$  that makes this an interesting question. For on the one hand, when it's clear that the opposing side has an epistemic advantage over oneself, especially a large epistemic advantage, it's not hard to see that one typically ought to defer to their opinion on the matter. For instance, to borrow an example from Adam Elga (2007: 479-480), if I think it's not going to rain in my town, and then learn that the local weather forecaster disagrees, it seems clear that I ought to revise my belief to that of the forecaster's, all other things being equal. While on the other hand, when it's clear that the opposing side is at an epistemic disadvantage, especially a large disadvantage, it seems obvious that one needn't take the dissenting opinion very seriously. For instance, if the local forecaster learned that I didn't think it was going to rain, then the forecaster hasn't gained a reason to revise his or her belief about the weather, all other things being equal.<sup>7</sup> However, if I am an epistemic peer to the forecaster when it comes to predicting the weather, and so we are both on roughly the same epistemic playing field, how we each ought to revise our belief after we learn of the other's dissenting opinion becomes much less clear.

Accordingly, in order to keep the question one worth considering, we cannot be concerned with just any old cases of disagreement between peers. Rather, our concern should be restricted to disagreements where the epistemic symmetry between the two peers is roughly maintained (or at least maintained on the face of it). This rules out cases where one party has an obvious reason to discount the opinion of the other, such as the peer clearly appears to be drunk, stoned, delusional, etc.... In other words, our use of the term 'peer disagreement' does not apply

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed explanation of disagreement with regard to epistemic superiors see Elga (2007).

to cases where one has good reason for thinking that the peer is not effectively acting as one's peer.<sup>8</sup>

However, disagreements between epistemic peers where one merely lacks an obvious reason for regarding the peer's opinion as being less credible than one's own do not quite get us to the interesting cases that the literature is concerned with. These interesting cases are those where one not only lacks an obvious reason to dismiss the peer's opinion, but also has a good reason, prior to the disagreement, to think that the peer is effectively acting as one's peer in the particular case. For instance, if we return to the weather forecaster example, if I am the weather caster's epistemic peer, but he has no reason to regard me as his peer, then he also lacks a special reason to take my opinion of the weather as seriously as his own. But, when he does have a good reason to regard me as his peer on the issue, then we find ourselves returning to the puzzling cases where it's less clear how beliefs ought to be revised.

Accordingly, I'll be following the literature in restricting the use of 'peer disagreement' to these interesting cases by also adopting the following restrictions. The first restriction limits the term to cases where one ought to regard the peer, prior to the disagreement, as (roughly) just as intelligent, clever, free from bias, reliable, etc....<sup>9</sup> This prevents one from being able to

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<sup>8</sup> This requirement is mentioned by Christensen (2009: 757) and can be seen in the set up of the thought experiments within the literature, such as in Christensen's (2007: 193) use of Mental Math, (2011: 8) Careful Checking, and Feldman's (2006: 223) Dean on the Quad example.

<sup>9</sup> Christensen, "Disagreement as Evidence," 756.

One consequence of this condition that has not been explicitly focused on in the literature, but has been brought to my attention by Michael Losonsky, is one related to disagreements about basic beliefs. If there are basic beliefs that are not subject to revision and one cannot be mistaken about, then it would seem that one does not have epistemic peers when it comes to basic beliefs. After all, if one cannot be mistaken about one's basic belief that *p*, then one should not expect others, who can be mistaken about this belief, to be just as reliable as one's self. Accordingly, if there are basic beliefs that one cannot be mistaken about, then these beliefs are excluded from the instances of disagreement that we are concerned with.

dismiss the peer's opinion on the grounds that the peer is less intelligent, clever, impartial, and reliable than oneself. The second restriction limits our use of the term to cases where each peer has informed the other of the relevant evidence one is aware of and discussed the reasons for why one thinks the shared body of evidence supports one's opinion. Disagreements that meet this second restriction are referred to in the literature as 'disagreements after full disclosure' (Feldman 2006: 220). By being a disagreement after full disclosure, both parties have a good reason to think that they are equally exposed to the same body of evidence<sup>10</sup> relevant to each of their respective opinions. This prevents them from being able to justifiably dismiss the other's opinion on the grounds that the other party is less informed or that one lacks a reason for thinking that they are equally informed. The addition of these two restrictions to our use of 'peer disagreement' makes it less clear how one can justifiably dismiss the peer's opinion, and thus helps preserve the interesting nature of the question.

However, by following the literature in focusing on cases of peer disagreement after full disclosure, a further complication is raised. How do we account for the possibility of cases where one's belief that p is grounded partly in incommunicable evidence?<sup>11</sup> Such incommunicable evidence would be the evidence that one has when one just "sees" that p or just "sees" the evidential connection between one's communicable body of evidence and that p. Even though it's not clear that such incommunicable evidence exists, we will still adjust the notion of shared evidence to account for such possibilities. This will be done by allowing for two parties to still

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<sup>10</sup> I'll be using 'evidence' as synonymous with the notion of an epistemic reason, which will be understood as what properly affects the epistemic status of a belief. Whether this is the proper account of the use of the term 'evidence' is a controversial and complicated issue within epistemology. Providing a full defense of my use of the term would take us too far beyond the scope of this paper, and so I will be helping myself to this account of evidence.

<sup>11</sup> This issue is raised by van Inwagen (2010: 25) and Feldman (2006: 222).

have shared evidence in those circumstances if each party informs the other that one has this non-communicable evidence. Although this does not result in the two parties having the *exact* same evidence it still places them in roughly the same evidential position, all other things equal.

As Richard Feldman (2006) points out, even if we grant that these seemings or insights provide one with evidence, one will be aware that comparable evidence exists for both opinions after each peer has reported their respective insights to the other. After all, given the symmetry in epistemic credibility between peers, neither party has a good reason to regard the other party as someone who has less reliable insights than the other. Thus, it seems that they should regard each of the insights as comparable pieces of evidence.<sup>12</sup> However, if they ought to be regarded as comparable pieces of evidence, then it's less clear that these incommunicable bodies of evidence can tip the scales in one's favor after both parties are aware of the other's insights. Thus, we can loosen our notion of shared evidence in this way while still preserving the interesting nature of the question.<sup>13</sup>

In summary, our use of the term 'peer' and 'peer disagreement' results in our question being concerned with what the epistemic norms demand, if anything, about one's belief that p in the following circumstances.

- i) One finds oneself in a case of disagreement with an individual about p.

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<sup>12</sup> Feldman, "Epistemological Puzzles about Disagreement," 223-24.

<sup>13</sup> Another concern about what evidence needs to be disclosed under the condition of full disclosure that has been brought to my attention by Michael Lososky is whether considerations about the future viability of the opinion or argument needs to be shared. In particular, one may wonder whether the following consideration of S needs to be disclosed. At the time of the dispute, at  $t_1$ , S recognizes that the two arguments are epistemically on par with one another. However, S has a hunch that at  $t_n$ , S's argument will be better supported by the total body of evidence acquired by  $t_n$ . In response to this concern, I do think that this type of consideration seems to be a relevant consideration that needs to be disclosed. After all, this would count as evidence that one argument is actually the better argument, as long as S is an epistemically credible assessor of such time related considerations.

- ii) This individual is roughly as informed, intelligent, clever, free from bias, and reliable with respect to getting things right as oneself in the field that p belongs to.
- iii) The relevant communicable evidence and considerations that each individual's opinion about p is based on have been shared with the other party.
- iv) Any non-communicable evidence that the parties possess has been reported to the other party.
- v) Both parties have discussed with each other the reasons one has for thinking that one's opinion about p is supported by the shared evidence and relevant considerations.
- vi) Each party has a good reason for thinking that the other party is acting effectively as one's epistemic peer prior to the disagreement.

However, before moving on to the positions on the epistemology of disagreement, I would like to briefly address one concern that has been brought to my attention. One may wonder whether the commitment to the particular type of disagreement that the literature is concerned with results in a commitment to regarding certain types of counterfactual disagreements as relevant to our concern. For instance, let us assume that Sam and Gill are epistemic peers that disagree about p after full disclosure at  $t_1$ . After their discussion, Sam acquires further p relevant evidence at  $t_2$  that Gill does not acquire. And let us suppose that Sam knows that Gill is going to die before they are able to discuss the implications of this newly acquired evidence in relation to p (perhaps Gill is on death row and will receive a lethal injection before they can meet once more). However, suppose further that due to how well Sam knows Gill, Sam knows that if Gill were to become aware of this newly acquired evidence and the

reasons why Sam thinks it supports her belief in *p*, Gill would still disagree. Does an answer to our question of the epistemology of disagreement need to also be an answer about how to respond to counterfactuals such as these?<sup>14</sup>

It seems to me that they do. For in this case Sam still has good reason to think that an individual who is her epistemic peer would disagree with her after full disclosure. And I do not see why the epistemically relevant factors are substantially different in this case from a similar case where Sam is able to discuss this newly acquired evidence with Gill before he is dead. However, this is not to say that we must be concerned with every merely possible disagreement. There are some possible disagreements such that we do not have any positive reasons for thinking that they would occur, and these seem to be irrelevant to our concern. For what seems to epistemically matter for our concerns is the fact that one actually possesses a good reason for thinking that an evaluation of one's relevant evidence that is more or less just as epistemically credible as one's own leads to a verdict that is incompatible with one's own verdict. And the type of counterfactual disagreement that Sam encounters provides one with this type of reason. But a merely possible disagreement does not provide one with this type of reason. With this issue about whether certain counterfactuals are relevant to the epistemology of disagreement clarified, let us now turn to the types of responses that have been put forth to our question.

## 1.2 The Spectrum of Positions

In response to the central question of the epistemology of disagreement, various answers have been proposed that can be seen as falling along a spectrum.<sup>15</sup> On one side of the spectrum

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<sup>14</sup> This issue and an analogous example were brought to my attention by Michael Losonsky.

<sup>15</sup> I'll be following Christensen (2009), Elga (2010), and Kelly (2010) in referring to the proposed answers as falling along a spectrum.

we have the Steadfast positions. This end consists of the positions committed to the claim that awareness of being in a peer disagreement about *p* typically *does not* provide one with a sufficient reason for revising one's belief that *p* in the direction of the peer's opinion after full disclosure. On the other end of the spectrum, we have the Conciliatory positions. This end consists of the positions upholding that awareness of being in a peer disagreement about *p* typically *does* provide one with a sufficient reason for revising one's belief that *p* in the direction of the peer's opinion after full disclosure.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, a position falls at the furthest end of the Steadfast side if it holds that awareness of being in a peer disagreement *never* provides one with a sufficient reason for revising one's belief that *p* after full disclosure.<sup>17</sup> And the more a position strays from the strength of this claim, the further it slides towards the furthest position on the Conciliatory side: the position that awareness of being in a peer disagreement *always* provides one with a sufficient reason for revising one's belief that *p* after full disclosure.

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<sup>16</sup> Christensen, "Disagreement as Evidence," 756.

One important thing to note about the use of 'typical' in the formulation of Steadfast and Conciliatory positions is that Christensen seems to use it to mean more than just what usually occurs. There also seems to be a commitment to refer to cases of peer disagreement where one's evidence justifies a belief that it is more likely to be a genuine case of peer disagreement rather than a merely apparent disagreement between two individuals evaluating *p* in a more or less equally rational manner. For instance, Christensen seems to be committed to the claim that the types of disagreements where it is more likely that one's peer is joking, drunk, stoned, etc... than genuinely disagreeing as one's effective peer are not typical peer disagreements. Now it is not clear to me that these types of disagreements are also the types of disagreements that usually occur. However, I find using 'typical peer disagreement' or 'typical peer disagreement after full disclosure' to refer to these cases where one's evidence does not justify a belief that the disagreement is merely an apparent disagreement to be useful. Accordingly, my use of these terms needn't be understood as being about the usual types of peer disagreement that occur. Rather, it should be understood as just referring to the cases where one's evidence does not justify a belief that the disagreement is merely an apparent disagreement between two individuals evaluating *p* in a more or less equally rational manner.

<sup>17</sup> A formulation of this view is mentioned, but not endorsed, by Elga (2007: 485), where he labels it the 'Extra Weight View'.



Not every position on the spectrum has a proponent within the literature, but both sides have had their defenders and intuition pumps. It will be useful to get an understanding of some of these general motivations for each side before we examine the more specific claims behind the main positions that have been defended in the literature. This will provide a basic overview of the underlying motivational conflicts that may lead one to even consider a particular position as promising to begin with. Let us first take a look at some initial considerations that have been used to support the plausibility of the Steadfast side in general.

One natural motivation for accepting the general principle behind Steadfast positions comes from our common sense intuitions about the peer disagreements that we seem to find ourselves in. As Gideon Rosen (2001: 71) nicely notes,

“[i]t should be obvious that reasonable people can disagree, even when confronted with a single body of evidence. When a jury or a court is divided in a difficult case, the mere fact of disagreement does not mean that someone is being unreasonable. Paleontologists disagree about what killed the dinosaurs. And while it’s possible that most of the parties to the dispute are irrational, this need not be the case.”

This common sense intuition about reasonable<sup>18</sup> disagreement provides some prima facie support to the Steadfast side of the spectrum. For if each party of a peer disagreement is already in a position of having a reasonable opinion, then it is hard to see why they wouldn’t be permitted to stick to their guns. But, this is just to say that it’s hard to see why we ought to take the general principle behind Conciliatory views as true.<sup>19</sup>

A second, more pressing motivation in favor of the general Steadfast side comes from the worry about the philosophical skepticism that seems to follow from Conciliatory positions,

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<sup>18</sup> By ‘reasonable’ I do not mean in the sense of merely being less than absurd. Rather, by ‘reasonable’ I mean (roughly) that it is epistemically permitted by one’s available reasons.

<sup>19</sup> Allan Hazlett (2012) also offers an argument from this intuition against certain Conciliatory views.

especially the stronger ones.<sup>20</sup> Strong Conciliatory views claim that being aware of a peer disagreement typically requires one to revise one's belief about p by splitting the difference between the two opposing opinions.<sup>21</sup> This is to say that if I believed p to degree 0.8, while my dissenting peer believed p to degree 0.2, then after full disclosure we should each revise our beliefs by meeting in the middle at a belief that p to degree 0.5. If we accepted the general principle of Strong Conciliatory views, then it seems that our awareness of being entangled in various disagreements within philosophy with those whom we take as our peers threatens to require us to suspend judgment (or come close to it) about many of our philosophical beliefs. Some find this consequence of supporting philosophical skepticism unacceptable, and from this unacceptability conclude that something must be wrong with the arguments for Conciliatory views (or at the least, Strong Conciliatory views).

A third, and perhaps the most troubling worry, is the motivation that comes from the appearance of Conciliatory positions being self-defeating.<sup>22</sup> As mentioned previously, Conciliatory Views claim that when one is in a peer disagreement about p, one typically ought to give up one's belief that p and revise it in the direction of the peer's dissenting opinion. However, individuals within the literature, who seem to be just as intelligent, clever, informed, etc..., disagree about whether Conciliatory Views are true, even after what appear to be cases of

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<sup>20</sup> This worry has been noted in articles such as, Feldman (2006: 235), Elga (2007: 484), Christensen (2007: 213-6), van Inwagen (2010: 27-8), and David Enoch (2010: 991-2).

<sup>21</sup> Strong Conciliatory views defined in this way are contrasted to Weak Conciliatory views, which are defined as views upholding that that typically cases of peer disagreement require one to conciliate towards the peer's opinion, but not as far as splitting the difference. See Matheson (2009: 270)

<sup>22</sup> This objection has been noted by Christensen (2009: 762-3), Elga (2010: 178-182), Thune (2010: 371-2), and Weatherson (2007: 2). However, it's less clear that Weak Conciliatory views are just as vulnerable to this worry as Strong Conciliatory Views are. Their vulnerability seems to depend on just how weak the conciliation they prescribe is.

full disclosure. Accordingly, it seems that if a Conciliatory View is true, then it prescribes abandoning the belief that the view is true. In order to avoid this problem Conciliatory Views cannot simply bar disagreement about disagreement from what the view's prescriptions apply to in an arbitrary or *ad-hoc* manner. Rather, the proponents of Conciliatory Views need a principled way as to why it doesn't prescribe this self-defeating verdict in cases of disagreement about disagreement. But, it's hard to see how such a principled way can be developed.<sup>23</sup>

However, in favor of the opposing side of the spectrum, the main motivation for accepting a Conciliatory position is to avoid the seemingly question begging nature that a Steadfast position risks adopting when it heeds the above worries.<sup>24</sup> According to this line of reasoning, when one sticks to their guns about their belief that *p* in a typical case of peer disagreement, one ends up relying on one's own evaluation of the shared body of evidence as a way of dismissing the peer's evaluation as mistaken. But, this seems to be a case of begging the question about whose reasoning is correct. For instance, let us consider an example from David Christensen (2007) that has been used to support this intuition.

Mental Math: Suppose that five of us go to dinner. It's time to pay the check, so the question we're interested in is how much we each owe. We can all see the bill total clearly, we all agree to give a 20 percent tip, and we further agree to split the whole cost evenly, not worrying over who asked for imported water, or skipped dessert, or drank more of the wine. I do the math in my head and become highly confident that our shares are \$43 each. Meanwhile, my friend does the math in her head and becomes highly confident that our shares are \$45 each. Let us suppose further that my friend and I have a long history of eating out together and dividing the check in our heads, and that we've been equally successful in our arithmetic efforts: the vast majority of times, we agree; but when we disagree, she's right as often as I am. So for the sort of epistemic endeavor under consideration, we are clearly peers. Suppose further that there is no special reason to think one of us particularly dull or sharp this evening—neither is especially tired or energetic, and neither has had significantly

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<sup>23</sup> Thune, "Partial Defeaters," 371.

<sup>24</sup> This seems to be the worry underlying the concerns of Feldman (2006), Elga (2007), and Christensen (2007/2009/2011).

more wine or coffee. And suppose that I didn't feel more or less confident than usual in this particular calculation, and my friend reports that she didn't either (Christensen 2007: 193).

In this case, it seems clear that one would be begging the question as to who reasoned correctly if one stuck to one's guns. As the example is set up, both parties are just as likely to get things right and just as likely to make a simple calculation error. By sticking to one's guns on the matter, one would be using one's own mathematical reasoning to come to the conclusion that "the peer is mistaken, since the correct total is \$43 and the peer thinks that it is \$45." But, without some further reason for thinking that this is the case outside of one's own evaluation of the bill (which does not exist in this example), it results in simply begging the question as to whose reasoning is free of a simple calculation error. This has led some to think that a conciliatory view is the only plausible option.

As we can see, both sides of the spectrum have less than obviously dismissible concerns. On the Steadfast side, it's not clear that we ought to disregard our common sense intuitions unless we have a good reason for doubting them. This not only provides some *prima facie* justification for accepting a commitment to the claim that we can be reasonable in agreeing to disagree, but also for rejecting a view that has skeptical consequences. After all, it seems quite plausible on the face of it to think that at least some of us have philosophical opinions that are epistemically justified in light of one's evidence. However, it's also not clear that we can so easily dismiss the Conciliatory side's concern. Instances of begging the question are not something that we should consider epistemically permissible unless we have a good reason for thinking that it's unproblematic. The fact that begging the question may be acceptable in some cases (e.g. cases of norm circularity),<sup>25</sup> doesn't give us a free pass to beg the question in just any

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<sup>25</sup> Norm circularity is a case where properly following a norm can justify a belief in the very norm that one is following. For instance, let us consider the epistemic norm of phenomenal conservatism to illustrate this type of

old case. Accordingly, we can see that each side has motivations that provide us with a source of hesitancy for accepting the other's general principle.<sup>26</sup>

However, despite the appeal of the Steadfast motivations, I find the concern of the Conciliatory side to be more pressing. If Steadfast positions really do permit one to viscously beg the question, then this sounds like a good reason for abandoning some of our common sense intuitions, if only a Steadfast position can preserve them. After all, our common sense intuitions are not immune from scrutiny. They should be abandoned if careful reflection reveals that they are actually epistemically problematic, such as endorsing vicious forms of begging the question. But, we have yet to see whether the main non-Conciliatory positions themselves can defuse this concern about the cost of preserving our common sense intuitions or if Conciliatory positions offer an alternative that can even be consistently held. Let us now take a look at the main positions that have been offered in the literature and why we might find one to be more promising than the other.

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circularity. Phenomenal conservatism claims that if it seems to S that p, S is prima facie justified in believing p, absent any undefeated defeaters. Some say that this norm can justify a belief in itself, such that if it seems to one that phenomenal conservatism is true, one is prima facie justified in believing phenomenal conservatism, absent any undefeated defeaters. This example was used by Jonathan Matheson when discussing norm circularity with me.

<sup>26</sup> Earlier, it was mentioned that one may wonder whether the vagueness permitted by the use of 'peer disagreement' can be used to raise a general objection to Conciliatory views. Now that we have seen an overview of the two poles, let us briefly turn to this consideration. According to this consideration, one may think that if the comparison of the two parties to the dispute is vague, then one may recognize that it could be the case that one is more likely to be right in this instance. In light of this, one may then think that it is permissible to stick to one's guns in hopes of being right. However, I do not think that this provides us with a good argument against Conciliatory views. The vagueness counts equally against one's own belief and the peer's. And in light of this, the epistemically responsible thing to do seems to be to conciliate. At most, epistemic responsibility seems to permit one to "stick to one's guns" only in the sense of using one's belief as a working hypothesis in hopes of discovering which belief is right, while not actually reflectively endorsing the belief as true until it is discovered to be true.

### 1.3 Steadfastness from Epistemic Relativism

One Steadfast position that naturally follows from an appeal to our common sense intuitions about reasonable disagreement embraces a commitment to a type of epistemic relativism.<sup>27</sup> This relativism upholds that individuals can be justified in responding differently to the same body of evidence, provided that they have different, *justified* epistemic starting points. This is to say that if Smith was justified in accepting epistemic system y, while Jones was justified in accepting epistemic system x, then they could both be justified in accepting different evaluations of the same body of evidence, E. It would just need to be the case that the two epistemic systems justified the two different evaluations of E.<sup>28</sup>

From this commitment to relativism, the Steadfast position argues that if two peers disagree, then they needn't revise their belief since each opinion needn't be considered any less of a rational response to the shared body of evidence than the other. Accordingly, revising one's belief needn't be seen as a process that results in an opinion that's any further up the scale of epistemic justification than if one stuck to one's guns. But, if revising one's belief doesn't result in the possession of a belief with more justification, then sticking to one's guns leaves one in no worse of an epistemic position than if one revised one's belief in the direction of the peer's. Consequently, it seems that one would be epistemically permitted to stick to one's guns on the grounds that both beliefs needn't be regarded as any less justified than the other. One can then

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<sup>27</sup> This appeal to epistemic relativism and different starting points as a possible justifier for a steadfast position has been discussed by Roger White (2005), Richard Feldman (2006), and Alvin Goldman (2010).

<sup>28</sup> It's important to note that this type of relativism can remain silent about whether there is one objectively correct epistemic system. It can accept that there is such an objectively correct system, while also claiming that such a system allows for different epistemic positions to justify adopting different epistemic systems. But, it needn't take this route. Instead, it can just hold that both adopted epistemic systems are part of the plurality of equally credible epistemic systems. For more on this, see Alvin Goldman (2010: 201).

get from here to the Steadfast position by making the further claim that this is how typical cases of peer disagreement play out.<sup>29</sup>

In this position's defense, it not only preserves the motivations behind Steadfast views mentioned earlier, but it also seems to have the potential to avoid the question begging nature that motivates rejecting a Steadfast position. For under this view, one needn't beg the question about who is responding more reasonably to the evidence in order to sticks to one's gun. It can be the case that both responses are equally rational responses, and one is just sticking to the rational response that one already believes. Accordingly, one may think that this position provides a promising answer to our question. It captures the main intuitions in favor of a Steadfast position, while avoiding the main source of hesitancy for accepting one.

However, despite the advantage this position may seem to have, it ultimately avoids an air of question begging by adopting an air of epistemic arbitrariness.<sup>30</sup> For what justifies one in sticking to one's guns in cases of peer disagreement is the fact that the adoption of one opinion leaves one in no worse of an epistemic position than the other. But, this suggests that it doesn't matter which opinion one adopts. By making this the case, it's hard to see why this position does not epistemically permit one to flip a coin to determine whether one sticks to one's guns or adopts the dissenting opinion. After all, whether one outright stuck to one's guns or decided to

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<sup>29</sup> This is not the only way to get to a Steadfast position from an appeal to this type of relativism. One could also argue that each party is justified in regarding their own response as the correct one, but not the other's response. For their own response is justified by their properly adopted epistemic system, but not the peer's response. Accordingly, both peers would be justified in sticking to their guns. However, it's not clear that the peers would be in a position to treat the other's epistemic system as less epistemically credible than their own. For the very notion of peer disagreement implies that both parties have a good reason for thinking that the other party is more or less just as epistemically credible as one's self. For more on this see Feldman (2006: 224-6).

<sup>30</sup> For a different objection to this view on the grounds of it ultimately seeming to prescribe an unstable position, see Christensen (2007: 190-2).

flip a coin in this instance would make no difference to the justification the resulting belief would enjoy from the shared body of evidence. However, something must have gone wrong if a position permits this kind of arbitrariness.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, the reasoning that is supposed to justify sticking to one's guns finds itself facing a further problem. The fact that two opinions are each maximally rational responses to a shared body of evidence does not entail that sticking to one's guns in *this* case would result in a maximally rational response. Once one is aware of the symmetry between the two opinions, one has gained new evidence. Particularly, one seems to have gained evidence suggesting that either sticking to one's guns or recanting one's opinion in favor of the peer's opinion is epistemically arbitrary. However, if one is aware that one would be no better off by sticking to one's guns than flipping a coin to determine which opinion to accept, then it seems that the more rational response is to suspend judgment about which opinion is correct.<sup>32</sup> But, this is in direct opposition to the Steadfast clause that the position is committed to. Thus in light of these problems, we can see that this appeal to relativism does not provide us with a clearly correct answer to our puzzling question.<sup>33</sup> In fact, for those of us who find ourselves uncomfortable with the idea of

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<sup>31</sup> For a more thorough argument along these lines see Roger White (2005).

<sup>32</sup> White, "Epistemic Permissiveness," 449.

<sup>33</sup> One possible response to this objection that has been brought to my attention by Jeff Kasser is an appeal to conservatism as a way of blocking the arbitrariness. According to a commitment to epistemic conservatism, one is justified in maintaining one's beliefs unless one has a *better* doxastic option. However, in the case of a peer disagreement, if both opinions are justified, then revising one's belief to that of the peers would not result in replacing one's belief for a better belief. Thus, it needn't be an arbitrary decision to stick to one's guns. Rather, it can be a matter of adhering to the principle of epistemic conservatism.

However, I'm not entirely convinced that this can escape the second part of the objection. Even if revising one's belief to that of the peers is not a better option, one still seems to have a better option available: suspending judgment about which belief is the better response to the evidence. After all, if one sticks to one's guns on the grounds that one belief is not better than the other in conjunction with epistemic conservatism, one is still



getting too friendly with epistemic arbitrariness, these problems seem to be a good reason for looking elsewhere for a solution to our question.

#### 1.4 The Right Reasons View

Another view on the Steadfast end of the spectrum that has been put forth in the literature is the Right Reasons View. According to this view, the fact that one is in a peer disagreement is a superfluous consideration with regard to revising one's belief. Rather, what determines whether one ought to revise one's belief is whether one's opinion is *in fact* justified by the reasons that one has available to them.<sup>34</sup> For instance, if you and I are in a peer disagreement about p, I am only required to revise my belief about p after the process of full disclosure if the reasons I am now aware of after our discussion justify your opinion more so than they justify mine. This is to say that what would do the epistemic work is not the fact that you disagree after full disclosure, but that I am now aware of *reasons* that do in fact support your opinion more than mine.

In defense of this line of reasoning, Thomas Kelly (2005) has pointed out that what makes accepting skepticism unreasonable is not its unpopularity, but the fact that there are *good reasons* for thinking that something goes wrong in skeptical arguments.<sup>35</sup> This suggests that the justification for a position stands or falls on the basis of the reasons for and against it, but not on the basis of how many epistemic agents happen to accept it. Moreover, Kelly has also argued that

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recognizing that one belief is not better supported by the evidence than the other. But once one recognizes the evidential symmetry between the two, it seems odd to stick to one's guns, even on the basis of conservatism. To borrow a term from Michael Bergmann (2005: 424), it seems that one would be placing themselves in a "bad epistemic state of affairs" if one recognized this symmetry and then failed to take the option of suspending judgment. Perhaps this can be further blocked with an appeal to a satisficing picture of rationality, but even then it seems odd not to take the better option when it's clearly available to one.

<sup>34</sup> Kelly, "Epistemic Significance of Disagreement," 17.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

the epistemic symmetry between peers in typical cases is not as solid as it might initially appear.<sup>36</sup> Once the two opinions have been formed, one of them is usually a better response to the shared evidence than the other. This creates an epistemic asymmetry between the two opinions, which weakens the charge that one would be begging the question if one stuck to one's guns. The asymmetry is thought to serve as a reason for treating the opinion that is actually better supported by the evidence as the opinion that is more likely to be correct. Thus, the *de facto* support of the evidence serves as a justifier for the party that evaluated the evidence better to stick to one's guns. Consequently, one needn't be guilty of viciously begging the question when one sticks to one's guns about p in the face of a peer disagreement about p.

However, Kelly (2010) has since abandoned the Right Reasons View due to the following line of reasoning.<sup>37</sup> Even if the shared body of evidence supports one's original opinion, this is not *all* of one's relevant evidence in a case of peer disagreement. Contrary to the Right Reasons View, the awareness of the peer disagreement after full disclosure does provide one with further evidence. In particular, awareness of being in a peer disagreement after full disclosures affords one with higher-order evidence (i.e. evidence *about* a body of evidence) about the shared body of evidence, or the first-order body of evidence. After all, in the case of Mental Math, it seems that when one learns that a peer disagrees with one's evaluation, one

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-17.

It's important to note that this does not involve a departure from our use of the term 'peer disagreement' and its restriction to cases where epistemic symmetry roughly appears to be maintained. Our restriction is limited to the appearance of the peers' evaluative abilities being symmetrical, such that one doesn't have a good reason prior to the disagreement to think that the other party is less likely or more likely to be right than oneself. It does not extend to a commitment to the opinions being symmetrical in the sense that both are equally good responses to the shared body of evidence.

<sup>37</sup> Kelly, "Peer Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence," 142-44

should think that it is more likely that one has made a mistake than one should have prior to being aware of this further information. But this is just to say that one has acquired evidence against the claim that the shared body of evidence is good evidence for one's opinion. However, since the notion of peerhood carries with it a notion of epistemic symmetry between the two parties' evaluative abilities, it also seems that this further body of higher-order evidence counts equally against the peer's evaluation. Thus, we can see that awareness of being in a peer disagreement after full disclosure affords one with comparable pieces of higher-order evidence against each of the party's respective opinions.<sup>38</sup>

Accordingly, what one's *total* evidence supports is not exhausted by what the shared evidence supports. Rather, it has been pushed to some extent from what the shared evidence supports in the direction of agnosticism by the higher-order evidence. Thus, the Right Reasons View fails to respect one's *total* evidence by ignoring the further evidential input of the higher-order evidence. This failure on the part of the Right Reason View's gives us a good reason to abandon the view, and has led Kelly (2010) to instead propose what he refers to as the 'Total Evidence View'.

### 1.5 The Total Evidence View

The Total Evidence View follows the Right Reasons View in allowing for the actual directional force of the shared body of evidence to affect what one ought to believe. But, unlike

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<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that this is not to say that the higher-order evidence is evidence against *p*. Rather, it is evidence pertaining to the credibility of one's evaluation of the shared body of evidence. And so the higher-order evidence is still relative to one's belief that *p*, even though it is not, strictly speaking, evidence for or against *p*. Accordingly, when I refer to the higher-order evidence as part of one's total body of evidence pertaining to *p*, I am not claiming that it is evidence for or against *p*. I am only claiming that it is part of one's total body of evidence that affects what one ought to believe about *p*. For more on higher-order evidence see Christensen (2010).

the Right Reasons View, it also takes into account the higher-order evidence afforded by one's awareness of the peer disagreement after full disclosure. Accordingly, we can understand the Total Evidence View as offering the following answer to our question. When one is aware of being party to a peer disagreement about *p*, one's belief about *p* should reflect the directional force of "...both the original, first-order evidence [i.e. the shared body of evidence that has been disclosed] as well as...the higher-order evidence that is afforded by the fact that one's peers believe as they do" (Kelly, 2010: 142). However, how exactly the directional force of this total body of evidence tends to play out (typical cases included) is something that the Total Evidence View remains silent on.

Kelly states that under this view there can be cases where the first-order evidence is strong enough compared to the higher-order evidence to virtually overwhelm the latter. In these circumstances, the Total Evidence View would suggest the verdict that is more or less in accord with the Right Reasons View. But, he also claims that there can be cases where the opposite relation between the two bodies of evidence holds. Those circumstances would instead result in a verdict that is more or less in accord with a Strong Conciliatory view. Moreover, there are also cases where neither part of one's evidence overwhelms the other, which would lead to a verdict that is more or less in accord with a Weak Conciliatory view.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, it's not clear which side of the spectrum this view falls on.

However, this is not a count against the view. This plurality of verdicts provides it with the ability to capture our intuitions about the verdicts in cases that have been used as intuition pumps on both sides of the spectrum. For instance with regard to Mental Math, one's casual mental

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 142.

calculations are not immune from common calculation errors. The fact that such errors are not uncommon results in the first-order body of evidence being outweighed by the evidence afforded by the awareness of the peer's dissenting opinion. Accordingly, this would allow for the Total Evidence View to produce a conciliatory verdict, which seems to be where our intuitions lie.

On the other hand, it's also able to capture the intuitive verdict of cases used to support Steadfast positions, such as Careful Checking.

Careful Checking: I consider my friend my peer on matters of simple math. She and I are in a restaurant, figuring our shares of the bill plus 20% tip, rounded up to the nearest dollar. The total on the bill is clearly visible in unambiguous numbers. Instead of doing the math once in my head, I take out a pencil and paper and carefully go through the problem. I then carefully check my answer, and it checks out. I then take out my well-tested calculator, and redo the problem and check the result in a few different ways. As I do all of this I feel fully clear and alert. Each time I do the problem, I get the exact same answer, \$43, and each time I check this answer, it checks out correctly. Since the math problem is so easy, and I've calculated and checked my answer so carefully in several independent ways, I now have an extremely high degree of rational confidence that our shares are \$43. Then something very strange happens. My friend announces that she got \$45 (Christensen 2011: 8)

It is commonly held that in Careful Checking one is permitted to stick to one's guns, even if one saw the dissenting peer going through the same careful processes as oneself.<sup>40</sup> The Total Evidence View could capture this intuitive verdict by claiming that what justifies one in sticking to one's guns is the overwhelming strength of one's first-order body of evidence in comparison to the higher-order evidence afforded by the disagreement. Moreover, the Total Evidence View also has the capability to explain why this case's correct answer differs from Mental Math. In Careful Checking, what justifies one in sticking to one's guns is the overwhelming strength of one's first-order body of evidence in comparison to the higher-order body of evidence. Whereas, in the case of Mental Math, this relationship between the two bodies of evidence does not obtain. Accordingly, this view seems to provide a nice explanation for why our intuitive verdicts change

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<sup>40</sup> Christensen, "Disagreement, Question-Begging and Epistemic Self-Criticism," 8.

in different cases. And it is able to do this while seeming to avoid the problem of arbitrariness and the problem of ignoring higher-order evidence that the prior views faced.

However, the way the Total Evidence View allows for the first-order body of evidence to overwhelm the higher-order evidence in certain cases makes it vulnerable to the charge of allowing for a type of question begging.<sup>41</sup> For the view permits the following line of reasoning in some typical cases. “My first-order body of evidence has provided me with very strong evidence for my belief that  $p$  to a degree of 0.8. Now that I’ve learned of my peer’s dissenting opinion resulting from an evaluation of this evidence that appears to be just as epistemically credible as my own, I’ve acquired additional evidence. This additional evidence is higher-order evidence that supports agnosticism about which process led to the correct answer. Fortunately, my first-order body of evidence supports my opinion far more than this higher-order evidence supports agnosticism. In fact, the former is strong enough for me to dismiss my peer’s opinion as mistaken.”

However, this line of reasoning begs the question about which evaluation is mistaken if it is solely grounded in an appeal to the directional force of the first-order evidence. For in that case one would essentially be using the very reasoning called into question by the higher-order evidence to rule out that one’s own reasoning is mistaken.<sup>42</sup> After all, one’s appeal to the

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<sup>41</sup> This is not to say that the Total Evidence View allows for one to beg the question in Careful Checking and similar cases. Rather, this is just to say that due to the view’s commitment to allowing for the first-order evidence to always have some say in whether and how one ought to revise one’s belief in light of being party to a peer disagreement there are some cases where one will be permitted to beg the question.

<sup>42</sup> Christensen notes that this isn’t a classical type of circular reasoning. For one’s reasoning really is correct and thus does actually support a belief that the peer’s opinion is wrong as a lone body of evidence. However, Christensen argues that the higher-order evidence puts one in a position where one cannot justifiably appreciate this evidential support. See Christensen (2010: 197)

directional force of the first-order evidence would be using one's own reasoning about the first-order body of evidence. This charge of begging the question could be properly avoided if one appealed to some further evidence outside the first-order body of evidence that suggested the peer was mistaken (e.g. evidence that the peer was drunk, stoned, joking, etc... despite appearances). In one of those cases, one would have a reason independent of one's own evaluation of the first-order body of evidence to justify the claim that one's evaluation was not the mistaken one.<sup>43</sup>

Unfortunately for the Total Evidence View, it allows for one to use the previous line of reasoning even without this further, independent evidence. After all, what can do the work is *solely* the directional force of the first-order, shared body of evidence. Thus, it seems that the Total Evidence View permits this type of question begging. However, this view is the only view that we have seen so far that has the ability to capture the intuitive verdicts for both the cases of Careful Checking and Mental Math. Accordingly, we still have some reason to view the Total Evidence View as a possible answer to our question, provided there isn't a better view that can

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<sup>43</sup> Christensen initially suggests a requirement for a reason outside of one's evaluation of the shared body of evidence in his (2007) article, and later specifically formulates it as the 'principle of Independence'. Independence is defined as the principle that "[i]n evaluating the epistemic credentials of another's expressed belief about P, in order to determine how (or whether) to modify my own belief about P, I should do so in a way that doesn't rely on the reasoning behind my initial belief about P" (Christensen 2011: 1). Independence bars the type of question begging the above argument is concerned with by requiring that one's reasoning about the directional force of the shared, first-order body of evidence is screened off: a requirement the Total Evidence View cannot accept.

One important thing to note about this requirement to screen off one's first-order body of evidence is that it is not a psychological requirement, for lack of a better term. Rather, it is a matter of reflective endorsement. For instance, if S's first-order body of evidence is E, it is not the case that S must stop believing that E is good evidence for H in the sense of no longer seeing E as good evidence for H. Instead, it is a requirement that S does not use E as a justifier for H in S's reflective reasoning about whether one ought to reflectively endorse H. For more on this distinction see Elgin (2010: 63-66).

capture these verdicts while also avoiding a permissance of the above form of begging the question.

## 1.6 The Equal Weight View

Unfortunately for the Total Evidence View, there is another view that can capture those intuitive verdicts without begging the question. This viable rival to the Total Evidence View is the Equal Weight View. This is a Strong Conciliatory view that claims in typical cases of peer disagreement, one ought to give each opinion the same amount of epistemic weight. This attribution of equal weight serves as a sufficient reason for revising one's belief in a manner of splitting the difference.<sup>44</sup> This view is thought to gain intuitive support from cases such as Mental Math and an analogy between the symmetry in cases of peer disagreement and in cases of equally reliable, but "disagreeing" thermometers. We have already seen the case of Mental Math and how it would support a Conciliatory view, and so let us turn to the thermometer analogy.

Disagreeing Thermometers: You and I are each attempting to determine the current temperature by consulting our own personal thermometers. In the past, the two thermometers have been equally reliable. At time  $t_0$ , I consult my thermometer, find that it reads '68 degrees', and so immediately take up the corresponding belief. Meanwhile, you consult your thermometer, find that it reads '72 degrees', and so immediately take up that belief. At time  $t_1$ , you and I compare notes and discover that our thermometers have disagreed. How, if at all, should we revise our original opinions about the temperature in light of this new information? (Kelly 2010: 114).

In this case, it seems quite obvious that one is not in a position to stick to one's guns, even if one's thermometer is in fact the accurate one. The equal reliability of the two thermometers prevents one from having a reason to favor one thermometer over the other prior

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<sup>44</sup> There are also versions of the Equal Weight View that prescribe suspending judgment, see Feldman (2006). However, as Kelly (2010: 117-8) notes, it becomes difficult to take a suspending judgment version of this view when one of the dissenting opinions is already a suspension of judgment. Accordingly, we will be focusing on the versions that prescribe difference splitting.



to their “disagreement.” Accordingly, one needs some further information that would allow one to properly distinguish the malfunctioning thermometer from the other before one can regard the correct thermometer as the correct thermometer. Moreover, one is also not in a position to use the following reasoning as a way of obtaining this further information. “This thermometer says it is 68 degrees, and it is in fact 68 degrees [where this claim about the facts is relying solely on the thermometer’s reading]. Thus, the thermometer that says it is 72 degrees is the mistaken one.” For even if it is in fact 68 degrees, the appearance of symmetry in reliability between the two thermometers prior to the disagreement provides one with a good reason for not favoring the use of one reading over the other in one’s reasoning. Consequently, favoring one thermometer’s reading over the other without supportive evidence independent of the two thermometers (as the above line of reasoning does) fails to respect one’s evidence by failing “to treat like cases alike” (Feldman 2005: 116). Thus, one is not in a position to properly give one reading more weight than the other in the above case.

Analogously, proponents of the Equal Weight View argue that the appearance of symmetry in epistemic credibility between peers has the same effect in typical cases of peer disagreement.<sup>45</sup> This is to say that since one has strong, undefeated reasons for treating the two parties’ evaluations the same prior to the disagreement, one would need further, independent evidence before one can appeal to evidence that relied on one’s own evaluation instead of the peer’s. Doing otherwise would result in adopting reasons parallel to the reasoning above that fails to treat like cases alike. This works to support the Equal Weight View since these independent reasons are not available in typical cases of disagreement. Thus, the thermometer

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<sup>45</sup> Kelly, “Peer Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence,” 152-55.

analogy is thought to help show that typical cases of peer disagreement require ascribing equal weight to each opinion, and thus splitting the difference.

However, even with these intuition pumps, one may still wonder how a Strong Conciliatory view such as the Equal Weight View is supposed to capture the intuitive verdict to cases such as Careful Checking. But, it's important to note that Conciliatory views needn't be views that endorse conciliation for each and every case.<sup>46</sup> Rather, as the spectrum is defined, it only needs to prescribe conciliation for the typical cases. With this in mind, let us turn to a main formulation of the Equal Weight View in the literature and how it can capture the intuitive verdict to cases such as Careful Checking.

One formulation of the Equal Weight View, as put forth by Adam Elga, claims the following about how one should respond to finding oneself in a peer disagreement.

Your probability that you are right [about p] should equal your [justified]<sup>47</sup> prior conditional probability that you would be right. Prior to what? Prior to your thinking through the disputed issue, and finding out what the...[peer]... thinks of it. Conditional on what? On whatever you have learned about the circumstances of the disagreement (Elga 2007, 490).

In other words, the amount of epistemic weight that one ought to give each opinion in a case of peer disagreement ought to reflect one's justified prior conditional probability about who is more likely to be right. From here, this formulation of the Equal Weight View becomes the Strong Conciliatory view that it is by adding the following claims:

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<sup>46</sup> Christensen, "Disagreement, Question-Begging and Epistemic Self-Criticism," 3.

<sup>47</sup> In his formulation of the Equal Weight View, Elga is unclear about whether the prior conditional probability is the prior conditional probability that you do in fact hold or the one that you are justified in holding. However, if it's not one's *justified* prior conditional probability, it's hard to see what the epistemic significance of this probability is. Accordingly, I'll be adopting a charitable reading of Elga's formulation and understanding 'prior conditional probability' as one's justified prior conditional probability. This issue is brought up by David Enoch (2010: 971-2) and Jennifer Lackey (2010: 285-6).

- i) In typical cases of peer disagreement, one's justified prior conditional probability should be such that it requires one to give equal weight to each opinion.
- ii) When one ought to give equal weight to one's own opinion and the peer's, one ought to revise one's belief by splitting the difference.

Consequently, this view claims that one's prior conditional probabilities will typically prescribe that one ought to split the difference in light of a peer disagreement. However, if it's an atypical case where one's prior conditional probability does suggest that one is much more likely to be right than the dissenting party, then this formulation of the Equal Weight View will prescribe sticking to one's guns.

Accordingly, with regard to Careful Checking, this formulation of the Equal Weight View can prescribe sticking to one's guns as long as one's prior conditional probability supports giving one's own opinion enough weight to justify maintaining one's belief. Fortunately for this formulation, it does seem quite plausible that one would be justified in upholding the needed prior conditional probability. As Christensen (2011) notes, before one discovers the disagreement in a case such as Careful Checking, one's prior probability that a genuine disagreement would occur should be rather low. In fact, one's prior probabilities should be such that it would be more likely that even if it appears that one is in a genuine case of disagreement between two highly reliable methods, that one of the parties is actually drunk, lying, joking, etc... Moreover, he states that due to one's privileged access to one's own mental state, one can rule out that one's self is actually drunk, lying, joking, etc.... But one cannot do so for the peer

with the same reliability as one can for oneself.<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, one's justified prior conditional probability should suggest that it's more likely that the dissenting party's opinion is the result of that party lying, joking, being drunk, etc... rather than a result of the party acting as one's effective peer.<sup>49</sup> And this is just to say that one's justified prior conditional probability is such that it suggests that the other party is more likely to get things wrong. As a result, one is justified in giving one's own opinion more weight than what one ascribes to the dissenting party's opinion. Thus, despite this formulation of the Equal Weight View being a Strong Conciliatory view, it can still capture the intuitive verdict to cases such as Careful Checking.

Moreover, like the Total Evidence View, this view has the capacity to provide an explanation for why the verdicts differ between cases such as Mental Math and Careful Checking. The reason we aren't permitted in sticking to our guns in the former is due to the evidence that justifies a prior conditional probability of 0.5 about who is more likely to get things right. Whereas in the case of Careful Checking, the unlikelihood of it being a genuine peer disagreement justifies a prior conditional probability that favors one's own reasoning over the peer's.

However, unlike the Total Evidence View, the types of reasoning that the Equal Weight View permits one in using when coming to a Steadfast verdict cannot include begging the

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<sup>48</sup>One may wonder if the fact that one has this type of private evidence in Careful Checking prevents it from being a case of peer disagreement after full disclosure. After all, it would seem that this type of evidence cannot be shared in a way that provides each party with comparable evidence. Thus, one may think that condition (iv) of our use of 'peer disagreement' is not met in this case. However, (iv) is concerned with evidence about the proposition that the disagreement is over, *p*. But, this type of private evidence is about the parties' mental states and not about *p*.

Also, one may wonder if the appeal to this type of private evidence can be used to support a Steadfast verdict in typical cases. For a response to this worry, see Christensen (2011: 11-2).

<sup>49</sup> Christensen, "Disagreement, Question-Begging and Epistemic Self-Criticism," 9-11.

question. As we mentioned earlier, the Total Evidence View's commitment to always allowing for the first-order evidence to have some epistemic input results in a commitment to permitting a type of question-begging in some cases. In contrast, one's own evaluation of the directional force of the first-order evidence cannot do such an epistemic feat under the Equal Weight View. Rather, one needs to appeal to a consideration that is *independent* of one's evaluation of the first-order evidence, such that it does not rely on the particular evaluation that one comes to. For instance, appealing to how unlikely it is that the dispute is a genuine disagreement in conjunction with one's private evidence that one's self really isn't drunk, stoned, tripping, joking, lying, carelessly evaluating the evidence, etc... in Careful Checking is an independent consideration. After all, this consideration does not rely on any particular evaluation of the first-order evidence that one comes to. It just relies on the following bodies of evidence. One's evidence about how unlikely it would be for there to be a genuine disagreement over a basic mathematical problem between two sober, careful, competent, and honest individuals carefully checking their work and that one's self is such a sober, careful, competent, and honest individual carefully checking one's work.

By requiring an independent consideration before one can properly ascribe more weight to one's own opinion than the peer's, it restricts one's ascriptions of asymmetrical weights to cases of peer disagreements where one does not solely use one's own evaluation of the first-order evidence. In other words, the only cases of peer disagreement where one can ascribe asymmetrical weight are the cases where one appeals to a justifier that is not itself called into question by the higher-order evidence afforded by awareness of being party to a peer disagreement. And this is just to say that the Equal Weight View does not permit one to break the appearance of epistemic symmetry in a typical case of peer disagreement by begging the

question in one's own favor. Thus, it seems that the Equal Weight View has the advantage over the Total Evidence View of barring the use of reasoning that begs the question in favor of one's own reasoning.

### 1.7 Conclusion

So far we have seen the four main positions that have been put forth in the literature as potential candidates for answering the question of the epistemology of disagreement. The first was a Steadfast position that embraced a type of epistemic relativism and different justified starting points. This view initially seemed like a plausible candidate, but ultimately ended up avoiding an air of begging the question at the cost of an air of epistemic arbitrariness. We then took a look at the Right Reasons View. This position avoided the epistemic arbitrariness of the former, but ran into the problem of ignoring the epistemic input of the higher-order evidence. The Total Evidence View then served as a way of dealing with the problem of the Right Reasons View. However, we saw that this view runs into the general worry that non-Conciliatory positions are thought to have, namely that it permits a form of begging the question. In contrast, we saw that while the Equal Weight View can capture a steadfast verdict for cases such as Careful Checking, it avoids the type of question begging non-Conciliatory views are thought to permit. However, we have not seen how the Equal Weight View sizes up against the typical objections raised against Conciliatory views.

Consequently, this examination has not provided us with a conclusive analysis suggesting that the Equal Weight View is the best answer, all things considered. Rather, this is just to say that the Equal Weight View might be a more promising candidate since it needn't overcome the epistemic vices of permitting arbitrariness, ignoring higher-order evidence, and begging the

question. For how these vices can be reconciled with the aim of guiding one to a justified belief in the face of a peer disagreement is not readily apparent. Accordingly, I think it is worth our time to investigate the problems raised against the Equal Weight View in hopes of defusing their ability to remove the Equal Weight View from the list of viable positions about peer disagreement. In the following chapter, we will begin our project of attempting to accomplish this by taking a look at one of the objections that has been understood as a devastating problem for the view and the responses that have been put forth on behalf of the Equal Weight View.

## Chapter 2

### Introduction

We have now seen that the Equal Weight View has the benefit of avoiding worries about allowing one to beg the question as to who is more likely to be right in typical cases of peer disagreement. However, we have also seen that the view has been objected to for multiple reasons. In particular, we noted that the view has been objected to on the grounds that it goes against our common sense intuitions, threatens to lead to a widespread philosophical skepticism, and ultimately turns out to be self-defeating in the sense of currently prescribing its own abandonment. There are other charges against the Equal Weight View as well.<sup>50</sup> But these three seem to be the main objections to Conciliatory views in general, and the Equal Weight View is no exception. However, the particular objection that I find to be the most troubling out of these three is the charge of self-defeat. After all, if these other objections turn out to be unanswerable then there is at least some ground for proponents of the view to dig their heels into and bite the bullet. But doing so in response to the charge of self-defeat is not a move that can be coherently made. For if a view is self-defeating, then one cannot be justified in maintaining an acceptance of it. Consequently, if this objection of self-defeat cannot be answered satisfactorily, then it is a fatal blow to the acceptability of the Equal Weight View. Providing an analysis of this charge of self-defeat, as well as the potential of certain considerations in the literature as solutions for the view is the focus of this chapter.

In the first section, I explain the objection that the Equal Weight View is self-defeating. This consists in clarifying the way that the Equal Weight View is said to turn out to be self-

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<sup>50</sup> For instance, see Kelly (2010) and Hazlett (2012) for further objections to the Equal Weight View.



defeating, as well as the conclusions that can be drawn from this problem if it is unsolvable. In sections two and three, I show why the arguments put forth by Adam Elga (2010) and Tomas Bogardus (2009) to defuse the charge of self-defeat fall short of their goal. In particular, I explain how they fail to save a version of the Equal Weight View that is consistent with typical Strong Conciliatory motivations. In the fourth section, I turn to Nathan King's (2011) argument for the scarcity of peerhood in hopes of finding a more promising defense against the charge of self-defeat. Lastly, I conclude that while King's argument is not sufficient for defusing the charge of self-defeat as it currently stands, a modified version of it may provide us with a promising defense against the charge of self-defeat.

## 2.1 The Equal Weight View and Self-Defeat

As we have seen, Conciliatory views, especially Strong Conciliatory views, are objected to on the grounds that they are self-defeating. The Equal Weight View in particular seems to be the main target of this objection, especially since it seems to offer a clear example of how Strong Conciliatory views defeat themselves. According to the Equal Weight View, when one learns that an epistemic peer disagrees with one about  $p$  after full disclosure, one ought to split the difference between the two opposing opinions unless one has an independent reason that justifies a belief that one is more likely to be right. More specifically, in such a case of peer disagreement, one must screen off the reasons one has for thinking that the shared body of evidence supports one's own opinion when evaluating which opinion is more likely to be correct. For instance, if one holds  $H$  on the basis of  $E$ , then one ought to screen off one's evaluation of  $E$  by no longer using  $E$  as a justifier for holding  $H$  in one's reflectively endorsed reasoning. And when one lacks an independent reason to justify favoring one's own opinion over the peer's, this screening off of one's previously used reasons is thought to result in one's justified prior conditional probability

demanding the attribution of equal weight to each opinion. This prescribed attribution of equal weight then supports splitting the difference between one's own opinion and the peer's.

However, there is currently disagreement about how we ought to respond to peer disagreement after full disclosure. In fact, proponents of the Equal Weight View are aware of individuals who are thought to be their epistemic peers that disagree with them about the truth of the Equal Weight View, even after full disclosure. Accordingly, it seems that the view requires its proponents to screen off their arguments in favor of the Equal Weight View, attribute equal weight to their belief that the view is true and the peer's dissenting belief, and then split the difference between these two beliefs. Depending on the degrees of belief held by the disagreeing parties, this prescribed difference splitting results in the view's proponents lowering their degree of belief in the view either below the threshold of belief or at least lower than it was prior to discovering the disagreement. For instance, if the proponent of the view's relevant belief is held to a degree of 0.9 while the dissenting peer's relevant belief is held to 0.5, then the view's prescription would only require that its proponent lower one's degree of belief to 0.7: a degree of belief above the threshold of belief. However, if the parties' respectively held degrees of belief are instead 0.8 and 0.3, then the view's prescription would require one to lower one's confidence to a degree of 0.5: a degree of belief below the threshold of belief. And unfortunately for the Equal Weight View, it is assumed that the held degrees of belief result in a prescription to split the difference being a prescription to abandon one's belief in the view by those who have recognized the problem, even proponents of the Equal Weight View such as Christensen (2009)

and Elga (2010).<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, I will be following the literature in focusing on the problem of self-defeat as a problem about the view prescribing its own abandonment.<sup>52</sup>

However, it is important to note the particular conclusions that can be drawn from this charge of self-defeat. This type of self-defeat is not itself a sufficient reason for thinking that the view is false. The claim that a view prescribes abandoning one's belief in the view does not say anything about whether the truth conditions of the view obtain. Rather, it says something about one's ability to *coherently regard* the view as true, namely that one lacks this ability. For when a view prescribes abandoning a belief in itself, as the Equal Weight View is said to do, the reasons that are initially taken to support the view end up supporting a belief that these very reasons cannot be regarded as good reasons for accepting the view. In other words, these reasons that one had for supporting the view turn out to be their own undermining defeaters in light of learning that one is party to a peer disagreement about the Equal Weight View. But just because one lacks good reasons for believing  $p$ , it needn't follow that one ought to hold that  $\sim p$ . On its own, this just means that one should not believe that  $p$ . Thus, since a charge of this type of self-defeat is

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<sup>51</sup> I am not directly aware of any evidence to support the claim that such difference splitting does in fact result in a belief that is below the threshold of belief. As I am not aware of any explicit argument in the literature that either shows this to be the case or even acknowledges a distinction between the different potential risks of the view's Strong Conciliatory prescription. Rather, it just appears to be assumed by both parties that the states of affairs are such that the view prescribes a degree of belief that is below the threshold of belief. Perhaps this is the case since opponents to the view may simply volunteer to be the dissenting peer that holds a belief to the needed degree for the prescription to be self-defeating in this stronger sense. Nevertheless, while assessing the responses to the charge of self-defeat in the literature I will be working under the assumption that the actual danger that the view faces is the danger of being a view that requires one's degree of belief in the view to fall below the threshold of belief. And when it comes to the actual response to the charge of self-defeat that I endorse, I will deal with this stronger charge of self-defeat and the weaker charge that the view prescribes one to lower one's confidence in the view, but not to the extent of abandoning a belief in the view. (Hereafter, my use of the term 'self-defeat' to describe a view should be understood in the sense of a view being such that it requires one to abandon one's belief in the view, unless otherwise stated).

<sup>52</sup> However, the issue of the view prescribing that one lower one's confidence in the view is not something that will be completely overlooked. This issue will be properly addressed when it comes up again in the following chapter.

only about the reasons one has for the position being their own defeaters, if it holds, it does not say anything about the truth or falsity of the Equal Weight View. It only means that the arguments that are thought to support the view are currently acting as their own defeaters, such that one cannot properly regard these arguments as being good reasons to accept the Equal Weight View.

Moreover, it is also important to note that this charge of self-defeat against the Equal Weight View is not the charge that the view is inherently self-defeating, such that it is necessarily an incoherent view that can never be justifiably held. Rather, it is the charge that the view is only self-defeating because the following conditions obtain.

- i) There is a peer disagreement after full disclosure about the proposition that *the Equal Weight View is true*.
- ii) A party to this disagreement does not have an available independent reason that would result in one's justified prior conditional probability being such that the proponent of the Equal Weight View is more likely to be right than the dissenting party.

After all, it is only in a case of peer disagreement after full disclosure where one lacks an independent reason for favoring one opinion over the other that the Equal Weight View prescribes screening off one's reasons, giving each opinion equal weight, and splitting the difference. Thus, it is only when a peer disagreement of this kind occurs about the truth of the Equal Weight View that it becomes self-defeating.

With this understanding of the problem in mind, we can now see how a proponent of the Equal Weight View can attempt to defend the view. It will have to be defended by an appeal to a

principled reason as to why it doesn't demand that one hold a prior conditional probability that gives equal weight to each opinion in the current disagreement about the truth of the view itself. One option for accomplishing this task is to argue that even though there are cases of disagreement about how to respond to peer disagreement, these cases do not meet the above conditions for self-defeat. This could be done by showing that such instances of disagreement about disagreement are not instances of peer disagreement on the grounds that they do not involve epistemic peers or the process of full disclosure.<sup>53</sup> Or it could be done by showing that even though these are instances of peer disagreements after full disclosure, proponents of the Equal Weight View have an independent consideration that is sufficient for holding a justified prior conditional probability that favors their own opinion.

Another way of defusing the charge of self-defeat is to bar the view from having anything to say about cases of disagreement about disagreement. This would prevent the view's prescriptions about how to disagree from applying to the disagreements about how to disagree, even if they are peer disagreements. However, one must be careful about how one makes this move. It would need to be made in neither an arbitrary nor *ad hoc* way. In other words, it could not be made simply to avoid the objection. It would need a proper source of motivation, such as appealing to principles about the use of language that bar statements or rules *in general* from calling for their own rejection.

As we can see, there are multiple ways to approach the objection that the Equal Weight View turns out to be self-defeating in our current epistemic position. Moreover, a variation of

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<sup>53</sup> It's important to note that rejecting the claim that epistemic peerhood obtains in certain cases needn't be a rejection that the two individuals are not exceptionally intelligent and informed. It could be the case that the two individuals still meet a lower, alternative type of peerhood than the one that is typically focused on in the literature.

each of these options can be found in the literature, either as a way to defend the Equal Weight view from the charge of self-defeat or as a defense against an argument for widespread philosophical skepticism on the grounds of widespread philosophical disagreement.

Unfortunately for the Equal Weight View, the responses that can be found within the literature are themselves not sufficient for clearly showing that the view is not self-defeating. However, I do not want to merely state that I find the variations of these options that have been put forth in the literature to be less than satisfactory solutions to the problem. Instead, I would like to show why I find them to be this way and, thus why a new solution that clearly resolves the problem is needed. Accordingly, we'll now be turning to the particular responses to this problem that have been put forth in the literature and an assessment of each of them.

## 2.2 Solution One: Elga on How to Disagree about How to Disagree

Adam Elga (2010) attempts to defend conciliatory views from the charge of self-defeat by arguing that Conciliatory views needn't be *ad hoc* in treating cases of peer disagreement about peer disagreement differently from other cases of peer disagreement. Conciliatory views can motivate their treatment of these cases differently in light of a general constraint of consistency that applies to *any* fundamental, prescriptive policy. In particular, Elga (2010) states that “[i]n order to be consistent, a fundamental policy, rule, or method must be dogmatic with respect to its own correctness” (185).

The underlying motivation for this claim seems to come from two places: the requirements of what it takes for a policy to be consistent and what it means for a policy to be fundamental. On the one hand, when a policy puts forth prescription x, it is also putting forth this prescription as the correct prescription. In other words, the policy has a commitment to the truth

of its prescription built into it just in virtue of being a policy that prescribes one to x. Consequently, insofar as the policy is put forth as a consistent policy that one ought to x, then it cannot endorse other conflicting commitments, such as that one ought to y, where doing y is incompatible with doing x. Otherwise, the policy would instead be one that inconsistently prescribes x-ing and not x-ing. Thus, insofar as a policy is to be consistent, it must uphold a commitment to its own correctness.

On the other hand, what it means for a policy to be fundamental is that its claims are not subject to the evaluation of the claims of other policies. As Elga states, a policy is taken as fundamental when it is “not governed or evaluated by any other [policy]” (2010: 185). And so if another policy suggests a claim that goes against the claim of the fundamental policy, this other policy’s claim cannot count as a mark against the fundamental policy and its claim, insofar as this policy is both fundamental and consistent. In other words, insofar as the policy is taken to be both fundamental and consistent, one can dogmatically adhere to its correctness in the face of the opposing policy’s claim. However, by being a fundamental policy, dogmatically rejecting other competing claims is not *problematically* dogmatic. The opposing claims are not something that can have any evaluative say with regard to the fundamental policy and its claims.

Accordingly, Elga argues that by applying this general constraint to a Conciliatory view, proponents of the view can dogmatically adhere to its own correctness, and thus treat disagreement about disagreement differently than typical cases of peer disagreement. Moreover, appealing to this general constraint in order to block the charge of self-defeat would not be appealing to a consideration that is specific to the issue of disagreement. It would be an appeal to a consideration about a general constraint for *any* fundamental policy if it is to be consistent. Accordingly, a Conciliatory view that motivated its treatment of cases of peer disagreement

about how to disagree differently from other cases in light of this general constraint needn't be appealing to *ad hoc* considerations.<sup>54</sup> However, even if we grant for the sake of argument that the appeal to this constraint of consistency is not an *ad hoc* consideration, it's not clear that the application of this general constraint to the Equal Weight View is one that can be well motivated.

First off, it is important to note that Elga is putting forth this general constraint of consistency as unproblematically applying to epistemic policies that one takes to be *fundamental*. But it is not clear that the Equal Weight View is a policy that one should adopt as a fundamental policy. As just stated, a policy is taken as fundamental when it is “not governed or evaluated by any other [policy]” (Elga 2010: 185). Yet it seems that the policy to strongly conciliate in typical peer disagreements after full disclosure is one that should be evaluated by other policies. After all, the Equal Weight View seems to be understood by its proponents as being supported by the policy of treating cases that appear to be alike in the same way. And if it was shown that the view is not supported by this policy to treat like cases alike, then it seems that the Equal Weight View would lose much of its plausibility. However, this suggests that the Equal Weight View is actually evaluated by this other policy: something that would not be the case if the Equal Weight View should be understood as a fundamental policy. Thus, it seems that even if we grant Elga's claim that a fundamental policy is justified in dogmatically adhering to its own correctness, it does not help the Equal Weight View against the charge of self-defeat. Or at the very least, it is of no help for defusing the charge for a well-motivated version of the Equal Weight View. Elga could try and avoid this issue by making the further claims that a policy needn't be fundamental to dogmatically adhere to its own correctness and that the Equal Weight View is one that can do

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<sup>54</sup> Elga, “How to Disagree About How to Disagree,” 186.



this. However, making this move seems to fare no better as a satisfactory response to the charge of self-defeat.

Not only would this move lose any motivational support that it gained from the claim that fundamental policies are not policies that can be evaluated by other policies, but it would lose other motivational grounds as well. As we saw in the previous chapter, what motivates the Equal Weight View's prescription of attributing equal weight and splitting the difference is the appearance of epistemic symmetry between the two parties. According to this underlying motivation, when one has good reason for holding that each dissenting opinion carries more or less equal epistemic credibility, one has good reason for treating them the same. And so it seems that in order for a version of the Equal Weight View to be consistent with its underlying motivations, it ought to be such that it prescribes attributing equal weight and splitting the difference in *all* cases of peer disagreements where this type of symmetry holds. And this is just to say that in order to be consistent with these motivations one does not make exceptions to splitting the difference unless the relevant type of symmetry fails to obtain. Consequently, by appealing to a general constraint of consistency as the reason for treating disagreement about disagreement differently, Elga's version of the Equal Weight View ends up being inconsistent with its underlying motivations. But a conciliatory view that is properly motivated ought to be the only type of Conciliatory view that we are concerned with. Whether a poorly motivated view can avoid the charge of being self-defeating is not relevant to our search for a satisfying answer to the central question of the epistemology of disagreement. Thus, this second option for Elga's solution also falls short of leaving us with a properly motivated version of the Equal Weight View.

Accordingly, either version of Elga's argument alone is not sufficient for showing that a version of the Equal Weight View that we ought to be concerned with can avoid the problem of being self-defeating. On the one hand, the Equal Weight View does not seem to be a policy that one ought to take as fundamental. Elga needs a further argument to motivate why one ought to regard the Equal Weight View as a fundamental policy. On the other hand, applying a general constraint of consistency to the Equal Weight View as a non-fundamental policy runs into the problem of being at odds with the typical motivations of the view. Elga needs an additional argument to show either that this version of the Equal Weight View can be supported by the same arguments that have typically been regarded as supporting the Equal Weight View or that there are other arguments available that can sufficiently motivate this new version of the view. Until these further issues are addressed, Elga's solution fails to solve the problem of self-defeat for a version of the view that we ought to regard as plausible. And unfortunately for his solution, there does not appear to be a readily available or promising argument to defuse these further issues.

### 2.3 Solution Two: Bogardus' Vindication of the Equal Weight View

Another attempt at solving the self-defeat issue for the Equal Weight View has been put forth by Tomas Bogardus (2009). According to Bogardus, the Equal Weight View allows for one not to conciliate if one can just see the truth of  $p$ , such that the proposition *it is the case that  $p$*  is part of one's immediately accessible evidence. When this is the case, he claims that the view allows one to reason as follows.

I just see the truth of a relevant piece of evidence. [My peer] does as well, or she doesn't. If she doesn't, then I have evidence she lacks, and so [the condition of being equally informed] isn't met. If she does, then either there's merely apparent disagreement, or [the peer] just sees the truth of some proposition and yet believes it's false. If the former, then

[it's not a genuine case of peer disagreement]. If the latter, then here in the circumstances of evaluation, [the peer] suffers from cognitive malfunction and so is not as reliable as I am on this issue, even setting aside the particular contents of our answers and any reasoning that led us to them (Bogardus, 2009: 331).

Bogardus claims that this type of reasoning works due to the lack of there being a distinction between an appearance of  $p$  being true and the reality that  $p$  is true, such that what one sees is not an appearance representing that  $p$  is true but the fact that  $p$  itself. This is said to be the case for one's access to certain phenomenally qualitative states, as well as some rational intuitions.<sup>55</sup> For instance, Bogardus claims that in the case of the mathematical proposition  $2 + 2 = 4$ , one can just directly see that  $2 + 2 = 4$ . And so if one finds oneself in what appears to be a peer disagreement about whether one is currently experiencing the clearly defined phenomenally qualitative state  $x$ <sup>56</sup> or whether certain propositions, such as  $2 + 2 = 4$ , are true, one's direct access to the truth of the relevant proposition provides a line of reasoning that justifies a prior conditional probability that one is more reliable in this case than the peer. Thus, the Equal Weight View would not prescribe that one split the difference with one's peer in those cases.

With regard to the charge of self-defeat, Bogardus claims that a proponent of the Equal Weight View can reason in a parallel manner in cases of disagreement about disagreement if one can just see the truth of the Equal Weight View. By directly seeing the truth of the Equal Weight View, the truth of the proposition that *the Equal Weight View is true* would then be part of one's total relevant evidence. This would place one in a position where one could regard the disagreement as either a case of disagreement where the two parties lack the same body of

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<sup>55</sup> Bogardus, "A Vindication of the Equal-Weight View," 332.

<sup>56</sup> For this type of consideration, Bogardus uses a thought experiment where two individuals are hooked up to an experience sharing machine, so that these individuals have access to the same type of phenomenally qualitative state as the other. See Bogardus (2009): 327.

evidence or as a case of disagreement where the peer suffers from a cognitive malfunction. And when one is in this position, one is justified in having a prior conditional probability that favors one's own opinion over the dissenter's. Consequently, the Equal Weight View wouldn't need to prescribe that one give each opinion equal weight and then split the difference over the truth of the Equal Weight View.<sup>57</sup>

However, whether or not one is justified in adopting this line of reasoning depends upon whether one is in a position to properly regard one's seeming that the Equal Weight View is true as a direct, unmediated appreciation of the truth of the view. In particular, one must be able to properly regard one's seeming in this way in the face of disagreement with an individual whom one took to be one's peer prior to the disagreement. For even if this seeming is in fact a direct appreciation of the truth, if one is not in a position to properly regard it as such, then it is hard to see how one can properly appeal to the reasoning of Bogardus' solution. Moreover, it is not just a matter of being able to properly adopt this line of reasoning for Bogardus' purposes. He must also show that one can properly adopt this line of reasoning and remain consistent with the Equal Weight View and its motivations. Otherwise, Bogardus' solution will find itself running into the same problem that Elga's solution faces. But unfortunately for Bogardus, his argument fails to show that this problem does not arise for his solution, even if we grant that rational insight can result in direct, unmediated appreciations of the truth of a proposition.

According to the Equal Weight View, when one encounters a dissenter whom one regarded as a peer prior to the disagreement, one acquires higher-order evidence that favors the hypothesis that one's reasoning is just as likely to be mistaken as it is to be right. Moreover, it

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 332-33.

holds that one cannot rule out this hypothesis just on the grounds that one's first-order evidence does support one's opinion but not the peer's on pains of circularity. After all, whether one is in a position to regard one's first-order evidence as supporting one's opinion and not the peer's is the very thing that the higher-order evidence is said to call into question. However, appealing solely to one's first-order evidence seems to be exactly what Bogardus' solution ends up doing.

His solution would avoid this problem if the *only* way to account for one's seeming that the view is true is that one's first-order body of evidence contains the truth itself of the view. For then it would be the case that the only way to account for one's first-order body of evidence is that the peer is mistaken. And so appealing to the contents of one's first-order evidence as Bogardus' solution does would not be a mere appeal to the directional force of one's first-order body of evidence. Rather, it would be an appeal to the independent consideration that a transcendental condition of one possessing the evidence that one possesses is that the peer is wrong, which would satisfy the standards of the view. However, this is not the only way to account for one's seeming that the Equal Weight View is true.

Even if we grant for the sake of argument that one's appreciation of the truth of the view is in fact the result of just seeing the truth of the view, there is another relevant hypothesis. In particular, one can still account for this seeming with the alternative hypothesis that one has acquired one's seeming that the view is true via one's fallible cognitive ability to infer from a body of evidence to a philosophical position. However, if one can account for one's seeming with this hypothesis, then the above independent consideration is not something that one can properly appeal to. After all, the peer being mistaken would no longer be a transcendental condition of the fact that one possesses the particular seeming that one does. There is a different

condition that could account for the possession of this particular seeming, namely that the peer is not mistaken and one's seeming is the product of a cognitive malfunction.

Accordingly, unless Bogardus' shows that there is another independent consideration to justify the claim that one's first-order body of evidence is more likely to contain a direct insight into the truth of the view rather than a mistaken inference, it will beg the question according to the view's standards. Yet this is not something that his argument as it currently stands addresses. Thus, it seems that as things currently stand, Bogardus' solution also fails to provide us with a way of defusing the charge of self-defeat while maintaining a consistent version of the Equal Weight View. However, I think that we can find a more promising defense against the charge of self-defeat in the next solution that we will be examining.

#### 2.4 Solution Three: King and the Scarcity of a Good Peer

A further option for defending the Equal Weight View from the charge of self-defeat is to appeal to Nathan King's (2011) considerations about how the conditions of epistemic peerhood rarely obtain. According to King, the following conditions are rarely met.

- i) The Equal Reliability Condition: "S and T are equally disposed to respond to E in an epistemically appropriate way.
- ii) The Same Evidence Condition: S and T have the same P-relevant evidence, E.
- iii) The Acknowledgement Condition: S and T have good reason to think conditions [i. and ii.] are satisfied" (King, 2011, 252-53).

And this is just to say that most of our disagreements are not disagreements between epistemic peers. Although King did not put this forth as a defense of the Equal Weight View, it's easy to

see how one could use these considerations to try and show that the Equal Weight View needn't prescribe splitting the difference for the disagreements over how to disagree. One just needs to show that we should not expect the disagreement about how to disagree to be a case where the above conditions are met. And as we will soon see, appealing to King's considerations will provide us with a more promising response to the charge of self-defeat than we have seen so far. Accordingly, let us see how these considerations can be adjusted to our purposes, beginning with King's attack on the equal reliability condition.

According to King, there are many factors that affect one's reliability. These can include factors ranging from the various intellectual virtues and background beliefs to the keenness of one's perception or other specific skills related to the proposition in question.<sup>58</sup> And while intellectual virtues needn't play a role in affecting one's reliability, they do play a role with regard to one's reliability with respect to disagreements about how to disagree.<sup>59</sup> After all, if Smith scores higher than Jones with regard to the ability to make strong, appropriate inductive inferences, we should expect Smith to be more likely to be right about how to disagree, all other things being equal. And the same can be said for other intellectual virtues or factors positively related to philosophical reliability.

Accordingly, we can see there are many factors that affect one's degree of reliability with respect to the epistemology of disagreement and other philosophical issues. And so it would

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<sup>58</sup> King, "Disagreement: What's the Problem?", 258-61.

<sup>59</sup> King uses the example of a disagreement in golf over the proposition that *one's five footer is going to break to the left* in order to show that intellectual considerations needn't play a role with regard to the reliability condition. For if one is better at reading short putts than one's dissenter, despite an intellectual disparity in the dissenter's favor, one is still more reliable with regard to the proposition. Accordingly, the reliability condition can be met if both parties are equally reliable when it comes to reading short putts, yet there is an intellectual disparity between the two. See King (2011) footnote 16.

seem that being equally reliable in the field of philosophy can be a rather complicated matter in certain cases. For instance, Smith and Jones can be equally reliable as a result of being equal with respect to each of the multiple factors that contribute to reliability (e.g. intelligence, making strong, appropriate inferences, avoiding overstepping one's evidence, possessing truth conducive background beliefs, etc...). However, this is not the only way to achieve equal reliability. They can also be equally reliable as a result of scoring differently with respect to each of these relevant factors, but in such a way that each of their respective weaknesses are balanced out by the other's weaknesses.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, there are countless ways in which these differences in each party's shortcomings can balance out one another given that the severity of one's shortcomings can come in degrees.

According to King, given this complexity involved in determining one's degree of reliability, there are countless ways that two individuals can fail to be equally reliable. In other words, there are innumerable ways that two individuals can fail to be epistemic peers in light of failing to meet the equal reliability condition. But if there are innumerable ways that two individuals can fail to meet the reliability condition of epistemic peerhood, then King claims that we should expect it to be fairly rare that two individuals meet this condition.

None of the above should be taken to imply that it is *impossible* for subjects to satisfy the dispositional condition on peerhood. However, it should be clear that satisfaction of the condition is in many cases a complicated matter. It is plausible to think that its satisfaction is fairly rare. If this is right, then we should not accept uncritically the claim that two subjects satisfy it in a given case. (King 2011: 261).

But if this is right, then it is reasonable to think that epistemic peerhood rarely obtains.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 13.



However, it's important to note that this prong of King's argument is appealing to a much stricter standard of equal reliability than what is relevant to our understanding of the Equal Weight View. King seems to be treating the equal reliability condition as only being met when the two parties possess the exact same degree of reliability. But as we mentioned in the previous chapter, we are working with Christensen's (2009) notion of epistemic peerhood, which only requires that the two parties are *roughly* equally reliable. This allows for the occurrence of small differences in degrees of reliability between the two parties to not prevent the status of epistemic peerhood from occurring as King claims it does. Consequently, as this prong of King's argument currently stands, it fails to properly address the relevant reliability condition in its claim for the scarcity of peerhood.

Moreover, even if we modify this prong of King's argument accordingly, it's not clear that the parties to the dispute about how to disagree fail to meet this rough condition of equal reliability. For with regard to the parties to the dispute about how to disagree, it is certainly not obvious that their similar training and experience within the field of philosophy has failed to result in a rough equality in philosophical reliability. Now this is not to say that it is the case that such training and experience has resulted in a rough equality of reliability. Rather, I am only stating that it's not clear that even a modified version of this prong of King's argument would offer a successful defense against the charge of self-defeat. After all, given the complexity of the factors involved in determining an individual's reliability, it's not at all clear whether individuals such as Christensen and Kelly are roughly equal in terms of philosophical reliability. And this is just to say that King's appeal to complexity does not clearly show that the relevant reliability

condition fails to obtain in the disagreements about how to disagree.<sup>61</sup> It only shows that the matter is complicated and unclear. However, this is not the only part of King's argument. Let us now see if we can find a more promising response from King's attack on the same evidence condition.

According to King, even if we operate under the account of evidence that is the most hospitable to shared evidence, the dialectical account of evidence<sup>62</sup>, most individuals fail to possess co-extensive bodies of evidence. For in most circumstances, even when individuals attempt to share the relevant arguments that they are aware of, they do not share each and every relevant argument. Rather they tend to resemble the following case.

*The Typical Philosophers:* Mike and Keith are veteran philosophers who teach at different universities. Both specialize in metaphysics, and were trained at similar schools and in similar methods. Both are very familiar with the arguments in the literature on the problem of universals. There is significant (but not total overlap) in the arguments of which they are aware. Both have published fairly extensively on the topic, and are highly regarded in the field. Mike is a realist who thinks that properties are abstract universals. Keith is a trope nominalist who thinks that realism is false. While attending conferences and through correspondence, they have discussed many of the reasons for their opposing views, yet disagreement remains (King 2011: 254-55).

In this type of case, the individuals fail to have the exact same body of evidence despite having bodies of evidence with significant overlap. And according to King, under even less restrictive accounts of evidence, it is even less likely for individuals to literally share the same body of evidence. Take for instance the account of evidence that includes intuitions and sensory experiences. Under this account of evidence, individuals in cases of disagreement will not

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<sup>61</sup> However, these considerations are not entirely useless for showing that the disagreement about disagreement is not a peer disagreement after full disclosure. Later in this section, we will see how these considerations can be used to show that a different necessary condition of a peer disagreement after full disclosure fails to obtain.

<sup>62</sup> According to the dialectical account of evidence, the only considerations that count as evidence are arguments for propositions that do not beg the question against those who reject the relevant proposition. See (King, 2011: 254).

literally share the same evidence in light of their different intuitions and sensory experiences. After all, if two individuals disagree about  $p$ , then it's not unreasonable to assume that one will have an intuition that  $p$  while the other that  $\sim p$ . Moreover, even if they report to the other that they have these insights, they will still not have *exact* the same body of evidence. The intuition or experience itself is not what is being given to the other individual, and this is what counts as part of their evidence.<sup>63</sup>

However, it is important to note that, like King's previous argument, this argument is focusing on a stronger conception of shared evidence. King is focusing on shared evidence in the sense of having the *exact* same body of evidence. But this is not how our version of the Equal Weight View understands the condition of being equally informed. Rather, it has been understood as being met if the two individuals have bodies of evidence that are more or less equally good bodies of evidence, such that they are two comparable bodies of evidence. This is not only seen in Christensen and Feldman's treatment of the epistemology of disagreement, but it seems to be the appropriate way to understand it.<sup>64</sup> What is relevant to the concern of the epistemology of disagreement is that there is *evidential symmetry* between the two parties, such that awareness of this symmetry provides one with a good reason for holding that each party is more or less equally informed. After all, part of what motivates the Equal Weight View and makes the question of the literature an interesting one is that there isn't a clear, non-question begging consideration that allows one to break the appearance of epistemic symmetry between the two peers. And while literally sharing a co-extensive body of evidence may be the most

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 256-57.

<sup>64</sup> This is explicit in Christensen's formulation of an epistemic peer and implied in Feldman's treatment of the private evidence considerations. See Christensen (2009): 756-7 and Feldman (2006).

straight forward way of maintaining the appearance of evidential symmetry, it is not the only way. Having two different bodies of evidence can also meet this goal, as long as the two bodies of evidence are comparable in the sense of being more or less equally good, yet different bodies of evidence. Accordingly, if King's attack on the same evidence condition is to be useful for our purposes, it will need to focus on whether the bodies of evidence possessed by the parties to the disagreement about disagreement are *comparable*.

However, even if we shift our focus to the relevant same evidence condition, it is not clear that the same evidence condition fails to obtain in the disagreement about disagreement. Even though we should expect the more prominent parties to the disagreement to possess a comparable body of evidence pertaining to the relevant arguments, it is not clear that their body of evidence consisting of rational intuitions is comparable. For as we saw it is not clear that the relevant equal reliability condition is met in the disagreement about disagreement. In particular, we saw that it was not clearly met since it is not clear that we should expect the two parties to have more or less equally credible intellectual faculties. And the same can be said of the two parties' faculty of rational intuition. After all, I do not know how we can even measure the credibility of one's faculty of rational intuition in enough detail to tell whether the two parties to the disagreement about disagreement have comparable faculties of rational intuition.

Consequently, it is also unclear as to whether the products of these faculties of rational intuition are comparable. But earlier in chapter one, we saw that the literature seems to allow for the product of rational intuition as part of one's relevant evidence. Accordingly, it is not clear that the same evidence condition fails to obtain. Now this is not to say that it does obtain. Rather, this is just to say that it is not clear as to whether it obtains or not. Yet if it is unclear, then this consideration also fails to establish that the disagreement about disagreement is not a peer

disagreement after full disclosure in light of the same evidence condition failing to obtain.

However, there is still a remaining prong of King's attack on the prevalence of peerhood. And as we will see, it is this prong of King's argument that seems to have a better chance at being used to defuse the Equal Weight View's charge of self-defeat.

According to this third prong of King's argument, we should expect it to be rare that the acknowledgement condition of a peer disagreement after full disclosure is met. King supports this claim by appealing to his previous considerations that show the complexity of reliability and the difficulty of acquiring the same evidence.<sup>65</sup> And while modifying King's previous arguments does not clearly show that the target conditions do not obtain, a modified version of this argument seems to succeed in the case of the acknowledgement condition.

As we saw in the explanation of the second prong of King's argument, the reliability of an individual with respect to a given proposition can be a rather complex matter. In light of this complexity, King argues that in order for one to have good reason for thinking that the other individual is just as reliable as oneself, one must have good reason to think that the various factors related to the dissenter's reliability are on par with one's own. As King notes, the most straightforward way that one can have such a reason is to have access to each party's track records. However, in most cases of disagreement individuals do not have access to track records that they can appeal to. Consequently, in most cases individuals will have good reason to believe that the other party is just as reliable as one's own only if they have good reason for thinking that their relevant skills are on par with one another without a track record. King claims that given

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<sup>65</sup> King, "Disagreement: What's the Problem?," 261-63.

these circumstances, it is not unreasonable to think that in a wide range of cases individuals do not have good reason to regard one's dissenter as equally reliable.<sup>66</sup>

Even though the actual target of this argument is the claim that in a wide range of cases individuals have good reason to regard one's dissenter as having the exact same degree of reliability as oneself, it can also be used against the looser condition that is relevant to the Equal Weight View. As we mentioned previously, even though the relevant parties to the disagreement have had similar training and experience, it is not at all clear that this is sufficient for establishing that they are roughly equal in philosophical reliability. After all, we not only lack a solid track record to properly examine the relationship between training and reliability but also a solid way of measuring the relevant intellectual virtues and evaluative skills related to philosophical problems. Consequently, it is hard to see how the parties to the dispute over the Equal Weight View have acquired a good reason to regard the dissenting parties as being roughly equal with respect to philosophical reliability.

Moreover, we also saw that the unclarity related to the equal reliability condition also affects the clarity of whether the same evidence condition obtains. For it becomes unclear as to whether the subset of the two parties' body of evidence consisting of their rational intuitions can be said to be comparable if we (the two parties included) cannot determine whether their faculties of rational intuition are more or less equally reliable. Thus, it seems that neither party to the disagreement has a good reason for holding that the same evidence condition obtains in the disagreement about disagreement. But if it seems that neither party has a good reason for holding that the equal reliability condition and the same evidence obtain, then it seems that the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 263.

acknowledgment condition fails to obtain in the disagreement about disagreement. And this is just to say it seems that the disagreement about disagreement is not a peer disagreement after full disclosure.

However, this is not itself sufficient for offering a satisfactory defense of the Equal Weight View from the charge of self-defeat. There is still the question of whether this modified version of the third prong of King's argument can be used as a defense against the charge of self-defeat for a consistent version of the Equal Weight View. What makes the Equal Weight View so appealing is the underlying motivation that where there is a case of apparent epistemic symmetry between incompatible opinions as there is in a typical peer disagreement, one ought to treat these opinions equally on pain of begging the question. After all, as we saw in chapter one, *Mental Math* and *Disagreeing Thermometers* seem to call for the Equal Weight View's Strong Conciliatory verdict due to the symmetry of one's evidence about how likely each party is to get things right. And not strongly conciliating in such a case seems to result in begging the question in one's favor according to the motivations of Strong Conciliatory views in general. However, it seems that the modified version of the third prong of King's argument still leaves room for a type of epistemic symmetry between the two opinions. In particular, it seems to leave intact the symmetry of one's justified prior conditional probability not clearly favoring one party over the other. Consequently, one may wonder whether these motivations for strongly conciliating in *Mental Math* and *Disagreeing Thermometers* also call for one to strongly conciliate in the face of the type of symmetry found in the disagreement about disagreement. If it does, then this response to the charge of self-defeat finds itself stuck with the same problem Elga's and Bogardus' solutions face: the problem of only being a solution for an unmotivated view. And as we mentioned earlier, such a version of the Equal Weight View would not be a viable response to

our question of the epistemology of disagreement. However, in comparison to Elga's and Bogardus' solutions, I think that we have a better chance of discovering that adopting a modified version of King's argument is not actually inconsistent with the typical Strong Conciliatory motivations.

## 2.5 Conclusion

As we can see, there are multiple considerations in the literature that one may try and use to defuse the charge that the Equal Weight View is self-defeating. However, we have also seen that each of the above considerations is insufficient for satisfactorily defusing the charge as they currently stand. First, we examined Elga's attempt to defuse the charge of self-defeat by appealing to a general constraint of consistency. And while this appeal was sufficient for defusing a charge of self-defeat, we saw that it fails to offer a well motivated version of the Equal Weight View. Then, we examined Bogardus' attempt to vindicate the view by arguing that one's seeming that the Equal Weight View is true allows for a non-question begging line of reasoning that shows that the dissenter is not acting as one's effective peer. However, we saw that once one is in a case of peer disagreement after full disclosure, one's use of this line of reasoning is no longer non-question begging without a further body of independent evidence. But Bogardus does not argue that one needs this independent body of evidence. Accordingly, we saw that Bogardus' attempt to defuse the charge of self-defeat also falls short of providing us with a response that is consistent with the typical motivations for the Equal Weight View.

However, we saw that a modified version of King's attack on the acknowledgement condition has the potential for offering us a response that avoids the problem the above two solutions face. If the third prong of King's argument is modified to target the relevant condition



of having a good reason to regard one's dissenter as more or less equally reliable and informed, then we have a satisfactory argument against the claim that the disagreement about how to disagree is a peer disagreement. In turn, it would show that the charge of self-defeat as it has been originally formulated rests on a mistaken premise. And even though the question remains as to whether adopting this defense can be consistent with the typical motivations for the Equal Weight View, I think there is some logical space available for addressing this question. It just needs to be shown that there is a sufficient distinction between the types of symmetry involved in typical peer disagreements after full disclosure and the disagreement about how to disagree. If there is such a distinction, then there can be room for holding that one type of symmetry calls for strong conciliation while the other does not. In the following chapter I will attempt to draw such a distinction in an attempt to show that the view needn't be dismissed from the list of viable views about disagreement on the grounds that it is self-defeating.

## Chapter 3

### Introduction

Our examination of the charge that the Equal Weight View is self-defeating has revealed that it rests on an assumption that proponents of the Equal Weight View needn't grant: that the disagreement about how to disagree is a peer disagreement after full disclosure. For we have seen that the condition of having a good reason to regard the other party as being more or less equally informed and reliable as one's self does not seem to obtain. However, at the end of our examination, we also saw that rejecting the assumption that disagreement over how to disagree is a peer disagreement after full disclosure may not be sufficient for defusing a different worry about the view. In particular, we saw that one may worry that an adoption of the previous chapter's argument as a response to the charge of self-defeat is not compatible with the typical motivations that are thought to underlie the Equal Weight View. After all, it still seems to be the case that in the disagreement about disagreement the proponent of the Equal Weight View does not have an independent reason for thinking that he or she is more likely to be right than the dissenting party. And in light of this deficiency in one's independent reasons, it's not obvious that the Equal Weight View can avoid prescribing splitting the difference while remaining consistent with its typical underlying motivations. If this worry is not defusable, then an adoption of the previous chapter's argument would not leave us with a version of the Equal Weight View that is a viable answer to our question of the epistemology of disagreement. Accordingly, the focus of this chapter is to show how a version of the Equal Weight View can adopt the previous chapter's argument to defuse the charge of self-defeat and remain consistent with typical Strong Conciliatory motivations.

In the first section, I return to the typical cases that have been thought to support the Equal Weight View's verdict of attributing equal weight and splitting the difference. By returning to these examples, I will show what type of epistemic symmetry between the two parties involved in the cases that are thought to support the Equal Weight View. In the second section, I turn to the type of epistemic symmetry between the parties to the disagreement about disagreement that the argument of chapter two has left intact. In particular, I show that this type of symmetry differs from the symmetry that is involved in the cases that are typically thought to motivate the Equal Weight View's strong conciliatory prescription. In the third section, I argue that restrictions of motivational consistency needn't tie the Equal Weight View's commitment to a Strong Conciliatory prescription in cases of peer disagreement to a commitment to this same Strong Conciliatory prescription in the actual disagreement about disagreement. In sections four through seven, I address potential objections to this defense of the Equal Weight View from the charge of self-defeat. In particular, I address the worries about whether the argument of section three rests on appealing to an *ad-hoc* consideration, whether accepting this defense ultimately turns this version of the Equal Weight View into Kelly's Total Evidence View, whether the view faces a weaker self-undermining problem, and whether the view still faces an unresolved charge of self-defeat. In section eight, I discuss where this analysis leaves the Equal Weight View in relation to the charge of self-defeat. And lastly, in section nine, I explain a few important considerations outside the view's relation to the charge of self-defeat that this analysis has shed light on.

### 3.1 The Symmetry of Pro-Equal Weight View Cases

Some of the common examples that have been thought to support the Equal Weight View's Strong Conciliatory prescription have been the cases of Mental Math and Disagreeing

Thermometers. In each of these cases, we can see that there is a specific type of epistemic symmetry between the two parties. In particular, there is a relation of symmetry such that prior to learning of a disagreement, each party ought to hold that the other party is equally likely to get things right.

**Mental Math:** Suppose that five of us go to dinner. It's time to pay the check, so the question we're interested in is how much we each owe. We can all see the bill total clearly, we all agree to give a 20 percent tip, and we further agree to split the whole cost evenly, not worrying over who asked for imported water, or skipped dessert, or drank more of the wine. I do the math in my head and become highly confident that our shares are \$43 each. Meanwhile, my friend does the math in her head and becomes highly confident that our shares are \$45 each. Let us suppose further that my friend and I have a long history of eating out together and dividing the check in our heads, and that we've been equally successful in our arithmetic efforts: the vast majority of times, we agree; but when we disagree, she's right as often as I am. So for the sort of epistemic endeavor under consideration, we are clearly peers. Suppose further that there is no special reason to think one of us particularly dull or sharp this evening—neither is especially tired or energetic, and neither has had significantly more wine or coffee. And suppose that I didn't feel more or less confident than usual in this particular calculation, and my friend reports that she didn't either (Christensen, 2007: 193).

In this example, the conditions are set up to clearly show that with regard to the relevant task at hand both parties are clearly peers. And this is just to say that it is clearly the case that both parties are (roughly) equivalent in terms of the relevant factors related to performing the task correctly (e.g. intelligence, ability to follow basic principles of addition and division, etc...).

More simply, they are more or less just as epistemically qualified for the task as the other. Christensen (2007) even notes that the two parties have a long history of going out to dinner and splitting up the check in their heads, which has given them a track record of being correct as often as the other party when there is a disagreement. This not only clearly establishes the condition of equal reliability but also the condition of having a good reason to think that the equal reliability condition obtains. Moreover, both parties lack an independent reason for thinking that the other party is not acting as one's peer at the time of the dispute. Consequently, in the case of Mental Math, both parties have a good reason for holding that prior to the disagreement, they are both more or less just as likely to get things right.

**Disagreeing Thermometers:** You and I are each attempting to determine the current temperature by consulting our own personal thermometers. In the past, the two thermometers have been equally reliable. At time  $t_0$ , I consult my thermometer, find that it reads '68 degrees', and so immediately take up the corresponding belief. Meanwhile, you consult your thermometer, find that it reads '72 degrees', and so immediately take up that belief. At time  $t_1$ , you and I compare notes and discover that our thermometers have disagreed. How, if at all, should we revise our original opinions about the temperature in light of this new information? (Kelly 2010: 114).

Although in the case of Disagreeing Thermometers the thermometers are not strictly speaking epistemic peers, there is still the same effective symmetry between the two individuals using the thermometers. The two thermometers are thought to be analogous to the cognitive processes in Mental Math of adding up the total amount of the bill and dividing it up evenly amongst the five group members. For it is the thermometer's temperature reading that one is basing one's opinion about the temperature on, just as it is through one's mental math that one

comes to one's opinion about the amount each of the five members owe. Moreover, the two thermometers have a history of being just as reliable as the other, which provides the same type of symmetry that the track record provides in Mental Math. And given that neither party has another method for measuring the temperatures or a way of distinguishing the malfunctioning thermometer from the non-malfunctioning one, both parties lack an independent reason for thinking that the other party's opinion is the result of a malfunctioning thermometer.

Accordingly, just as each party in Mental Math had good reasons prior to the disagreement for regarding the other party as more or less just as likely to be right, each party in Disagreeing Thermometers also has good reasons prior to the disagreement for thinking that the other party's opinion is more or less just as likely to be right.

What we have in each of these examples is a case of epistemic symmetry between the higher-order reasons that one has for how likely each party is to get things right. These higher-order reasons for thinking that oneself is likely to get things right are more or less just as strong as one's higher-order reasons for thinking that the other party is likely to get things right. Specifically, they are such that one ought to hold, prior to the disagreement, that each party is more or less equally likely to get things right. However, it's important to also note that the way in which this symmetry occurs in the cases of Mental Math and Disagreeing Thermometers. It is not merely a case of the two sets of higher-order reasons being more or less equally strong in the sense of being more or less equally weak from a lack of information. Rather, they are equally strong as a result of being two sets of positive reasons that support the proposition that *Party 1 is likely to be right to degree  $x$*  and the proposition that *Party 2 is likely to be right to degree  $x$*  to roughly the same degree. After all, in both cases they not only have acquired enough information to access the relevant track records, but such track records reveal that they are both equal in

reliability.<sup>67</sup> It is this particular type of epistemic symmetry between one's positive higher-order reasons that motivates calling for the prescription to attribute equal weight and split the difference between the two opinions in these cases, which I'll hereafter be referring to as 'positive epistemic symmetry'. And when this type of positive epistemic symmetry holds between the higher-order reasons one has for the above two propositions, I'll be referring to it as a case of 'initial positive epistemic symmetry'.

Once one is in this epistemic position of initial positive epistemic symmetry, learning of a disagreement after full disclosure itself does not seem to provide one with further evidence that would break the appearance of positive epistemic symmetry. This could only occur once there is an asymmetrical independent body of evidence suggesting otherwise. After all, if we recall from chapter one, favoring one's own opinion once one holds a justified prior conditional probability that each party is more or less just as likely to get things right (i.e. a case of initial positive epistemic symmetry holds) seems to result in begging the question in one's own favor, absent an asymmetrical independent consideration. And in order to avoid begging the question, it seems intuitive to screen off the reasons one acquires from using one's own method for coming to one's opinion. Once one screens off these original reasons, one's total body of evidence relevant to one's belief ends up consisting of the following reasons.

- i) One's initial reasons for holding that the two parties are more or less equally likely to come to the correct opinion.

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<sup>67</sup> It's important to note that this is not to say that the only way one can acquire a good, positive reason for holding that the equal reliability condition obtains is by access to a track record. Rather, this is just an exemplary way of acquiring such a reason. Accordingly, the positivity of one's reasons for holding that the equal reliability condition obtains seems to be a matter of degree. However, we will not address how this relates to a formulation of the Equal Weight View until the final section. Until then, we will understand 'positive reasons' as referring to positive reasons in the sense of being strongly positive.

Consequently, respecting one's total evidence in such a case seems to require following the Strong Conciliatory verdict of the Equal Weight View.

As we can see, the positive epistemic symmetry found in the cases of Mental Math and Disagreeing Thermometers prior to learning of the disagreement seems to result in positive epistemic symmetry between the following sets of higher-order reasons after learning of the disagreement.

R1) The reasons one has for thinking that one's own method of coming to one's opinion is mistaken.

and

R2) The reasons one has for thinking that one's own method of coming to one's opinion is not mistaken.

(Hereafter, when this type of symmetry holds between these higher-order reasons, I'll be referring to it as 'positive epistemic symmetry after full disclosure'.) And it is in light of this positive epistemic symmetry after full disclosure that motivates the intuitive verdict that the parties to the disagreements in Mental Math and Disagreeing Thermometers ought to attribute equal weight to each opinion and split the difference. This intuition about Mental Math and Disagreeing Thermometers is then thought to support the Equal Weight View's verdict about what one ought to do in cases of peer disagreement in light of the occurrence of initial positive epistemic symmetry in cases of peer disagreements.

In a case of a typical peer disagreement after full disclosure there is positive epistemic symmetry between the higher-order reasons one has in favor of the proposition that *one's self is*



*likely to be right to degree x* and the higher-order reasons one has in favor of the proposition that *one's peer is likely to be right to degree x* prior to the disagreement.<sup>68</sup> As we saw in chapter one, the very conditions of being epistemic peers are such that the two individuals are more or less equally disposed to get things right within the domain of peerhood. And a further condition of being a peer disagreement after full disclosure is that prior to learning of the disagreement the two parties have a good reason to think that this relation of peerhood obtains. Consequently, there will be an instance of initial positive epistemic symmetry in typical cases of peer disagreements after full disclosure. It would only be otherwise if there were an independent consideration that favored one party over the other (e.g. that one of the two parties is not trying to get things right, is tired, drunk, etc...). But as we saw in the above examples, once this initial positive epistemic symmetry is in place, one is in an epistemic position where one is required to regard both parties as just as likely to be mistaken in a case of disagreement, unless one has an independent consideration. Consequently, upon learning of being a party to a peer disagreement after full disclosure, one's total evidence relevant to one's belief ends up consisting of (i) as it does in *Mental Math* and *Disagreeing Thermometers*, absent an independent asymmetrical consideration. Thus, for reasons analogous to those in the two examples, the initial positive epistemic symmetry found in a peer disagreement after full disclosure seems to require one to attribute equal weight to each opinion and split the difference, absent an independent asymmetrical consideration.

Accordingly, we can now see that what makes *Mental Math* and *Disagreeing Thermometers* a source of motivational support for the Equal Weight View's verdict about peer

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<sup>68</sup> It's important to note that 'x' needn't be a specific probability, such as 0.7 or 0.8. Since the standard of the equal reliability condition is one that is rough, this allows for 'x' to refer to probabilities that are somewhat vague, such as roughly 0.7 or roughly 0.8.

disagreement after full disclosure is the initial positive epistemic symmetry found in both cases. In particular, we can see that it is the instance of initial positive epistemic symmetry without an independent consideration that puts one in an epistemic position of having a good reason for thinking that one's own reasoning is just as likely to have gone wrong as the peer's reasoning. And it is from being in this epistemic position that one is epistemically required to give each opinion equal weight and split the difference. With this in mind, let us now turn to an examination of the type of epistemic symmetry that holds between one's reasons in the disagreement about disagreement.

### 3.2 The Symmetry of the Actual Disagreement about Disagreement

According to the proposed defense of chapter two, in the actual case of disagreement about disagreement the condition of having a good reason to regard the other party as more or less equally reliable and informed fails to obtain. For with respect to the domain of philosophy, it is not at all clear how one can acquire sufficient information to justify a belief that two parties are more or less equally reliable and possess comparable bodies of evidence. It is in light of this deficiency in information that neither party to the disagreement is in a position prior to the disagreement to properly hold that the two parties are more or less equally likely to get things right. If one did hold that each party is more or less just as likely to get things right, then one is acting as if one possesses information that one does not have.

There are numerous incompatible hypotheses that are compatible with one's information about the reliability of each party. For one's information is not just compatible with the broader hypotheses that "Party1 is just as likely to be right as Party2," "Party 1 is more likely to be right than Party2," and "Party1 is less likely to be right than Party2." It is also compatible with

numerous other hypotheses that are more specific since reliability comes in degrees. And if one holds that each party is more or less just as likely to be right, then one would be acting as if one has a reason for favoring that particular hypothesis over the many alternative hypotheses.<sup>69</sup> But the information that the parties to the disagreement have is not specific enough to provide one with a reason that specifically favors that hypothesis over the incompatible alternatives. After all, it is not at all clear how we ought to go about measuring reliability in the domain of philosophy. Not only is it unclear what list of intellectual characteristics we should take into consideration, but it is not clear how we should even go about quantifying them. There is also still the issue of figuring out how each of these virtues measure up against one another. Until these issues are clarified or one has access to a useful track record, the information related to philosophical reliability will remain unclear. And it is the very nature of vague or unclear information that it does not provide one with reasons that specifically favor one hypothesis over alternative hypotheses.<sup>70</sup> Thus, holding that each party is more or less just as likely to get things right would be an improper response to the unspecific evidence that one has. Consequently, the initial positive epistemic symmetry that is found in the cases of Mental Math, Disagreeing Thermometers, and typical peer disagreements after full disclosure does not obtain in the current disagreement over disagreement.

However, it's important to note that this is not to say that there is not another type of epistemic symmetry prior to the disagreement. For it is not the case that the two parties have a good reason for holding that they are not more or less equally reliable. Making this claim would be to fall into the same mistake of favoring one hypothesis over incompatible alternatives on the

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<sup>69</sup> Joyce, "How Probabilities Reflect Evidence," 167-171.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

basis of unspecific information. And it is in light of this latter fact that there still remains a type of epistemic symmetry in the actual case of disagreement about disagreement. In particular, there is the type of epistemic symmetry that obtains as a result of one lacking a higher-order reason that specifically supports the proposition that *Party1 is more likely to be right than Party2*, the proposition that *Party 1 and Party 2 are equally likely to be right*, or the proposition that *Party2 is more likely to be right than Party1*. (Hereafter, I'll be referring to instances of this type of epistemic symmetry between one's higher-order reasons about the above propositions as instances of 'initial unspecific epistemic symmetry'). And as we will see, this difference in the initial epistemic symmetry that occurs prior to the disagreement affects the epistemic position that one is in after one learns of being party to the disagreement.

By starting off in an epistemic position where one lacks specific information about the likelihood of each party getting things right, learning of the dispute does not provide one with specific information about who the mistaken party in this instance is likely to be. For one's information about who is more likely to get things right, or even if one party is more likely to be right, fails to provide one with specific reasons that favor one hypothesis over the others. It would only be otherwise if one acquired some further independent information that specifically favored the hypothesis that one party is more likely to be right than other or the hypothesis that both parties are just as likely to be right. And this is just to say that if one is in an epistemic position of initial unspecific epistemic symmetry, awareness of a disagreement itself does not provide specific information about who is more likely to be the mistaken party. For instance, consider the modified version of Christensen's (2007) Mental Math where one's initial epistemic position contains initial unspecific epistemic symmetry instead of initial positive epistemic symmetry.

**Mental Math\***: Suppose that five of us go to dinner. It's time to pay the check, so the question we're interested in is how much we each owe. We can all see the bill total clearly, we all agree to give a 20 percent tip, and we further agree to split the whole cost evenly, not worrying over who asked for imported water, or skipped dessert, or drank more of the wine. I do the math in my head and become highly confident that our shares are \$43 each. Meanwhile, my friend does the math in her head and becomes highly confident that our shares are \$45 each. Let us suppose that my friend and I have a long history of eating out together and dividing up the check in our heads, but we cannot recall how we measure up in cases where we disagree. So for the sort of epistemic endeavor under consideration, my friend and I are not, strictly speaking, epistemic peers. Suppose further that there is no special reason to think one of us particularly dull or sharp this evening—neither is especially tired or energetic, and neither has had significantly more wine or coffee. And suppose that I didn't feel more or less confident than usual in this particular calculation, and my friend reports that she didn't either.

In *Mental Math\**, the mere fact that I learn of my friend's dissenting opinion does provide me with some information. However, it does not provide me with anything specific about who is more likely to have made a mental calculation error or asserted a mistaken opinion. For on the one hand, learning of the disagreement does provide me with the information that one of us is asserting a mistaken opinion about the amount each individual owes. But unlike in *Mental Math*, I do not have any specific information about which one of us is more likely to be the mistaken party, or even if one of us is more likely to be the mistaken party. Accordingly, it seems that the shift in the type of initial symmetry in the case of *Mental Math* to the initial symmetry in *Mental Math\** results in a shift in the epistemic symmetry of one's epistemic

position after learning of being party to the disagreement. In particular, it results in a shift from one's higher-order reasons about the likelihood of each party being the mistaken party bearing a relation of positive epistemic symmetry to bearing a relation of unspecific epistemic symmetry. (Hereafter, I'll be referring to cases where unspecific epistemic symmetry occurs between these types of reasons as instances of 'unspecific epistemic symmetry after full disclosure'.)

However, if one's higher-order reasons about the likelihood of either party being the mistaken party bear a relation of unspecific epistemic symmetry to one another, then they do not properly support the claim that one ought to attribute equal weight to each opinion. For attributing equal weight would amount to favoring the hypothesis that both parties are more or less just as likely to be mistaken in this instance. And as we saw earlier, unspecific reasons do not favor one hypothesis more than its alternatives. Accordingly, attributing equal weight to each opinion in *Mental Math\** in light of this unspecific epistemic symmetry after full disclosure would amount to acting as if one has evidence that one does not. Instead, it seems that this unspecific epistemic symmetry makes it vague as to what weight one ought to attribute to each opinion.

Moreover, this shift is analogous to the shift in initial epistemic symmetry from the case of a peer disagreement after full disclosure to the actual disagreement about disagreement. Accordingly, we can see that there should also be a shift in the type of epistemic symmetry of one's epistemic position once one learns of being party to the disagreement. In particular, we can see that there should be a shift from being in an epistemic position containing positive epistemic symmetry after full disclosure to one containing unspecific epistemic symmetry after full disclosure. And as just stated, an epistemic position containing unspecific epistemic symmetry after full disclosure does not support the prescription to attribute equal weight to each opinion.

Instead, one's epistemic position contains reasons that are vague about what weight one ought to attribute to each opinion. Consequently, the actual disagreement about disagreement does not just differ from peer disagreements after full disclosure in light of the difference in the type of initial epistemic symmetry. It also differs in light of the difference in the type of epistemic position one is in after learning of being party to the disagreement. Moreover, this difference results in the fact that awareness of the disagreement about disagreement does not provide one with a reason for attributing equal weight to each opinion as it does in a peer disagreement where one lacks an independent asymmetrical consideration.

With these distinctions in mind, we are now in a better position for evaluating our worry about the defense put forth in chapter two. In particular, we can now see that the worry comes down to the following question. Is a version of the Equal Weight View that enjoys its typical motivations committed to the prescription that one ought to screen off the reasons behind one's original opinion in light of the unspecific epistemic symmetry between one's reasons in the disagreement about disagreement? If such a version of the Equal Weight View is committed to this prescription, then it would be committed to the further claim that one's total body of evidence relevant to one's belief about the Equal Weight View consists of the following.

HoE\*: One's higher-order reasons about the likelihood of each party coming to the correct opinion, which bear a relation of initial unspecific epistemic symmetry to one another.

But HoE\* does not justify a belief that the Equal Weight View is true. Thus, that version of the Equal Weight View would find itself committed to the problematic claim that one's epistemic position about the truth of the Equal Weight View is such that it does not justify the belief that

the Equal Weight View is true. Accordingly, let us now turn to the different ways that one can motivate screening off one's original reasons in light of the positive epistemic symmetry to see if a version of the Equal Weight View can avoid this self-defeating consequence.

### 3.3 Ambitious and Modest Motivations for the Equal Weight View

There are two ways of motivating a move from the type of positive epistemic symmetry that occurs in the cases of Mental Math, Disagreeing Thermometers, and typical peer disagreements to the Strong Conciliatory prescription of the Equal Weight View. On the one hand, there's the way of tying these together in light of motivations which I'll be referring to as 'Ambitious motivations'. While on the other hand, there's the way of tying these together in light of motivations which I'll be referring to as 'Modest motivations'. And we will soon see that while a version of the Equal Weight View that rest on Ambitious motivations will result in a further commitment to screening off the original reasons in the disagreement about disagreement, a version resting on a form of Modest motivations will not.

According to Ambitious motivations, if one has higher-order evidence that fails to justify the belief that *p* is more likely to be right than wrong, then one ought to suspend judgment about *p*. And in light of this suspension of judgment, one ought to screen off one's original reasons pertaining to *p* as no longer being good reasons for holding that *p*. Accordingly, a version of the Equal Weight View that rests on Ambitious motivations will be committed to the following line of reasoning. One ought to suspend judgment about which party's opinion is correct in a typical peer disagreement, since the occurrence of initial positive epistemic symmetry leads to positive epistemic symmetry after full disclosure. After all, due to there being a case of positive epistemic symmetry after full disclosure, one lacks a higher-order reason for thinking that one's opinion is



more likely to be the correct one than the mistaken one. And it is in light of this deficiency in one's higher-order evidence that one ought to suspend judgment about whether one's opinion is the correct one and screen off the prior reasons for one's belief as no longer being good reasons for that belief. However, if the Equal Weight View is grounded on these motivations, then it will also be required on pain of inconsistency to prescribe that one suspend judgment about the Equal Weight View and screen off one's prior reasons for holding the belief as no longer being good reasons for that belief.

Even though the type of epistemic symmetry after full disclosure that obtains between one's higher-order evidence in the disagreement about disagreement differs from the type that occurs in a typical peer disagreement, it still fails to escape the reach of Ambitious motivations. For the acquired higher-order evidence in this case still has the characteristic of failing to provide one with a reason that justifies holding a belief that one's first-order belief is more likely to be right than wrong. And it is in light of one's body of higher-order evidence possessing this characteristic that Ambitious motivations call for suspending judgment about whether one's belief is true and screening off the prior reasons pertaining to one's belief as no longer being good reasons for that belief.

Thus, a consistent version of the Equal Weight View that rests on Ambitious motivations will find itself committed to the claim that one's total body of evidence pertaining to one's belief about the Equal Weight View consists of HoE\*. And as we mentioned earlier, if one's relevant evidence is exhausted by HoE\*, then this version of the view will find itself committed to the problematic claim that one's evidence does not justify the belief that the Equal Weight View is true. Thus, even if this version of the view appealed to the defense put forth in chapter two, it is still vulnerable to a different, yet equally problematic charge of self-defeat. However, as we

mentioned at the beginning of this section, this is not the only available motivational ground for the view to rest on.

Another way of motivating the prescription to screen off one's original reasons in light of the positive epistemic symmetry found in *Mental Math*, *Disagreeing Thermometers*, and typical peer disagreements is to appeal to Modest motivations. According to Modest motivations, if one's higher-order evidence fails to justify the belief that one's belief that *p* is more likely to be right than wrong, then one is not necessarily required to suspend judgment about one's belief that *p*. However, if one's higher-order evidence justifies the belief that one's belief that *p* is more or less just as likely to be wrong as it is to be right, then one ought to suspend judgment about *p*. And in light of this suspension of judgment, one ought to screen off one's original reasons pertaining to *p* as no longer being good reasons for holding that *p*.<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, a version of the Equal Weight View that rests on a form of Modest motivations will be committed to the following line of reasoning with regard to peer disagreements. When one learns of being party to a peer disagreement, one ought to suspend judgment about which party's opinion is correct when the initial positive epistemic symmetry becomes positive epistemic symmetry after full disclosure. For when there is a case of positive epistemic symmetry after full disclosure, one's higher-order evidence justifies the belief that one's own opinion that *p* is just as likely to be the mistaken opinion as it is to be the correct opinion. And in light of this higher-order evidence, one

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<sup>71</sup> Due to the open ended nature of Modest motivations' rejection of Ambitious motivations, it should not be understood as a single position. For there are various, incompatible epistemic principles that could still meet the above definition of Modest motivations. In fact, both prescribing steadfast and weak conciliatory verdicts for cases of unspecific symmetry are compatible with the above definition of Modest motivations. Accordingly, it should be understood as a family of views that have the commonality of rejecting Ambitious motivations, but maintaining that when there is positive epistemic symmetry after full disclosure, one ought to screen off one's first order evidence, attribute equal weight, and split the difference.

ought to suspend judgment about whether one's opinion that p is true and screen off one's prior evidence pertaining to p as no longer being good evidence for p.

However, unlike a version resting on Ambitious motivations, constraints of consistency needn't require that a Modest version of the Equal Weight View prescribe that one should screens off one's original body of evidence in the disagreement about disagreement. The awareness of being party to the disagreement about disagreement does not provide one with higher-order evidence that justifies the belief that one's opinion is more or less just as likely to be the mistaken opinion as it is to be the correct opinion. The higher-order evidence that one acquires in this case provides one with reasons bearing a relation of unspecific epistemic symmetry after full disclosure. And as we saw earlier, reasons bearing a relation of unspecific epistemic symmetry after full disclosure do not provide one with a reason that justifies favoring the hypothesis that both parties are just as likely to be the mistaken party over the alternative hypotheses.

Accordingly, unlike the version of the view that rests on Ambitious motivations, a version of the view that rests on modest motivations needn't be required by constraints of consistency to hold that one's total evidence pertaining to a Modest version of Equal Weight View consists of HoE\*. Instead, there is room for a consistent version of the view resting on Modest motivations to hold that one's total evidence pertaining to one's belief about a Modest version of the Equal Weight View consists of the following.

- i) One's higher-order reasons about the likelihood of each party coming to the correct opinion, which bear a relation of unspecific epistemic symmetry.

and

- ii) One's first-order reasons pertaining to a Modest version of the Equal Weight View.

Unlike the problematic commitment of holding that one's total evidence pertaining to one's belief about the view consists of HoE\*, this claim about one's evidence needn't result in a commitment to the claim that one's total evidence pertaining to one's belief about the view fails to justify a belief that the view is true. For there is room within Modest motivations to hold that if it is the case that (ii) is strong enough for one's total evidence to maintain a balance in favor of the a Modest Equal Weight View despite (i), then one's total body of relevant evidence still justifies the belief that the Modest Equal Weight View is true.<sup>72</sup>

However, before we look further at this particular issue, let us turn our attention back to our examination of Ambitious vs. Modest motivations. In particular, let us first examine whether Modest motivations are even motivational grounds that one ought to pick over Ambitious grounds, independent of the goal of avoiding the charge of self-defeat. For if it turns out that we ought to accept Ambitious motivations instead of a form of Modest motivations, the appeal to Modest motivations seems to be in danger of being an *ad hoc* response to the charge of self-defeat. Accordingly, let us now turn to some considerations in favor of Modest motivations.

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<sup>72</sup> One may notice the shift from referring to the defended view as the 'Equal Weight View' to referring to it as a 'Modest Equal Weight View' or a 'Modest version of the Equal Weight View' and wonder whether this is still a defense of the same view that was discussed in the previous chapters. And while it is true that the view I am attempting to defend cannot be classified as a Strong Conciliatory view in a robust sense (i.e. prescribing strong conciliation for a great many kinds of disagreements), there is no reason it cannot be seen as a form of the same view discussed in the previous chapters. For as chapter one defended the view, it is a response to a specific question, namely how to respond to *typical* peer disagreements after full disclosure. And a Modest version of the Equal Weight View is still committed to the claim that one ought to strongly conciliate in typical cases of peer disagreements, even though it needn't be committed to such a prescription for other kinds of disagreements.

### 3.4 The Plausibility of Modest Motivations

One useful way of assessing the epistemic merit of Modest motivations in comparison to Ambitious motivations is to examine a case where the two motivations prescribe different verdicts. However, it's important to note that we should not consider a case where one's original evidence pertaining to *p* is not particularly strong. If a case is set up in this way, then we run the risk of examining a case where there is room for a form of Modest motivations to prescribe the same verdict as Ambitious motivations. After all, Modest motivations can prescribe that one should abandon one's belief that *p* and the belief that one's original reasons are sufficient for justifying a belief that *p* if these original reasons are not strong enough to withstand the acquisition of unspecific higher-order evidence. Accordingly, I will be appealing to an instance where one's original body of evidence pertaining to *p* strongly supports *p* to minimize this risk. With this in mind, let us now consider the following thought experiment.

**DrugCo Volunteer.**<sup>73</sup> Sam has volunteered to be one of the participants in a demonstration for DrugCo at a science convention, where she will be demonstrating the effects of DrugCo's new product to the scientific community. DrugCo is known for its development of drugs with bizarre cognitive effects, such as one of their drugs that causes one to form an evidential connection between discovering that it is Monday and the belief that a black cat is eating out of one's garbage can. However, the bizarre effects of DrugCo's drugs have resulted in individuals posing as DrugCo scientists and falsely informing the participants at these demonstrations that the drug they are testing has a particular bizarre effect. However, no one has kept track of exactly how often such

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<sup>73</sup> This is a modification of Christensen's thought experiment involving a cognitive ability affecting pill and higher-order evidence. See Christensen (2010: 187).

pranks occur, such that participants do not have specific information about how likely it is that it is a prank if one is informed of being under a bizarre cognitive defect. As Sam is walking towards the area where the demonstration takes place at  $t_1$ , an individual who appears to be a DrugCo scientist asks Sam to consider whether the proposition that *two plus two equals four* is true. At  $t_2$ , Sam considers the proposition and comes to the conclusion that it is true in light of her understanding of the related concepts. However, upon her assertion that the proposition is true at  $t_3$ , the individual who appears to be a DrugCo scientist informs Sam that the drug she has taken distorts one's ability to do basic mathematics. Let us suppose even further that the individual tells her that the drug distorts her ability in such a way that even an attempt to form a basic mathematical belief on the basis of her memory or other background beliefs (e.g. that the intuitively obvious sense of her belief is an indicator of accurately grasping the concepts) will still result in an erroneous mathematical belief. In light of this new evidence at  $t_3$ , how, if at all, should Sam revise her belief about the truth of the proposition?

In this example, it seems clear that at  $t_3$  Sam ought to revise her belief to some extent. After all, at  $t_3$  she has at the very least acquired a further piece of evidence that calls for lowering her confidence in her belief. And so her total body of evidence that pertains to her belief about the proposition that *two plus two equals four* supports a weaker degree of confidence in her belief than it did prior to  $t_3$ .<sup>74</sup> However, it does not seem to be the case that she ought to revise her belief to the extent of suspending judgment and screening off her original evidence as following Ambitious motivations would require.

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<sup>74</sup> It is important to note that this is not claiming that the empirical evidence that she has gathered is evidence for or against the mathematical proposition itself. Rather, this is only claiming that the higher-order evidence she acquired at  $t_3$  is evidence relevant to her *belief* about the mathematical proposition.

In DrugCo Volunteer, Sam has acquired a reason for thinking that her mathematical reasoning *might* be such that it will lead her to a false conclusion. But, the unspecific nature of this acquired evidence prevents her from being in a position to tell whether this reason is a good reason for thinking that her mathematical reasoning is in fact defective. In other words, Sam has acquired higher-order evidence about the reasoning behind her belief held at  $t_2$ , but lacks the information needed to determine whether this higher-order evidence is itself an undermining defeater for her original reasoning. And it is because of this deficiency in Sam's information that it seems intuitive for her not to follow the prescription of Ambitious motivations. By following Ambitious motivations and screening off her mathematical reasoning as a justifier for her belief, Sam would be treating the acquired higher-order evidence as an undermining defeater for her reasoning. But, as we just stated, she lacks the information to determine that her higher-order evidence provides her with an undermining defeater.<sup>75</sup> After all, *ex hypothesi*, the higher-order evidence that she acquired is unspecific. Accordingly, it seems that following Ambitious motivations in DrugCo Volunteer would require one to act as if one has information that one does not. And this is just to say that following Ambitious motivations requires one to not respect the evidence that one actually has by overstepping it.

However, the problem of overstepping one's evidence in the case of DrugCo Volunteer is not a problem that a version of Modest motivations needs to face. According to Modest motivations, even though Sam's higher-order evidence does not provide her with a reason that provides sufficient justification for the belief that she is more likely to be right than wrong, it

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<sup>75</sup> It's important to keep in mind that an undermining defeater *removes* the evidential connection, rather than weakens it. Accordingly, I am not claiming that her higher-order evidence does not weaken the evidential connection between her original reasoning and her conclusion. Rather, I am only claiming that it does not remove the evidential connection. For more on undermining defeaters see (Kelly, 2008)

does not necessarily follow that Sam ought to screen off her original reasoning. For Modest motivations can hold that unless Sam's higher-order evidence justified the belief that she is more or less just as likely to be wrong as she is to be right, then it needn't be the case that she ought to screen off her original evidence. And that is not a belief that the higher-order evidence she has acquired at  $t_3$  justifies.

Accordingly, unlike Ambitious motivations, some forms of Modest motivations will not require Sam to act as if she has higher-order evidence that will defeat the relevant first-order evidence regardless of the strength of the first-order evidence. Instead, it seems that Modest motivations makes room for the claim that Sam's total body of evidence that pertains to her belief about the proposition that *two plus two equals four* to consist of

- i) Sam's unspecific evidence about the likelihood of an individual who informs her of the effect that the drug she has taken has on her is an actual DrugCo scientist,
- ii) Sam's unspecific evidence about the likelihood of her suffering from a cognitive malfunction and coming to the incorrect opinion about the truth of the relevant proposition as a result,

and

- iii) Sam's original evidence underlying her belief that the relevant proposition is true.

However, this is not to say that these forms of Modest motivation require Sam to maintain her belief with the same degree of confidence as she did prior to  $t_3$ . There is room for them to hold that the subset of unspecific evidence decreases the amount of confidence that her total body of evidence pertaining to her belief about the relevant proposition warrants, such that she ought to



decrease her confidence in her belief and become more open to being wrong at  $t_3$  than she was at  $t_2$ . Thus, following one of these forms of Modest motivations can allow for the verdict that Sam is justified in maintaining her belief at  $t_3$ , but that she ought to hold it with a lesser degree of confidence than she did at  $t_2$ . In other words, there can be a version of Modest motivations with prescriptions that fall between the verdict of Ambitious motivations and sticking to one's guns completely. And it is this type of verdict that seems to respect Sam's total body of evidence pertaining to her belief at  $t_3$ .

Now a proponent of Ambitious motivations may object that by not holding that she ought to screen off her first-order evidence, Sam is being permitted to beg the question about whether the individual in the DrugCo uniform was a prankster. However, this needn't be the case. If Sam is permitted to beg this question, then she would be permitted to retain the same degree of confidence in her belief at  $t_3$  as she did at  $t_2$ . And so by being permitted to beg the question, she would be permitted to regard the acquired body of evidence at  $t_3$  as not being a piece of evidence that ought to decrease the degree of confidence warranted by her total body of relevant evidence. After all, if Sam regarded the evidence she acquired at  $t_3$  as being evidence acquired from being told by a prankster that her mathematical reasoning is defective, then she would have no reason to regard it as a piece of evidence against her belief in the proposition. And in turn, she would have no reason to think that the degree of confidence that her total body of relevant evidence warrants has decreased. Thus, if Sam were permitted to beg the question, she would end up in a position where she would not have a reason to lower her degree of confidence at  $t_3$ . But this is not the line of reasoning that a form of Modest motivations needs to permit.

Modest motivations can hold that Sam is required to lower her degree of confidence in light of the acquired unspecific higher-order evidence. For instance, we saw earlier that a form of

Modest motivations can require her to do so in light of this acquired body of unspecific evidence reducing the degree of confidence warranted by her total body of evidence pertaining to her belief about the proposition. But this is something that would not occur if she were permitted to beg the question in her favor. Thus, it seems that instead of necessarily permitting Sam to beg the question, Modest motivations has room for options that falls somewhere between begging the question in her favor and screening off her original reasoning. Consequently, Modest motivations makes room for avoiding the problem of overstepping one's evidence in DrugCo Volunteer, whether it's overstepping one's evidence by treating the acquired higher-order evidence as an undermining defeater or as evidence that doesn't count against one's original belief. Now this is not to say that I have offered a knockdown argument as to why we ought to accept a form of Modest motivations over Ambitious motivations. But it does seem to provide us with some reason in favor of a form of Modest motivations that is independent of a desire to avoid the charge of self-defeat.

### 3.5 Does this Collapse a Modest Equal Weight View into Kelly's Total Evidence View?

However, one may still have a further worry about whether a form of Modest motivations is actually compatible with the Equal Weight View, even if the adoption of Modest motivations is not *ad-hoc*. After all, allowing for one's first-order body of evidence to still have epistemic input in the disagreement about disagreement sounds rather close to Kelly's (2010) claim that the epistemic input of both the first-order and higher-order evidence ought to play a role in shaping what one ought to believe. One may wonder if there is room to allow for one's first-order evidence to have this effect in the disagreement about disagreement, while still holding onto the heart of the Equal Weight View: that it cannot have this effect in typical peer disagreements after

full disclosure.<sup>76</sup> If there is not room for this task, then it would turn out that the logical space we have just carved out does not actually have room for a version of the Equal Weight View as a view distinct from Kelly's Total Evidence View. However, this is not something that a Modest Equal Weight View needs to worry about.

Even if a version of the Equal Weight View rests on a form of Modest motivations, it can still hold that one's body of first-order evidence does not have any epistemic input in a case of peer disagreement, provided that one lacks an independent consideration. For a form of Modest motivations needn't have anything to say about whether one's body of first-order evidence can have this epistemic effect on one's higher-order considerations. All that it needs to hold is that *when* one's higher-order considerations justify the belief that one is more or less just as likely to be right as one is to be wrong, one ought to screen off one's first-order body of evidence. But this does not need to include a commitment about whether one's first-order evidence can play a role in shaping what one's higher-order considerations justify in general.

Consequently, there is room for a view resting on Modest motivations to hold the following claims.

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<sup>76</sup> For those sympathetic to Kelly's (2010) characterization of the Equal Weight View, one may think that the issue here is not whether there is room for rejecting the epistemic input of one's body of first-order evidence in peer disagreements while leaving room for its input in other cases. Instead, one may think that the issue is how the Equal Weight View can maintain its commitment to the claim that one's higher-order evidence always overrides one's first-order evidence. However, this is not an accurate characterization of the view. The Equal Weight View, or at least as it has been put forth by Christensen (2011) and Elga (2007), is a view that is specifically about responding to peer disagreements after full disclosure. Thus, it is accurate to claim that the heart of the view is that the higher-order evidence always overrides the first-order evidence for *typical cases of peer disagreement after full disclosure*. But this claim needn't be extended to the view's take on higher-order evidence in other types of disagreements.

However, to be fair to Kelly, it is not clear that he is referring to a version of the Equal Weight View that is a response to the same question we are dealing with. He is not explicit about whether a peer disagreement requires that one has a good reason for thinking that the equal reliability condition obtains. And so he may be referring to a version of the Equal Weight View that is a response to a broader question than ours. See Kelly (2010): 112.

- i) When one's higher-order considerations justify the belief that one is more or less just as likely to be right as one is to be wrong, one ought to screen off one's first-order body of evidence,
- ii) When one is in an epistemic position of initial unspecific epistemic symmetry, one's body of first-order evidence can affect whether this initial unspecific symmetry will result in unspecific epistemic symmetry after full disclosure,

and

- iii) When one is in an epistemic position of initial positive epistemic symmetry, one's body of first-order evidence alone cannot affect whether this initial positive epistemic symmetry will result in positive epistemic symmetry after full disclosure. It can only do so if there is an independent, asymmetrical consideration.

Thus, resting the Equal Weight View on a form of Modest motivations needn't result in a view that collapses into Kelly's Total Evidence View; there is in fact room within the logical space that we have carved out for a Modest version of the Equal Weight View that is distinct from the Total Evidence View. However, before we come to a conclusion about where a Modest Equal Weight View stands in relation to the charge of self-defeat, let us first turn to the two concerns that were brought up earlier in our discussion, but were set aside.

### 3.6 A Weaker Charge of a Modest Equal Weight View as Self-Undermining

One issue that we passed over in chapter two was a concern that the Equal Weight View may find itself committed to the prescription that one should lower one's confidence that the view is true, even if this is not to the extent of abandoning one's belief in the view. And while

the original formulation of this concern relied on the disagreement about disagreement being a peer disagreement after full disclosure, we can easily see how the heart of the concern still applies. For it seems that a reasonable version of a Modest Equal Weight View will hold that the unspecific higher-order evidence pertaining to a Modest Equal Weight View weakens the degree of confidence warranted by one's total body of evidence pertaining to one's belief about the view. Accordingly, even if we grant that a Modest version of the Equal Weight View has the ability to defuse the charge of being self-defeating in a strong sense, it still seems to undermine itself in a weaker sense. However, this does not seem to be a special problem for a Modest Equal Weight View. In fact, being a view that does not undermine itself in this weaker sense would be the real problem.

For instance, consider the case of DrugCo Volunteer once more. In this case, the claim that Sam should not lower her confidence in her belief that "two plus two equals four" expresses a true proposition seems quite counterintuitive. The type of evidence that she acquires at  $t_3$  is evidence that weakens the degree of warranted confidence from her total body of evidence pertaining to her belief. After all, it's evidence that she might be wrong. And when one acquires undefeated evidence that one might be wrong about  $p$ , one ought to lower one's confidence in one's belief that  $p$ . However, this is the same type of evidence that one acquires upon finding out that one is party to the disagreement about disagreement. It's just the case that instead of this evidence pertaining to the fallibility of one's belief about whether two plus two equals four, it pertains to the fallibility of one's belief about how we ought to respond to disagreement. Thus, for analogous reasons, it seems quite counter intuitive to think that an epistemic hypothesis about disagreement gets a mark against it if it holds that one should lower one's confidence in one's

belief about disagreement when one is aware of being party to the disagreement about disagreement.

Instead, it seems that this is a consequence of being a view that is sensitive to the type of evidence one will obtain upon becoming aware of being party to the current disagreement about disagreement: something that is a virtue rather than a vice. Thus, while it may seem odd at first blush for a view to undermine itself in this weaker sense, we can see that it is actually even stranger for a view about disagreement *not* to undermine itself in this weaker sense. And this is just to say that this weaker concern of self-undermining is not actually a mark against a Modest Equal Weight View, but a mark in its favor. With this minor issue properly addressed, let us now turn to our final remaining issue.

### 3.7 The Remaining Worry about a Modest Equal Weight View and Self-Defeat

Earlier, it was established that there is room for a Modest version of the Equal Weight View to hold that one's total body of evidence pertaining to one's belief about the view consists of the following:

- i) One's higher-order reasons about the likelihood of each party coming to the correct opinion, which bears a relation of unspecific epistemic symmetry.
- ii) One's first-order reasons pertaining to a Modest Equal Weight View.

However, it was also held that such a version of the Equal Weight View would only permit one to hold a belief in the view if the support from (ii) was strong enough for one's total evidence to still justify a belief in the view after being combined with (i). In other words, whether the logical space that we have carved out is sufficient for saving a Modest Equal Weight View from self-

defeat comes down to the strength of the first-order body of evidence pertaining to a Modest Equal Weight View. Unfortunately, I do not have the space to take on the project of providing a full-fledged defense of the view by attempting to show that all of the relevant first-order evidence strongly supports the view when taken together as a total body of evidence. However, I do have room to explain why the charge of self-defeat is not as clearly a fatal blow to a Modest version of the Equal Weight View as it initially appeared to be in previous chapters once the charge of self-defeat comes down to the strength of the first-order body of evidence.

At the beginning of chapter two, it was stated that the charge of self-defeat was a particularly worrisome objection to the view since it was not an issue that one can simply bite the bullet on. After all, if one accepts that the view is self-defeating, then one cannot coherently hold that the view is true. However, if what we have shown is that the charge of self-defeat comes down to the strength of one's first-order body of evidence, then there is room for proponents of a Modest Equal Weight View to coherently hold the view as true. They just need to hold that the arguments relevant to a Modest version of the Equal Weight View strongly support the view. In particular, they must hold that it supports the view strongly enough such that one's total body of relevant evidence still supports the view after the acquisition of the higher-order evidence of (i).

While I do not have the space to fully show that this is in fact a justified move, there are arguments in the literature that attempt to show that the arguments relevant to the epistemology of disagreement strongly support the heart of any version of the Equal Weight View. And these arguments are quite plausible. After all, there does seem to be something to be said for the following general intuitive appeal behind the Equal Weight View and its arguments.

- i) A necessary principle of rationality is that one ought to treat like cases alike

- ii) The initial positive epistemic symmetry of a typical peer disagreement puts one in a position where, absent an independent consideration, one's epistemic position is such that the case for the claim that one's own opinion is the mistaken one and the case for the claim that the peer's opinion is the mistaken one appear to be alike.

And

- iii) This appearance of symmetry and a commitment to treating like cases alike requires attributing equal weight to each opinion and strongly conciliating.

Even if one does not think that this line of reasoning is correct, one should at least admit that it carries with it quite a bit of prima facie plausibility. And given that the first-order evidence relevant to the view does not clearly support the belief that Strong Conciliatory views are wrong, this prima facie plausibility provides us with an adequate reason against dismissing a defense of the charge of self-defeat that appeals to the strength of the relevant first-order evidence .

Moreover, appealing to these arguments in the literature to supplement an appeal to Modest motivations seems to be more promising than the responses to the charge of self-defeat that we examined in chapter two. By appealing to Modest motivations and the arguments in favor of the Equal Weight View that are found in the literature, this type of defense needn't tie the view to problems of being inconsistent with its motivations as both Elga's and Bogardus' solution do. Thus, in light of the constraints of this project, I can offer the following response to this final worry about the charge of self-defeat that seems to be the most promising defense that has been put forth so far. If the arguments in the literature do in fact provide us with particularly strong reasons in favor of the heart of the Equal Weight View, then there is room for proponents of the view to properly hold that a Modest version of the Equal Weight View is not self-



defeating. And until the strength of these arguments is shown, a Modest Equal Weight View should not be dismissed from the list of viable positions on the grounds that it is self-defeating given the strength of its prima-facie plausibility.

### 3.8 Where This Leaves a Modest Equal Weight View and the Charge of Self-Defeat

It has been the aim of this project to carve out the logical space for a version of the Equal Weight View that is neither self-defeating nor committed to *ad-hoc* considerations. The project has attempted to tackle the concern of self-defeat by first defusing the original charge of self-defeat that has been raised against the Equal Weight View and Strong Conciliatory views in general. And as we saw at the end of chapter two, this original charge can be defused on the grounds that it relies on an assumption that proponents of the view needn't grant. In particular, we saw that neither party to the disagreement about disagreement seems to have a good reason for regarding the other party as being more or less just as likely to get things right. And in turn, we saw that the disagreement about disagreement does not seem to actually be a peer disagreement after full disclosure.

This left us with the concern of whether rejecting the claim that the disagreement about disagreement is a peer disagreement after full disclosure is sufficient for refuting the charge of self-defeat. For the worry was raised as to whether the initial epistemic symmetry in the disagreement about disagreement would still require a Strong Conciliatory prescription from a consistent version of the Equal Weight View. But, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, a commitment to the heart of the Equal Weight View does not need to require one to screen off one's first-order evidence if one's epistemic position contains a relation of initial unspecific epistemic symmetry. The Equal Weight View just needs to rest on a form of Modest motivations

instead of Ambitious motivations. Moreover, we saw that not only is the heart of the Equal Weight View compatible with rejecting Ambitious motivations for a form of Modest motivations, but making this move seems to be independently well motivated as well. Thus, we have seen that there are some grounds for proponents of the view to hold that appealing to a form of Modest motivations is not an *ad-hoc* defense against the charge of self-defeat.

We then turned to a few remaining issues that a Modest version of the Equal Weight View must deal with: the worry about actually being Kelly's Total Evidence View in disguise, the worry about facing a weaker self-undermining problem, and the worry that a plausible form of Modest motivations is not itself sufficient for defusing the charge of self-defeat. First, we saw that a Modest version of the view needn't worry about collapsing into Kelly's Total Evidence View as the first worry suggests. Adopting a form of Modest motivations does not require a commitment to the claim that first-order evidence in typical cases of peer disagreements after full disclosure have an epistemic effect on one's higher-order considerations, as Kelly's view is committed to. Secondly, we saw that this worry about a plausible form of the view facing a weaker self-undermining problem is not actually a problem for the view. In fact, we saw that the view's commitment to the prescription that one ought to lower one's confidence in the view is actually a mark in favor of the view's plausibility.

However, we saw that if the prescription it is committed to is not merely that one's confidence ought to be lowered, but that it ought to be lowered to the extent of abandoning one's belief, then this is no longer a virtue of the view. Instead, it becomes a new source for a charge of self-defeat. With regard to this final concern, we have not seen a full-fledged defense of the view that completely defuses this final worry about self-defeat. But we have discovered what must be shown in order to save the view from this charge. If the view is to properly defuse this charge of

self-defeat, then it must be shown that one's first-order body of evidence pertaining to the view (i.e. the arguments and considerations pertaining to the epistemology of disagreement) strongly supports the Strong Conciliatory verdict of the heart of the Equal Weight View. In particular, it must support this verdict with enough strength such that one's total body of evidence pertaining to one's belief about the view still justifies a belief in the view despite the subset of unspecified higher-order evidence.

This seems to be the most promising response to the charge of self-defeat that has been put forth so far. For as we have seen in chapter two, the other arguments in the literature have not only failed to provide us with a proper defense, but there also does not seem to be a promising way to defuse the issues they face. After all, the arguments that have been put forth by Elga and Bogardus seem to fit rather poorly with the typical Strong Conciliatory motivations. In contrast, establishing that the first-order evidence pertaining to the view is strong enough for one's total body of evidence to still justify a belief in the Equal Weight View does not run into problems of inconsistency with the typical Strong Conciliatory motivations. Accordingly, it seems that future defenses of an Equal Weight View from the charge of self-defeat should focus on two things.

First, one should focus on the strength of the support the view enjoys from the first-order body of evidence, such as demonstrating why rationality demands that one strongly conciliate in light of the positive epistemic symmetry of a typical peer disagreement. Then, one should focus on the weakness of the higher-order evidence one acquires from learning of the dissenting party's opinion. In particular, one should focus on just how unspecified one's evidence about the dissenter's reliability, intelligence, thoughtfulness, motives, etc... really is. If one can show that this evidence is particularly unspecified, then this would seem to weaken the degree to which one ought to lower one's confidence. And the weaker the degree to which one ought to lower one's

confidence, the easier it is for the first-order body of evidence to justify one's belief in a Modest Equal Weight View. Thus, future defenses of a Modest Equal Weight View should focus on showing that in light of the first-order and higher-order subsets of one's total evidence pertaining to one's belief about the view, the view does not prescribe that one ought to abandon one's belief in the view. And until it is shown that such a defense cannot be properly made, we should not give up on a Modest Equal Weight View as a viable view about disagreement on the grounds that it is self-defeating.

### 3.9 Further Considerations

Before finishing up this project, I would like to take the time to point out a few final considerations, even though they may fall outside the scope of a Modest Equal Weight View's relation to the charge of self-defeat. First, I would like to focus on how the analysis of this project may also work to shed on light how to defuse another consideration raised against Strong Conciliatory views in general. In chapter one, it was noted that an initial reason to find Strong Conciliatory views unappealing is that they seem to threaten us with widespread skepticism in many interesting fields (e.g. the domains of philosophy, politics, and religion). However, it is not implausible to expect that our analysis of whether we ought to expect the acknowledgement condition to be met in the disagreement about disagreement will have similar conclusions about the acknowledgement condition for the disagreements in these other domains. Accordingly, the difficulty of being in a position where the acknowledgement condition is met may not only provide proponents of Strong Conciliatory views with a way of defusing the charge of self-defeat but also the charge of threatening us with widespread skepticism.

Lastly, I would like to address an important concern raised in the section on positive epistemic symmetry. In particular, I would like to briefly discuss the analysis' implication that there is more than one way that a case of initial positive epistemic symmetry can occur. One can acquire positive reasons related to the likelihood of each party getting things right from various sources, such as track records or information pertaining to factors related to reliability. However, some of these sources will provide stronger positive reasons than others. For instance a strong track record will provide stronger reasons than a weaker track record or information pertaining to the factors related to reliability. Accordingly, it would seem that the strength of the initial positive epistemic symmetry of one's epistemic position can come in degrees. If this is so, then it would seem that there are different types of peer disagreements after full disclosure (e.g. peer disagreements after full disclosure where one's reasons for thinking that the reliability condition obtains are justified to degree  $x$ ,  $y$ ,  $z$ , etc...).

This raises the question as to whether different types of peer disagreements after full disclosure call for different doxastic responses. However, the Equal Weight View as it has been formulated in the literature does not explicitly take this into consideration. Consequently, future formulations of an Equal Weight View should adapt to the fact that there are different types of peer disagreements after full disclosure in one of two ways. On the one hand, the view can show that there is a particular threshold in the degree of positive epistemic symmetry that one's epistemic position meets if it is to qualify as a peer disagreement after full disclosure. It would then need to show that if this threshold is met, one ought to screen off one's first-order body of evidence. Or on the other hand, it can restrict itself to being a view about how one ought to respond to one particular type of peer disagreement, such as the type where one's positive epistemic symmetry obtains in light of one's higher-order evidence consisting of strong, positive

reasons. And while I do not have the space to fully discuss how addressing these further considerations ought to play out, I hope that shedding light on these issues will help direct future formulations of a Modest Equal Weight View and Strong Conciliatory views in general towards a more fine grained view that can accommodate the various degrees of peerhood.

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