

The Total Evidence View as a Case for Conciliationism¹

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1. Introduction

I believe that conciliationism is the correct strategy for rationally dealing with disagreements with one's peers. I believe that, insofar as the existence of disagreements represents in such cases a testament to the extant limits of our cognitive powers in the relevant areas, we can do no better than to all be conciliationists. In this paper, I seek to cast a positive argument for this strategy around the criticisms I develop against a competing strategy Thomas Kelly has recently proposed, the **Total Evidence View** (TEV).² I will argue that stubborn strategies are unacceptable, and that TEV is a stubborn strategy despite Kelly's attestations to the contrary. I argue that at the minimum, suspension of judgment is required in the face of revealed disagreement with one's epistemic peers.

The strategy by which I will take up this twofold task is as follows. First, I will defuse some objections to conciliationism (§ 2), one of which Kelly considers to be "damning." This will give us an idea as to what conciliationism really stands for, and importantly, foreshadow the aims that motivate TEV. In repudiating TEV, I will generally employ a "divide and conquer" strategy, and show why certain views about disagreement are wrong (§§ 4.3-4.4). This will reveal TEV to belong to a certain family of views, which will allow us to be clear on what exactly its commitments are, and to make possible a fair consideration of what the demerits really are of TEV. All the while, I contrast TEV failures with eminently plausible conciliationist solutions that stand ready as very reasonable courses of action to take in the problematic cases canvassed. I argue (§ 4.5) that one "possible

¹ In this paper, I use "conciliationism" generally to indicate that "pessimistic" or "extreme" view that requires that epistemic peers suspend judgment in the face of disagreement. There is another more moderate view, held by David Christensen, which recommends "splitting the difference" in the same circumstances—Kelly calls this the "Equal Weight View" in his 2010 paper (referenced immediately below). I use these names interchangeably to indicate both the maneuvers of suspension of judgment and splitting the difference. However, where one particular strategy in the context of an argument deserves disambiguation or special attention, I will signal this distinction.

² Thomas Kelly, "Peer Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence," in *Disagreement*, eds. Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 117-174.

response” available to TEV as a solution to its demerits, that is, an appeal to metajustification and/or private evidence, to settle a dispute is, all things considered, not a reasonable response to revealed peer disagreement. This will lead us into my main “destructive” arguments (§ 5), in which I consider the merits of TEV’s pronouncement of being uniquely suited to fulfilling what is known as the epistemic truth-goal – that of attaining as many truths as one can. (This is sometimes taken in the literature to entail a commitment to avoiding falsehoods, but TEV, I will show, has the surprising result of doing violence to both.) Recognizing where it falls short of this goal demonstrates, given the preceding arguments, the unsurprising fact of the conciliationist’s natural advantage in this regard. Conciliationist constraints on our confidence that result from our being social creatures, I argue, are good constraints. In that sense, I argue that TEV, in taking the wrong side on this issue by in essence privileging the ideal of the Lockean “autonomous knower,” recommends strategies that turn out to be practically harmful for a social member’s epistemic goals. In the penultimate section (§ 6), I draw out and respond to the few undesirable implications of accepting full-blown conciliationism that there are, and suggest a new angle from which to approach the question as to what brings about disagreements and causes them to persist.

My overarching aim throughout is to make a compelling case demonstrating that conciliationism is underwritten by a commitment to defending reason’s autonomy and acknowledging its successes without taking lightly the fact of the poor epistemic conditions in which we are given to reason about certain subject matters that pervade our social lives. To take appropriate stock of the opinions our peers have, I will indicate, far from being a blight on our cognitive autonomy and an impediment to our individual epistemic truth-ends, represents an impeccable way of alerting us to the errors we are prone to as a result of being necessarily enveloped in these conditions, and, most importantly, is the main facilitator of our attempts to bridge them and ultimately arrive at true beliefs.

2. Kelly's Objections to Conciliationism

2.1. Multiple-Persons Bootstrapping

I begin by considering some objections that Kelly presents for conciliationism. As point of departure, consider the following classic case:

The Restaurant. Suppose you and your friend are eating at a restaurant. At the end, both of you agree to split the check, as you usually do. You come to the belief that you each owe \$15. Your friend, however, believes that you each owe \$17. Both of you are justified in your belief that both of you are *epistemic peers* in these kind of calculations, having dined together for years, and established an equally reliable track record.

The question, of course, is: how should this *prima facie* disagreement rationally impact the opposed beliefs of you and your friend?³ A natural view, of course, is for both of you to suspend judgment, even if one of you did in fact respond correctly to the evidence and thereby produced the correct figure. Intuitively, this is because *ex hypothesi*, in the case as described, you are both equally likely to be wrong; the revealed disagreement alerts impartial observers, including yourselves, to the tenuousness of either answer absent a deserved recheck. In other words, you should both adopt a *conciliationist* stance in response to discovery of competing beliefs.

Let us say that someone is a supporter of conciliationism just in case he thinks that suspending judgment is rationally required of him in response to a disagreement that is undefeated. A disagreement is undefeated just in case (a) the revealed competing belief comes from someone who is an *epistemic peer*, and (b) one is justified⁴ in thinking that both his own and the peer's competing belief is not the result of, on this occasion, some performance error or a compromised mental state.

³ This example, with minor changes in detail, was (so far as I know) originally presented by David Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News," *Philosophical Review* 116, no. 2 (2007): 193-4.

⁴ In this paper, I use "justification" and "rationality" interchangeably, identifying the concept both terms invoke as that, whatever it is, which epistemologists say along with mere true belief, and perhaps a Gettier-proofing fourth condition, leads to knowledge. This usage would be strained but for the fact that I am concerned in this paper only with defeaters that are, by the very nature of our topic of *revealed* disagreement, evident to the subject. Thus, while rationality is often invoked in arguments for externalist theories of justification, and justification for internalist theories, in this paper, a belief for a given subject is justified just in case it is rational.

Also, let's call evidence of dissenting opinion either "higher-order,"⁵ "psychological,"⁶ or "second-order"⁷ evidence. Returning to *The Restaurant*, Kelly says that while the above response is fine, insofar as it generates the right response (suspending judgment) on this occasion, an undesirable consequence of conciliationism as a *general* response to disagreements is that the strategy it recommends is such that rational belief is too easy to come by. Just compare the relevant evidence, adjust credence levels (or suspend judgment), and then, voila, you have a rational belief. There seems to be something wrong, however, with saying of two believers, one of whom forms his belief in a more rational way by arriving at the response properly supported by the evidence, that they are on equal footing after they run into each other, discover their disagreement, and then carry out the conciliationist recommendation. This is a *prima facie* problem for conciliationists.

However, as Kelly concedes, conciliationists have available as a response to this objection that *how* reasonable the resulting adjusted belief is for parties to a dispute to have depends on how reasonable their *original* belief was; splitting the difference is merely the first, rationally required step to take upon encountering disagreement. So, if in forming my original belief I was incautious and thereby came to a less rational position, while you were cautious and came to the more rational position, my final belief will be less reasonable than yours even though they are the same content-wise. While this response avoids the initial objection, still, Kelly thinks that this move comes with some unwanted baggage—at least for the hardheaded evidentialist. How can the same belief from the same evidence have differing justifiedness for two different people, if all that matters for the purpose of obtaining a rational belief is, upon finding that there are epistemic peers who disagree with you, splitting the difference? This is like saying that Brain, who is Brian's unfortunate brain-in-a-vat counterpart on Alpha Centauri, is less justified in his beliefs than Brian, even though both

⁵ Kelly, *op. cit.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Richard Feldman, "Respecting the Evidence," *Philosophical Perspectives* 19 (2005): 297-325.

form identical beliefs for identical reasons.

But is Kelly's objection really like this commonly cited objection to reliabilist theories of justification? I think we can all agree that the fact that two people share the same evidence and resultant belief from that evidence does not necessarily entail that their belief is of the same quality.

Take the following case for example:

The Matrix. Suppose you and I are students in a cryptology class. We are taking a test. On the last question, we are given matrices whose determinants we are supposed to figure out. Then, we need to take those calculated determinants and use them as elements in a new, final matrix, whose determinant we likewise are supposed to figure out. This determinant, if calculated accurately, is the final answer to the question. Suppose you and I both come to the right answer. But unlike you, I see the clock winding down, indicating imminent dismissal of class, and desperately "supply"—some may jocularly say "educatedly" guess—the determinant of the last one of the original matrices supplying the elements for the matrix whose determinant is the final answer to the question.

Note that in "educatedly" guessing as to the answer to one of the original matrices, I respond to our shared evidence (the original matrices) in a rationally suboptimal way. But, like you, I figure out the *resultant* matrix in the right way, having obtained the rest of the elements from the determinants of the original matrices responsibly, with the single exception mentioned. It seems reasonable to say that in these circumstances, your belief, though the same as mine, and in response to the same evidence, is more rational, because more reasonably formed. Admittedly, this isn't an outright analogue to the case, since as stated, there is no disagreement here between you and I before convergence of our responses. But my purpose here is just to show that evidentialists need not be distressed by such results, as they aren't all that mysterious. I think that it wouldn't be a stretch to suppose that for each one of us who does the work and gets it right, there is another one of us who shares all the same relevant evidence on some subject but who simply stumbles on the same conclusion, failing to take proper stock of the proper evidential relations that we are *ipso facto* both in possession of.

So, what is the proper diagnosis of the alleged oddity in this case? It is this: Kelly confuses the prescription for rational *action* that conciliationism demands of parties to a dispute with the mistaken

notion that the resultant belief prescribed by it *must* be equally rational for the disputing parties. I now move to a similar objection Kelly levels at conciliationism.

2.2. *Single-Person Bootstrapping*

Kelly gives the following argument to show that in single-person cases, where the only psychological evidence comes from one's own knowledge of how reliably he forms beliefs, conciliationism has it that one can easily bootstrap from that evidence to rational belief in just about everything. The argument that Kelly gives runs like this:

Single-Person Bootstrapping. Suppose I am in possession of a body of evidence E and at t_0 I form an opinion H from E . I am completely ignorant of what anyone else thinks about the issue. Assuming that we can all give a rough and ready estimate as to our level of confidence, and further, introspect how confident we are, I believe to 0.7 degree that H is true. At t_1 , then, I update my evidence E to evidence E^* , which consists of the following:

- (i) My original body of non-psychological evidence E
- (ii) The fact that I believe H to 0.7 confidence.

Kelly asks us conciliationists how we would respond if at t_2 , you came along and expressed 0.3 confidence in H . Of course, both you and I, supporters of conciliationism, think we should either suspend judgment or split the difference. Let's split the difference, and believe H to 0.5 degree, since this is the particular strategy of which Kelly makes an example. Attempting to push us into a corner, he asks us what then we should say about back at t_1 , when I was ignorant of what anyone else thought about the issue. Should we say that at t_1 , my psychological evidence also swamped my non-psychological evidence? Kelly answers for us:

It would seem that the only principled answer for the proponent of the Equal Weight View to give to this question is 'Yes.' For the proponent of the Equal Weight View will insist that, at time $[t_2]$, what one is rationally required to believe is determined by averaging the original opinions of the two peers. Moreover, if, at an even later time t_3 , one becomes aware of the opinion of a third peer, then what one is rationally required to believe will be determined by averaging the original opinions of the three peers; and if, at some still later time t_4 , one becomes aware of the opinion of a fourth peer . . . In general, for any time t_n , a proponent of the Equal Weight View will hold that what one is rationally required to believe is entirely fixed by averaging the opinions of the n peers. (2010, 130)

The charge, then, is that unless we don't mind being labeled perpetrators of adhocery, a serious

charge indeed, we must take the principled stand of insisting that at t_1 , my non-psychological first-order evidence is entirely swamped by my psychological evidence about my confidence in H. But if we do so, then we allegedly inherit the problem of easy rational belief that Kelly argues afflicts cases of disagreement involving multiple persons. One will recall that this objection was dismissed in the previous subsection: the resultant belief is not in general more rational than the previous belief. Take Christensen, who remarks regarding Equal Weight, that one result of revising one's belief in the face of disagreement is that one may actually move *further* away from the better epistemic position in which she originally stood (209). Indeed, the conciliationist stance is not merely concerned with attaining truth, it is also concerned with being rational while in the act of attaining it. Thus although in cases of revealed disagreement conciliationism is potentially destructive of truth-attainment or confidence-maximization in single instances as a result of needing to balance rationality with the truth-attaining act, nevertheless, as a general strategy, it puts us in the best position to avoid falsehoods in the short and long terms, while ensuring that we are always ready to arrive at truths in disagreement-plagued matters for the long haul, since it doesn't permit belief in them. Now, let us see whether there is any lasting bite in Kelly's objection.

Kelly supposes that just as in multiple-persons disagreements conciliationists “credit the views of others in proportion to their general competence while abstracting away from facts about actual performance,” likewise, if we are to take a principled, non ad hoc stand in single-person cases, we will also credit ourselves, in isolation, in proportion with our observed general competence. But then once we have gained a large enough track-record, we will then have no need to advert to our actual performance in deciding as to the reasonableness of our beliefs. The alleged conciliationist idea, I take it, that Kelly means to criticize is that on the conciliationist view, one absurdity to which its followers seem committed is that since everyone is always his own epistemic peer, if one were smart about it, he need never have reason to question what he believes as long as his track-record

meets some preapproved range. By stacking belief that is very probably knowledge (i.e., “easy” knowledge, or BPK for short) atop BPK in the initial stages of one’s entering, and presuming to be eventually competent enough to judge in, a field, and then letting nature do its thing and verify them one by one, one’s beliefs can easily meet any conciliationist demand for rational belief. So why not take a shortcut to that range? This, Kelly says, is an implausible consequence, and hence conciliationism it should be rejected.

I don’t think there is much going for this apparent argument by reduction/analogy. First, the single-person case is clearly not a case in which there is disagreement of the kind that has spawned much of the disagreement literature. When I form a belief based on some body of evidence, short of self-deception, the following two conditions in general must obtain. (1) I recognize that my belief is formed precisely because I find the totality of evidence and my weightings of the individual pieces constituting that body relative to other pieces in it to unequivocally endorse my belief. (2) I recognize that those weightings, so far as I know, are the appropriate weightings. For the most part, this is an unconscious act. But we implicitly endorse this principle of being, in Feldman’s words, obligated to *respect* our evidence, when we move to assess the quality of our beliefs *prior* to their formation. One way in which we can see this is when, upon a disputant or questioner’s challenge or request for a vote of confidence, we instinctively assign to our belief some credence level as in the examples above (“I am 85% sure that such-and-such is so-and-so”), as if we knew what the grounds of our belief were, and to what degree they supported our belief. It is when our disputants disagree and reveal themselves to possess the same evidential body that we possess, that knowledge of their general competence necessarily upgrades or downgrades confidence in our own belief accordingly, since assuming peerhood, and expectation of further quarrel, we know not whose method of weighting the evidence or incommunicable insights necessarily result in truth. Justified belief in such cases requires the relevant doxastic adjustments. Returning to Kelly’s objection, how might this sort

of case, *mutatis mutandis*, play out in single-person cases?

The preceding show that in multiple-persons cases, higher-order facts about each other's belief "successes" are germane from the standpoint of wanting to reach the truth in a justified manner. But the general rationale that underwrites this, the principle that gave rise to conciliationism in the first place—which is that justified belief requires a dose of deference to the private evidence in others to which one has not access yet—suggests the correct treatment of inquiries conducted in an initially solitary manner (or in a necessarily solitary manner, such as when one is, say, the only expert in the world on the relationship between Jain yoga and contemporary Libertarian philosophy): to refer to the relevant evidence *prior* to any belief-formation. This is not a move gerrymandered to meet some common sense standard. Rather, common sense differentiates between the two cases, and prescribes different ways of responding to each. Let's see how common sense dissolves the supposed discrepancy.

Suppose over time I gain evidence that my general competence, in percentage terms of those I get correct, in some domain of inquiry is about 85%. Does this mean, as Kelly would have conciliationists concede, that 8.5 times out of 10, I can simply believe whatever pops into my head, without regard for the circumstances of its provenance? Clearly, it does not. Indeed, as I noted, I am justified in believing that my response is reasonable because I form it in recognition of that fact. In other words, if I hadn't thought my response was reasonable, I would not have enshrined it as belief in the first place. Cases where I inveigle formation of a belief in myself for, say, pragmatic reasons, by referring simply to the fact that I have a high competence in the relevant domain, are cases where it is luminously clear to myself that my belief is out of step with my general norms of belief-formation. To justify such malpractice, I would need a proportionately supporting evidential base. Once I am honest in this regard to myself, and consider the epistemic status of my belief in full awareness of its origins, I will no doubt withhold judgment, and reconsider the evidence. In single

person cases, then, facts about my reliability/competence, far from providing me with a ticket to “implausibly easy bootstrapping,” make me work hard to maintain it.⁸

That is to say, when there is doubt as to my belief’s accuracy, they require that in order that I may continue to maintain that belief, I must acquit my belief-formation processes in arriving at it *independent* of what my higher-order evidence about my general competence suggests about my ability to properly assess first-order evidence for beliefs like it. Contra Kelly’s charge then, the reasons given show that the discrepant treatment of single-person cases would not be ad hoc at all. Consider this analogy. When a poll seeks to gauge whose economic view people think are the best for our country, Barack Obama does not by voting for himself break a 50-50 tie. The actual voters’ votes are, as it were, the first-order evidence, while Obama’s own vote is expressive of his higher-order evidence that he never believes wrongly about whose view he agrees with – his own. Nevertheless, when Obama considers that question in private, since that evidence is irrelevant, he must consult his advisers and reflect studiously instead on the first-order evidence to decide what laws to include in a proposed stimulus package. The resulting package will, of course, often include only parts of one’s previous view, this being especially so when one was in error.⁹

This, then, is a nuance Kelly brushes over in wrongly claiming that conciliationists consider only facts about general competence in responding to disagreement, both with respect to multiple-persons and to single-person cases. In multiple-persons cases, “general competence” comes down to

⁸ There is an unexceptionable exception. Consider our need sometimes to act quickly. Suppose I am taking a timed exam, say, the math portion of the computer-based GRE, and need to select either response A, B, C, or D, in order to move on to the next question. I whittle it down to A and B, but see that working the problem out fully will take me too long. Aware of my historically high “competence” (say 85%) in guessing correctly that B is the right answer in response to questions of this type (I’ve taken many practice tests), I decide to select B in order to move on rather than waste valuable time confirming that it is correct. Here, I am indeed relying on a fact about my general competence, but only as a basis for *action*, and not belief. The bootstrapping criticism is correctly imputed only in cases where further beliefs are or can be allowed to be built on one irrationally acquired, in like manner to how I guessed the right answer here, but it is clear in this case that no such action or series of actions could be warranted, nor does it suggest the possibility of such implausibly easily justified beliefs.

⁹ This example can be refined further. As it stands, the resulting view can of course be described as strained and really a product of necessary compromise, not what the conciliationist response really wants, which is a genuine discovery occasioned by respecting one’s evidence in single-person cases. Since all the conciliationist really needs to do is to show how the discrepant treatment avoids charges of adhocery, and I have done it, I will not belabor this illustration.

who we consider to be our epistemic peers. Since the notion of epistemic peerhood is defined in significant part by the track-records of others within the subject/field in question whom we judge to meet our own standards for credibility in that subject, questions about our peers' performance in belief-formation do not in general crop up in *prima facie* disagreements. Notice, however, that the notion of general competence tends to obfuscate the reason for our reliance on them, which is that we appeal to it only because we are not one consciousness, and so we need an "externally" viable means of judging whether someone is our epistemic peer. The most efficient way of doing this is to observe a candidate's success-to-failure ratio in her judgments that p in some domain d . As a result, even if someone else is judged to be an epistemic peer like us in relation to d , it is merely *assumed* that a high success-to-failure ratio indicates consistently commendable exercise of one's rational capacities, regardless of how a given person *actually* comes to his belief in general practice. He may have, say, earned them by buying them from a sci-fi-like "belief" slot machine, which spits out a proposition in d for belief every time a quarter is inserted. Of course, these In single-person cases, however, we can know whether our beliefs have been formed in an epistemically appropriate way. Unlike multiple-persons cases, it isn't the mere end-results of our successful inquiries, represented by a ratio, that after a while constitute the facts about our general competence; rather, it is the actual performance of our successful inquiries that convince us that the ratios reflect our *actual* competence.

What my points in this subsection amount to are this: where there is only one person, the parameters of how to respond to disagreement by nature differ from those that govern multiple-persons cases. In this type of situation, we are rationally required to evaluate our first-order evidence regardless of facts about our general competence for the warranted continued maintenance of our original belief. Because this is so, there is no basis for the charges of adhocery that Kelly levels at this so-called discrepancy. Kelly's argument by analogy to single-person cases, besides being

irrelevant for casting doubt on conciliationism's treatment of multiple-persons disagreements, also fails to distinguish the intrinsic differences between the two types of epistemic situations we can find ourselves in.

I have now made a preliminary case as to why we are, by default, justified in pursuing conciliationist responses when engaged in a disagreement with a putative epistemic peer. This sets the stage for what follows, namely, my case against Kelly's Total Evidence View.

3. The Total Evidence View

Having reached a suitable point in our discussion, let us now state Kelly's view in his own words:

The Total Evidence View. What it is reasonable to believe depends on both the original evidence as well as on the higher-order evidence that is afforded by the fact that one's peers believe as they do. (142)

And, as Kelly states, where the first-order evidence is relatively insubstantial, psychological evidence will tend to swamp the first-order evidence. Conversely, where the psychological evidence is insubstantial, perhaps because of convergence on a dissenting opinion being a result of people merely following some ringleader's opinion like sheep, first-order evidence will tend to swamp the psychological evidence.

Pace Kelly, I think that TEV, while plausible for mundane cases like *The Restaurant*, fails when extended to cases involving disagreements with one's peers, where the source and cause of a putative dispute is of a more complex and divisive nature, such as those concerning politics, religion, ethics, or history, that is, cases where the disputants all feel equally strongly about their beliefs, and in which we cannot easily determine whose belief is the more rationally formed based on the available evidence. In such cases, one typically finds that no amount of poring over the evidence, going through the logical connections one makes, etc., is likely to persuade those on the other side

of the issue as to the reasonableness of one's belief. The reason for such recalcitrance in the face of revealed peer disagreement is decidedly because of the indispensable pretheoretical commitments and incommunicable evidence that one brings to bear on one's own belief-forming practices, which unconsciously affect the direction one takes one's arguments. (Recall David Lewis' apt remark to the effect that one man's reason is another's *reductio*.) Given that this is the case, it is of paramount interest to explore the question as to how going back and checking the relevant evidence can be a means of determining whose response to the shared first-order evidence makes the better case in being *the* response that is spared from the authority that psychological evidence has of forcing a reduction in the confidence that is had by beliefs that are involved in prima facie disagreements, and also, to what degree this can be done.

In the rest of this paper, I wish to look at one possible response, one that Kelly expressly rejects, namely, that the epistemic status of competing beliefs supervenes on their phenomenology. I think that it is in the serious interest of TEV that this response be co-opted in some way and made plausible, as I think it stands and falls with it. I argue that even after being accordingly reinforced, TEV fails to "walk the talk."

4. Metajustification and Reasonable Disagreements

4.1. *The Role of Phenomenology in Resolving Disagreement*

Consider Kelly's statement of what is problematic with appealing to private, phenomenological evidence:

... Of course, there is no magic red light that illuminates when one responds to the evidence correctly, no warning bell that sounds when one does not. Indeed, as a phenomenological matter, there might be no introspectible difference between how things seem when one is responding correctly and how things seem when one is not. Given this, how can a decision to adopt the Total Evidence View (or any view that shares this central feature) reflect anything other than a meta-epistemological commitment to externalism about justification, with the Equal Weight View left as the view of choice for those with more internalist sympathies? (2010, 169)

Kelly expresses here the basic fact that in *The Restaurant*, that both you and I feel equally strongly about our answers is poor evidence in favor of either of our answers. Indeed, to offer it when presented with counterevidence seems facile. Rightly, then, the suggestion that this sort of response—that “when one responds correctly to a body of evidence, one typically has some justification for thinking that one has responded correctly”¹⁰—might be available for us in all or even some of these cases for settling a disagreement, is quixotic. Kelly’s positive thesis, generalizable as he says it is to political and philosophical cases, is for us to go over the evidence once again when we encounter disagreement with our peers, and then afterwards, if no resolution has been reached, to reduce confidence in proportion with how substantial *independent* psychological evidence against my belief is. A piece of psychological evidence is characterized by substantial independence if, say, the opinions it reflects are not largely mere duplications, either by indoctrination or by appeals to authority. So, for example, if a billion people believe in Christianity, but two-thirds of them believe it unthinkingly as a result of growing up in Christian households, I have reason to sharply discount the weight of this higher-order evidence. Likewise, if there is widespread convergence in opinion against my position, much of which I judge to be independently acquired, then my first-order evidence is swamped to literal extinction. (In § 5, I note some problems with this independence constraint.)

The intended upshot is that on the TEV, cases in which I am constrained by the norms of belief in response to revealed disagreement to adjust my doxastic attitude in your direction when we are disputing about an incendiary and controversial topic are ubiquitous, just as the conciliationist wants. The kicker, however, is supposed to be that I can do this all the while reasonably maintaining that I have got it right, and you, wrong. Kelly’s question, “how can a decision to adopt the Total Evidence View... reflect anything other than a meta-epistemological commitment to externalism about justification,” then, isn’t a mere rhetorical question; in his mind, TEV navigates both

¹⁰ Kelly, *op. cit.*, 156.

desiderata satisfactorily, and promises to give us a palatable syncretism combining conciliationism's deference to psychological evidence with the TEV's subservience to first-order evidence. Let us see if TEV succeeds.

4.2. *Metajustification and Reasonable Disagreements: An Overview*

First, some taxonomy. Kelly thinks that having formed one's belief responsibly is sufficient—even if no independent reason can be furnished to justify such a conviction—for enduing one's belief with a distinctive quality that, in effect, translates to a justified belief that one is *reasonable in holding onto one's belief amidst revealed peerhood disagreement*.¹¹ Let's call this distinctive quality of the perfectly rationally formed belief its *metajustification*.¹² Supposedly, the phenomenological character of such states is not usable as evidence in a revealed disagreement. Nevertheless, all doxastic attitudes in response to evidence, assuming a foundationalist view on the structure of justification, have them. The difference between my metajustification and yours lies in their strength, which varies in accordance with how rational our respective doxastic attitudes are vis-à-vis the evidence. Kelly illuminates the nature of metajustification nicely.¹³ Says Kelly:

... When one responds correctly to a body of evidence, one typically has some justification for thinking that one has responded correctly. In paradigmatic cases in which one takes up the view that is best supported by one's evidence, it is no mere accident that one has done so (although lucky accidents are of course possible, they are atypical). Rather, one takes up the belief in question precisely because it is supported by one's evidence. Indeed, in a given case, one might very well take up the belief because one recognizes that this is what one's evidence supports. Plausibly, recognizing that *p* entails knowing that *p*. Assuming that that is so, then any case in which one recognizes that one's evidence supports a given belief is a case in which one knows that one's evidence supports that

¹¹ On this point, see Kelly, *op. cit.*, 155ff.

¹² Now would be the time to state what has heretofore been obvious: that I have been assuming the truth of the Rational Uniqueness Thesis. I argue for its truth in § 4.2.

¹³ Kelly himself doesn't use this term in describing the epistemic justification that springs from "recognizing that *p*" in the quote following. So I apologize in advance if my identification of it with the sense that has traditionally been associated with the term, notably, Peter Klein's—for which see Peter D. Klein, "Human Knowledge and the Infinite Regress of Reasons," *Noûs* 33, s13 (October 1999): 297-325—is mistaken. But I do think that Kelly's use of the term very closely approximates in sense, if it isn't identical with, that of Klein's. For in Klein's paper, he says, "[what] Laurence Bonjour calls "meta-justifications"... [are] justifications designed to show that certain types of beliefs are acceptable even in the absence of another belief that serves as a reason. Such beliefs are acceptable, it is claimed, because they have some property, call it *P*, and beliefs having *P* are likely to be true" (303).

belief. Clearly, if one knows that one's evidence supports a given belief, then one is justified in thinking that one's evidence supports that belief; if one were not justified, one would not know. But, even if recognizing that *p* does not entail knowing that *p*, one would in any case not be able to recognize that *p* if one were unjustified in thinking that *p*. It follows immediately from this that, whenever one recognizes that one's evidence supports such-and-such a conclusion, one is justified in thinking that one's evidence supports that conclusion. (156)

Thus, in any case in which you hold a given belief because you recognize that this is what your evidence supports, not only is your belief a reasonable one, but you are also justified in believing an epistemic proposition to the effect that it is reasonable for you to hold that belief. But, extending on what I presaged in § 3, I argue that metajustification is elusive. Indeed, I will argue that it is so elusive it never figures as part of one's evidence for the correctness of his belief, in spite of the fact, I am sure, of its reality—especially among those who think they are right on some important issue. I begin by examining why metajustification and its close relative, what's often called “private evidence,” seem appealing as a response to the argument that revealed disagreements involving full disclosure show that neither side can justifiably claim cognitive authority. I shall motivate this section by using an example of Richard Feldman's to knock down some competing views on disagreement. Doing so will reveal the close ties that TEV bears to one of them. In his “Epistemological Puzzles About Disagreement,” Feldman describes the following situation:¹⁴

Forked Road. Suppose we are traveling together and we come to a fork in the road. The map shows no fork and we have no way to get more information about which way to go. We have to choose. You choose the left path and I choose the right path. Each of us may be entirely reasonable in choosing as we did. Of course, we would have been reasonable in choosing otherwise. We can each endorse the other's choice as a reasonable one. (433)

This case shows that two people with the same evidential base, when deciding what to do, may rationally prosecute different *actions* and yet recognize the other's action as reasonable. Is there a truth-preserving parallel of *Forked Road* involving belief? That is, can we conceive, using the following as recipe, a case involving belief that is analogous to *Forked Road*?

¹⁴ Richard Feldman, “Epistemological Puzzles About Disagreement,” in *Epistemology Futures*, ed. Stephen Hetherington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 229. An online edition is available at <http://www.philosophy.stir.ac.uk/postgraduate/documents/FeldmanPaper.pdf>. All future references will be to this online edition (pp 414-444).

Reasonable Disagreement. *S* and *R* have a similar capacity for reasoning responsibly within a field, in which they are considered experts. Recently, they have come to different conclusions regarding some controversial topic *p* within that field, for which they both possess all the same, relevant evidence.

Notice that *S* and *R* above exemplify all the trademark characteristics of, and hence are, what the literature calls *epistemic peers*. So, let's suppose one answers in the affirmative, in keeping with the object of our inquiry. Then, we will have identified an example of "mutually recognized reasonable disagreements." There are several philosophers who think such disagreements possible. Indeed, they think such disagreements abound.¹⁵ Proponents of such a view deny the following (what I think) eminently plausible principle:

Uniqueness Thesis. For any given body of evidence *e* and a given proposition *p*, there is some response (or level of confidence) that it is *uniquely* rational to have in that proposition given that evidence.

Such people allow for *S* and *R* to rationally maintain their original doxastic attitudes regarding *p*, without needing to think their opponent unreasonable in continuing to maintain her own original doxastic attitude regarding *p*, upon revealed disagreement. Allow me to explain why I don't think such disagreements are viable.

4.3. *The Symmetrical No Independent Weight View*

Consider what it would mean for two people with a similar capacity for reasoning responsibly on a given topic to be able to, based on the same evidential base, rationally possess differing attitudes toward a belief formed from it *and* still recognize the other's attitude as reasonable. A luminous example involving mathematics, due to Christensen, was considered previously (see page 2). Let's revisit it. Again, the pertinent details are these: you and I, who consider each other to be epistemic peers with respect to calculating restaurant checks, follow our established tradition and calculate our share of the check after our meal. Question: What would it

¹⁵ Some notable ones are Peter van Inwagen (1996) and Kelly (2005).

mean, in this situation, for you to say that I am just as reasonable in believing what I do as you are? Under the conciliationist view, since *ex hypothesi* we are equally adept at performing mathematical calculations of this sort, you and I are rationally required to first suspend judgment, and then check our calculations. This is because if you think that my answer is just as reasonable as yours, you might reasonably believe either of our calculations. And this seems weird. Indeed, denying the Uniqueness thesis will generally lead to such prima facie weird situations. Let's elaborate on this intuition.

Suppose as a thought-experiment I knew beforehand what the acceptable spread of rational doxastic attitudes are for the check in *The Restaurant*, which is a function of all the degrees of confidence of belief and their corresponding values (i.e., the beliefs specific to each rational doxastic attitude) that are rationally supported by the relevant body of evidence E. The limiting relative clause (introduced by "that are") is needed to ensure that one is in a Gettier-free context. To simplify our discussion of how rational belief formation might proceed under this view, I will introduce the following machinery. Using the standard Bayesian convention to indicate the credence level/degree of confidence one can choose to accord to a belief, this spread may include as *wholly* rational a credence level of 1.0, when that credence level is matched with an appropriately supported degree of confidence in a belief that is the right response to E, i.e., in the manner prescribed by the limiting clause above. (Hereafter, in conformity with this view's commitments, every time I assign a credence level to a belief, I assume that it is rationally supported by the evidence.) For example, for some body of evidence E*, it may support to 0.7 degree of confidence the attitude α , to 0.8 degree of confidence the attitude β , etc., all the way up to 1.0 in the one attitude that is the wholly rational one in response to the evidence. Further, to make plausible a view that denies the Uniqueness thesis, one should assume also that there is some minimal threshold of degree of confidence that is required for rational belief. Now we are in position to import this machinery into our discussion of *The Restaurant*.

Suppose that the range of acceptable doxastic attitudes in *The Restaurant* example includes as wholly rational a credence level of 1.0 appropriately accorded to the right belief that our individual share of the check is \$17, which is precisely what you believe. Suppose further that a credence level of 0.8 is also rational in the belief that our share each is \$15, which I wrongly believe. Importantly, our shared body of evidence E requires at least a credence level of 0.8 for rational belief. But plausibly, since saying that 0.8 credence is a rational investment in the belief that \$15 is the right figure is akin to saying that a credence level of 0.8 is a rational investment in the belief *not*-\$17, which is your answer, plausibly, I would be rational to the same degree in believing that you are wrong. Indeed, I challenge the notion that someone who accords to his belief some sufficiently high credence level for *rational* belief can reasonably grant that a dissenter with a contradictory belief likewise holds it rationally. Implausibly, however, a view that denies Uniqueness recommends that I accept that your belief is nevertheless rationally formed, despite my recognition of the fact that persisting in my belief, confidence unshaken, is, at the least, tacit recognition of your belief being irrationally formed relative to what is actually supported by E. Further, on such a view, it is reasonable to ask what strategy exactly is being proposed for dealing with prima facie disagreements. It seems to me that defending views of this sort will require acceding to a sort of “live and let live” attitude that nevertheless does not seem capable of outlasting situations that require coordinated action or joint compromise. This result, which is counter to our intuitions, suggests that views that imply that disputants to some issue may rationally maintain their doxastic attitudes *even while* recognizing the reasonableness of the doxastic attitudes of other disputants are false. Call all such views, following Kelly, **Symmetrical No Independent Weight** (SNIW) views. Surely TEV cannot be identified as a member of such a view.

Two options remain for responding to disagreements of this sort (leaving conciliationism by the wayside for the time being). First, I may become diffident as to the correctness of my calculation

and defer to your calculation, which in effect ends our prima facie disagreement (and hence is uninteresting). The other, which we have glossed, is to hold on to my own view stubbornly, insist that I am right, and that you're wrong, and hence, that you should discard your belief and accept mine instead. Call a view that advocates the justifiedness of this sort of response to dissenting opinions by one's putative epistemic peers, when his epistemic position is justified, following Kelly, an **Asymmetrical No Independent Weight** (ANIW) view. In keeping with our inquiry as to what distinguishes Kelly's TEV from ANIW-type views, let us examine how one philosopher, namely, Peter van Inwagen, is led to accept ANIW.

4.4. The Asymmetrical No Independent Weight View

For starters, what could justify ANIW views? Clearly the disclosed evidence is either (a) not sufficient to support either position (since although all the relevant evidence has been laid out, still there is no consensus), or (b), if it is, the fact of varying opinions shows that though there is a correct position to take, it is not agreed who is in this position (since *ex hypothesi* the disputants are topical peers). If we accept (a), then we should withhold beliefs about the matter. Disagreement, then, dissipates, and the search for more evidence continues. However, we often like to think that we do have sufficient evidence for arbitrating positively, i.e., taking a side, on some matter, no matter how contentious our higher-order evidence tells us it is; we like to think that because we cannot but think that we have been rational in forming our own opinion, some one side is right, and the other wrong, notwithstanding awareness of the higher-order evidence. (Think of the contentious issue of manmade climate change, for instance.) Option (b), then, is more attractive. But say we don't want to accept its conclusion. What could provide a way out? Metajustification, perhaps.

Consider Peter van Inwagen's thoughts about his disagreement with David Lewis on many

philosophical matters:¹⁶

How can I believe (as I do) that free will is incompatible with determinism or that unrealized possibilities are not physical objects or that human beings are not four-dimensional things extended in time as well as in space, when David Lewis—a philosopher of truly formidable intelligence and insight and ability—rejects these things I believe and is already aware of and understands perfectly every argument that I could produce in their defense? Well, I do believe these things. And I believe that I am justified in believing them. (2)

This seems to me to be a preamble in incipient, if not tacit, support (at least) of ANIW views. This is confirmed by his turning to discussing what he perceives to be a double-standard concerning evidential support in matters religious, where van Inwagen hints as to where precisely he stands regarding his disagreements with not just Lewis, but to other *prima facie* equally qualified pundits of such controversial subjects as politics with whom he disagrees:

How can I believe that my political beliefs are justified when these beliefs are rejected by people whose qualifications for engaging in political discourse are as impressive as David Lewis's qualifications for engaging in philosophical discourse? These people are aware of (at least) all the evidence and all the arguments that I am aware of, and they are (at least) as good at evaluating evidence and arguments as I. How, then, can I maintain that the evidence and arguments I can adduce in support of my beliefs actually justify these beliefs? ... Well, as with philosophy, I am inclined to think that I must enjoy some sort of incommunicable insight that the others, for all their merits, lack. I am inclined to think that the evidence and arguments I can adduce in support of my beliefs do not constitute the totality of my justification for these beliefs. But all that I am willing to say for sure is that something justifies me in rejecting political skepticism, or at least that it is possible that something does: that it is not a necessary truth that one is not justified in holding a political belief that is controverted by intelligent and well-informed political thinkers. (4)

So, (by all appearances) a defender of ANIW (charitably interpreted, since we have already

¹⁶ Peter van Inwagen, "Is It Wrong Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything upon Insufficient Evidence," in *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality: Philosophy of Religion Today*, eds. Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 137-153. There is an online edition available at <http://comp.uark.edu/~senor/wrong.html>. All future references will be made to this online edition.

made SNIW out to be implausible), van Inwagen sees two ways to justify the view. The first, which he thinks a less persuasive position among a general audience, is to refer to the private sense experience and incommunicable insights in our possession for a given disputed controversial belief.¹⁷ The second, the one that he finds more persuasive, or more easily deployed as premise in an argument, is his unwillingness to be thrown into philosophical skepticism.¹⁸ In effect, van Inwagen sees the choice between Clifford's Thesis and ANIW as a choice between forced philosophical skepticism and permissible philosophical dogmatism. Since he is convinced that we are justified in forming beliefs about certain matters despite insufficient communicable evidence, van Inwagen rejects Clifford's Thesis.

As we shall see, defenders of ANIW-type views offer responses suggestive of, if not identical to, the sort of appeal to metajustification that Kelly sanctions as a licensed practice of his TEV.

4.5. *Against Appealing to Metajustification*

Suppose I am considering evidence *e*. I think it justifies, at least subjectively, belief in *p*. I sedulously check my belief-forming practices to make sure that no biases and non-epistemic factors have influenced my judgment that *p*—i.e., I check that my belief in *p* is *objectively* supported by the evidence. I judge that it is. You do all these things as well. However, you arrive at belief *not-p*. This fact is revealed. In an effort to determine who's got the right answer, we disclose all of our evidence, which as a result is now shared between us. Now that all the evidence is in front of us, there remains only one issue for us to take care of: we need to decide *whose* insights regarding *p* to employ in

¹⁷ Says van Inwagen, "This, as I have said, is the view I find most attractive, or least unattractive" (10).

¹⁸ The goal of the paper is to defend religious beliefs from what van Inwagen perceives to be unfair attacks on their lack of evidential support. The challenge he presents is this: those who reject private evidence for justifying religious beliefs must, it would seem, likewise reject them for such controversial subjects as philosophy and politics, unless they are willing philosophical skeptics. If, however, they employ a double-standard against religious beliefs in an effort to avoid philosophical skepticism by accepting private evidence only for the latter, they must explain away this inequity in treatment. It shall be revealed that I am a willing philosophical skeptic, with qualifications.

coming to judge who is right. Let *insights* be those subjectively held *disclosable*¹⁹ experiences or values that one brings to bear on the evidence relating to a given proposition, which, assuming Uniqueness, leads to a unique determination as to the right attitude to have regarding it. Insights may be truth-conducive, in that they do not bias one's response to a body of evidence, or they can be *misleading*. So, the insights of environmental scientists are more truth-conducive in the matter of whether or not climate change is a genuine phenomenon than those of climate change skeptics, whose pronouncements are often found to be colored by certain religious commitments. These insights are thus important for deciding which answers to invidious topics such as philosophy and politics are the right ones.

But now we are in a curious predicament. How can I come to decide in nonobvious cases whose insights to employ in deciding whether p without begging the question against my opponent? If I take up my insights, I will be displaying some bravado, but this would not be epistemically sensible bravado. I cannot appeal to them simply because I happen to have them, no more than you could appeal to your own just because you have them. This point, I think, explains the sometimes stunning intensity of disagreements in the first place: the insights that one possesses determine the entailment relations between evidence and proposition that are needed for thinkers on that issue to converge on an answer; yet no one person can appeal non question-beggingly to his own if he is unable to put those insights in argument form. Of course, Kelly will have a response ready to this problem. Recall his words from § 3, which I restate:

... When one responds correctly to a body of evidence, one typically has some justification for thinking that one has responded correctly. In paradigmatic cases in which one takes up the view that is best supported by one's evidence, it is no mere accident that one has done so (although lucky accidents are of course possible, they are atypical). Rather, one takes up the belief in question precisely because it is supported by one's evidence. Indeed, in a given case, one might very well take up the belief because one recognizes that this is what one's evidence supports. Plausibly, recognizing that p entails knowing that p . Assuming that that is so, then any case in which one recognizes that

¹⁹ If it isn't disclosable, it cannot be shared private evidence. So the only private evidence I argue against using here is disclosable private evidence. In § 6, I suggest a limited way in which appealing to undisclosed private evidence may save reasonable disagreements from extinction.

one's evidence supports a given belief is a case in which one knows that one's evidence supports that belief. Clearly, if one knows that one's evidence supports a given belief, then one is justified in thinking that one's evidence supports that belief; if one were not justified, one would not know. But, even if recognizing that p does not entail knowing that p, one would in any case not be able to recognize that p if one were unjustified in thinking that p. It follows immediately from this that, whenever one recognizes that one's evidence supports such-and-such a conclusion, one is justified in thinking that one's evidence supports that conclusion. (*loc. cit.*)

A possible recourse, then, will be to appeal to the metajustification that a person comes to have simply in virtue of responding properly to her evidence. But, like directions for how to use some tool that one is not in possession of, postulating this response to take when one is in possession of doxastically immaculate metajustification, whatever that amounts to, is practically useless. If Joe is to meaningfully and non-circularly appeal to metajustification as an explanation as to why he is justified in steadfastly holding to his view in a disagreement with a peer, he will not be able to accomplish that by fatuously pointing to that fact. Rather, if his expostulations that “my evidence supports my conclusion,” or “my evidence justifies a proposition to the effect that my evidence supports my conclusion” (with the implication that his peer's doesn't) are not to ring hollow, he will need to support them by reference to a basis that is less inscrutable.

It appears, then, that we will need to go a greater distance than Kelly—in fact contradict him—so as to prevent the appeal to metajustification from being argumentatively inutile. One way to do this, I suggest, is to posit that metajustification is a sort of property that, whatever its underlying structure, is *perceptible*; and that it is the sort of property that naturally arises in beliefs as belief's way of assuring its holder as to the quality of its genesis. Then, just as one's perceptual beliefs are *prima facie* knowledge because luminously descended from a foundationally justified source,²⁰ one's metajustification is similarly knowledge because luminously derived from a “certification” that is conferred by belief's own constitutive sources. On such a view, assertions made in strong defense

²⁰ Following many epistemologists, I assume that certain major fountains of belief are regular partners to *foundationally justified* knowledge. Though foundationalism is characteristically internalist, my point is not lost on externalist conceptions of justification, since we are here now concerned with the character of internal states, if there are any, indicative of propositional knowledge.

of a thesis—e.g., “my evidence supports my conclusion” or “I am correct, and I just know/feel it”—are ways of expressing this affect metajustification imbues persons in the right cognitive states with. An account of the possibility of ANIW can thus be given in terms of a plausible psychological link between the phenomenal character inherent in metajustification and the epistemic circumstances of a given doxastic state’s genesis in a way useful for settling disagreement, which would be entirely determined by the integrity of the beliefs’ evidential connections. This would be reflected by a “vivid” and “lively” metajustification (to steal a few adjectives from Hume) that the holder of the belief is intimately aware of. Kelly’s TEV seems particularly amenable to this treatment of metajustification, as it can be adapted to square with his view on higher-order evidence and its relation to first-order evidence: the phenomenal strength of the metajustification attending to one’s belief that p varies with the quality of the evidential connection between p and the evidence on whose basis p is inferred. Also, the phenomenal strength of a belief’s metajustification is decreased in proportion with the substantiality of independent opinion to the contrary. Beliefs formed under adequate conditions are in this way able to resist the adjustments that, under the more conservative view of conciliationism, would be necessitated.

We thus have seen one way our account above might be able to make sense out of Kelly’s appeal to metajustification. But is it able to absolve TEV of the charge of prescriptive inadequacy I have lodged previously? As we now see, it isn’t. This is because the same complaint I have made against TEV resurfaces, despite application of the account I have supplied—that of lacking a scrutable account of metajustification: in non-mundane, controversial philosophical, religious, and political (among others) cases, cases that tend to arouse fervent emotion, there is from the disputants’ individual perspectives *ex hypothesi* no phenomenally distinguishable difference between those among them arguing for, say, the tenability of genuine modal realism, and those arguing against it. This is just what disagreements are like. As we have seen, neither strategy recommended

by both SNIW and ANIW-type views is appropriate for dealing with revealed peer disagreement. The former counsels a response that is inconsistent with our intuitions; the latter refers the course of action we should take to mere intensity of feeling. However we coat TEV to deflect prescriptive inadequacy, it is seen, upon reflection, to be mere veneer.

On the other hand, the conciliationist strategy for dealing with perceptual and simple arithmetical disagreements, which Kelly says gives the right answer to the simple perceptual and arithmetic cases, stands ready to be applied. If a perfectly adequate response is available, what could the rationale be for avoiding taking it up? It seems, then, that for TEV to be applicable in a case of disagreement, some appeal to metajustification, or the brute insistence that one has checked his evidence and he's sure he's right, will be needed. Since it is clear that many disputants on an issue will attest to possession of equally strong conviction, in the end, however, it is only the person holding his ground who is the one who is right who, on TEV, will be justified in moving very little in the direction of his epistemic peer.

I have explained why this account fails as a strategy for rationally dealing with the kinds of subjects, which as I said, arouse fervid disagreement. It is safe to say that in such cases, the unfavorable epistemic conditions that occasion the fact of disagreement amongst the beliefs of those who form them cast a deep pall of uncertainty the resolution of which requires a distinct and uniform treatment which is able to move all believers toward more epistemically secure ground, namely, conciliationism. Better late than never, as the saying goes.

5. Whether TEV Serves or Does Violence to the Truth-Goal

To be sure, one might wonder, where self-acquired truth is thought to be the main epistemic goal, whether awaiting common agreement on some divided issue before forming a belief about it—versus forming a belief about it on the basis solely of one's cognitive authority when one recognizes

its truth or falsity—in some way enslaves our epistemic independence to the inaccessible and perhaps unstable performances of our peers, despite the special status we grant them. But such a question presupposes that all beliefs that are true are good beliefs to have or keep. This is far from the truth. In the social fields within which men have been planted, and whose upkeep and sharing of limited resources require joint action, persistent and widespread disagreement among the relevant expert communities puts a damper on our hope for fostering genuine understanding as a precondition for action. (To put it in more strident terms, it is only the tyrant who imposes his beliefs on others without having established them as true.) This point can be seen more clearly by considering how TEV disrupts, rather than promotes, intellectual progress. I will consider, in the following, two problems that are most worrisome for TEV in this regard.

Consider, as primer, TEV exponent Joe's belief that infinitism is the correct view on epistemic justification. I now argue that contrary to the TEV exponent's hypothesis, no amount of reflection by Joe on his evidence, if he is to be a consistent TEVer, will move him to revise his belief *if* he believes his belief has been "caused" by the relevant evidence. (Whether infinitism, or any substantive and controversial belief one chooses to substitute into this case, is in fact correct is immaterial; I am here concerned with the kind of process of inquiry TEV necessarily licenses.) Suppose, for the sake of argument, that infinitism is wrong, which is just what Joe's opponent believes. On the TEV, taking a second look at one's first-order evidence about such invidious issues, absent the addition of new relevant evidence occasioned by the disclosed disagreement, is sufficient for discounting sharply the opinions of others, if one judges that his evidence does indeed support his belief. But then the following consideration will show TEV has trouble delivering simultaneously on its self-professed recognition of the relevance of higher-order evidence as one counterbalancing part of the two-pronged act of proper belief-formation (the other being the scrupulous examination of the relevant first-order evidence) and its more basic commitment to the truth-goal. For, assuming

the defender of TEV is serious about attaining truth, he must believe any proposition that strikes him as being true.

An obvious scenario is when p is true, and S believes p on evidence e , which he takes to support p . Suppose at t_1 , he comes to form such a belief. At t_2 , however, he comes across psychological evidence that suggests pervasive disagreement on the issue. Therefore, he looks at his evidence again, and makes sure that his belief checks out on that evidence. In addition, he adds some more pieces of evidence to e that were acquired as a result of the collection of further data prompted by his newfound knowledge of peer disagreement, forming e' . The belief seems to him now, upon recheck, to be somewhat reduced in credibility. Yet, determined to honor his own cognitive authority, which determines how he assesses his evidence, he sharply discounts the credibility of the added evidence by way of the subjective certainty that his own response induces in him, to the point where he is no longer perturbed by or solicitous of new first-order or psychological evidence. This story, if permissible on TEV, would be contrary to Kelly's own statements of the view's commitment to the value of higher-order evidence.

One might object that the conscientious TEV exponent will always be open to revision concerning some matter p about which he has formed a belief, stopping only once he's determined that his latest revision in the set $\{r', r'', \dots, r'''\}$ of all revisions in the "life" of his attitude toward p that are epistemically enjoined by newly revealed peer disagreement has been proportioned to the set $\{e', e'', \dots, e'''\}$ of correspondingly adjusted evidence bodies, at each stage resulting in the appropriate belief about p . This rebuttal is no good. If one is to decide on some genuinely contentious issue rather than not decide on it at all (i.e., withhold judgment), which TEV allows, at some point during one's process of revisiting and revising his belief, the consistent TEV exponent will decide also at some point that his own first-order evidence has outrun any revisionary demands placed by the accretion of future psychological evidence. Clearly, this is the case, as the relevant evidence on any

humanly decidable issue cannot run up to infinity. *A fortiori*, the TEV exponent will, on pain of betraying a puerile wishy-washiness and tacit admission of the sensibility of the conciliationist response, cease subjecting her invidious belief to reflective scrutiny entirely at some point. When exactly? It is important to ask this question, because its answer will reveal how seriously TEV advocates take the existence of psychological evidence to be.

Upon reflection, it is clear that if a TEV exponent would wait until such time as when it is a known fact that all the relevant evidence has been collected for deciding on some issue before finalizing a preexisting belief, that is, the precise time when conciliationists would make their first (and in principle only) belief about the matter, it would be unmotivated to the extreme to believe in the first place, go through manifold revisions of it, all the while knowing that one will likely continue to make changes to one's belief in the future. For if believing *p* is a way of expressing, as Kelly certainly seems to intimate in the passages quoted, certainty in her own belief-formation practices, it would make no sense for the TEV advocate to believe, but allow that it is susceptible to future revisions, given the recurrent tendency of pervasive disagreement. So it follows that the consistent, dyed-in-the-wool exponent of TEV will at some point, likely very early on for the reasons given, decide that there is not any additional evidence that is necessary for closing the case on or that could do violence to her belief.

But if this is so, the rational act that is naturally enjoined by one's sensitivity to new, relevant psychological evidence, namely, rechecking and collecting new evidence, is *ipso facto* precluded from appropriate exercise. So, it turns out that the TEV supporter cannot abide by the truth-goal that is its imperative without significantly shrinking from their duty to take seriously the importance of higher-order evidence. It is evident, in addition, that merely showing that this is a *possibility* on the TEV, as I have done, is enough for my objection to go through. I submit, thus, that TEV supporters face the following dilemma: either they accept that higher-order evidence is unqualifiedly evidence,

to be weighted in equal proportion with one's evidence of one's own epistemic performance, or admit that their view allows a disproportionate encroachment of one's first-order evidence on future psychological evidence. So, the supposed problem for conciliationism—that it allows for implausibly easy bootstrapping—actually afflicts TEV. This suggests that the only difference between ANIW and TEV is that the latter makes the pretense that psychological evidence is equally evidence to its practitioners.

No doubt, the preceding is speculative on my part, and is an implication I have drawn from some of the assumptions that I argued drive Kelly's project. But there is independent support for my reading that goes beyond my oblique extraction of these assumptions. They are his restrictions on what constitutes legitimate psychological evidence for casting doubt on one's own belief, which I shall now argue are left too equivocal to rule out one's being able to discount those whose opinions differ from his own for reasons irrelevant to the issue at hand. Consider the following schema, which Kelly gives, of how new psychological evidence might influence the process of reasoning through revealed disagreement:²¹

Disagreeing about H. You and I share a substantial body of evidence E. E strongly favors H over *not*-H. At t_1 , I believe *not*-H, while you believe H. At t_2 we compare notes. Thus, we each update our evidence E to E*, which consists of the following:

- (i) Our original evidence E,
- (ii) The fact that you are quite confident H is true,
- (iii) The fact that I am quite confident H is false.

According to Kelly, since there is substantial first-order evidence in support of H, and little psychological evidence that H is false, though you are rationally required to adjust your confidence in my direction, the fact that your only evidence against your belief in H about E consists of *my* believing *not*-H does not require your suspending judgment altogether. So, suppose H is some complex mathematical proof. My belief that *not*-H, then, says Kelly, is not so damaging to your correct belief that H: “The justification afforded by such a piece of evidence has a certain robustness

²¹ Kelly, *op. cit.*, 142.

in the face of challenge: it is not easily washed away by the fact that another mistakenly fails to appreciate it on a given occasion” (2010, 141). Now, suppose another mathematician enters the fray, and he submits his opinion that H is false. Suppose further that I am a mathematician, and this mathematician was once my graduate student. On the conciliationist view that I endorse, even more so should you now suspend judgment, if you weren’t persuaded already. However, Kelly will say that you would not be unjustified in sharply discounting my graduate student’s opinion, simply because of this additional fact. But of course my hypothetical ex-graduate student would deny that he had formed his opinion *because he was my graduate student*. Further, it is stipulated that we all have the same relevant evidence. To the extent, then, that we disagree, the only plausible, non question-begging explanation for our disagreement despite the evidence is that you possess something that I don’t, vice versa, or both. And what else could this evidence be but the contraband private evidence/metajustification to whose appeal we’ve already proscribed, if the disagreement persists, in spite of the lofty credentials of each of us as professional mathematicians? So it seems, once again, that once the fact of (revealed) disagreement has been made known, the only rational option left is conciliationism, contra TEV.

Kelly, in priding his view on the fact that it neither privileges first-order nor second-order evidence, can hardly make the case that his view recommends the epistemically most rational response when, as we have seen, what is liable to happen is that upon reevaluation of the shared evidence, the one who is right sticks to his guns, despite his opponent’s insistence that he, too, feels that he is justified in sticking to his guns. Just as we should both suspend judgment as to whose horse crossed the finish line first if you and I find out that we have different beliefs about the outcome of our race (assuming we have raced each other on many occasions, and we have reason enough to trust in each other’s honesty), and we can avail ourselves of no means by which to settle the issue (e.g., via video evidence), we should likewise suspend judgment if we find out that we are

both equally confident about our political, philosophical, or religious beliefs (with obvious exceptions) if we take each other to be epistemic peers.²² So, while I think that the story of metajustification is as good a story there is as to how individuals go about efficiently sifting apart beliefs which they are most certain of from those they are less confident of *independently* of comparing their beliefs to (genuinely) rival ones (if there are any) in a social setting, it does no work *practically* when the question is how to deal with a disagreement with an epistemic peer whose judgment one has good reason to think is as reliable as his own.

So, metajustification, like private insights, cannot be appealed to for supporting ANIW-type views, and consequently, unless we wish to all fall into irremediable epistemic disrepair, we must, as Christensen counsels, embrace the partial checks that disagreements with our peers provide us with, especially in intellectual environments like philosophy, politics, and religion, where epistemic conditions are very bad. This is a *good* thing.

6. Towards a New Way of Viewing Competing Beliefs and Views as Reasonable, and Why Disagreements Persist

If my preceding claims are true, it will also be the case that reasonable disagreements when it comes to such sensitive and controversial topics as politics, philosophy, and religion, are largely illusory. We are rationally required, in the face of what we know about our liability to error and the expertise and honesty of those we consider our epistemic peers, to significantly reduce our confidence or suspend judgment altogether in such situations. But, you ask, how can anyone say with a straight face that there are no genuinely reasonable disagreements? That is, are we all to

²² Kelly offers something of a *reductio* to conciliationism. This is a case where one respondent is obviously wrong. For instance, I calculate our individual shares of the bill to be \$450 each. But the meal itself is 1/5th that amount. Thus, the well-formed beliefs of conciliationists seem to be at the mercy of irresponsible thinkers. And this is presented as being problematic for conciliationism. But it isn't. In this case, you have good, independent evidence that my calculation is off-target, namely, your belief that individual shares cannot exceed the price of an entire bill.

become philosophical skeptics, as van Inwagen thought he would have had he capitulated to this result? Well, I do say that there aren't reasonable disagreements *per se*, and we need not pretend that there are more disagreements of *that* sort than there are. But there are pervasive reasonable disagreements *of a sort*. In recognizing this, I am inspired by Catherine Elgin's incisive observation that our beliefs are involuntary responses to our experiences, and that they aim at truth.²³ So, she quotes Bernard Williams:

If I could acquire a belief at will, I could acquire it whether it was true or not; moreover, I could know that I could acquire it whether it was true or not. If in full consciousness, I could will to acquire a 'belief' irrespective of its truth, it is unclear that ... I could seriously think of it as a belief, i.e. as something purporting to represent reality. (60)

I believe there is much truth to this. As I said earlier, the reason I do not refer to psychological evidence about my competence when the only person making a judgment that I am aware of is myself is because I recognize that I would not have formed my belief unless I thought it was true. But I also recognize that this is true for you as well. There is, then, implicit in our belief-forming practices a *de facto* and *de iure* obedience to a sort of safety principle. This is why running into other persons who hold conflicting opinions occasions such consternation. This is unsurprising, given that our beliefs are ways by which our minds capture experientially characteristic "snapshots" of our environment, and so are sensitive to the causal nexus of our subjective experiences and values; they cannot be manipulated like buttons to meet some credence level adjustment or judgment-suspension mandate independent of our gaining the requisite *perspective* from which to decide the reasonableness of our opponent(s)'s view.²⁴ Notice thus that on my view, we are left with

²³ Catherine Z. Elgin, "Persistent Disagreement," in *Disagreement*, eds. Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 53-68.

²⁴ The topic of doxastic voluntarism is a burgeoning one in the ethics of belief, and has natural links to the literature in the epistemology of disagreement. In my estimation, many epistemologists, following William Alston, have come down on the side that belief is almost universally involuntary, for which see his "The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification," *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988): 257-99. Yet, many have, unlike Alston, rejected Alston's conclusion that epistemic justification is not deontological, i.e., the claim that epistemic justification is a merely descriptive, and not a normative, notion. Some, like Jonathan Adler—for which see Adler Jonathan E. Adler, *Belief's Own Ethics* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 45-53—have done this by arguing that reflective (and justified) belief requires a second-order perspective which all believers *do* ascend to in full awareness, and in which previously held say, prudential beliefs, are

a propitious space from which to say about our revealed conflicting opinions that they reflect a *reasonableness* in our respective incompatible positions.²⁵ To wit, they are reasonable disagreements *of a sort*. Our experiences produce them, in a manner of speaking, after all. Insofar as changing one's belief at will presupposes deceiving oneself about the character of one's own experiences, and we do not know, at any stage during the lifetime of an unresolved disagreement with one's peers, whose experiences are the right ones from which to endorse a particular position in a rational way, we must suspend judgment.

But wait! Isn't there a *prima facie* problem with my view? If we cannot manipulate our beliefs at will, how are we to implement the conciliationist's recommendations? No worries. Under Elgin's view, which I accept, the conciliationist equivalent of suspending judgment consists in abstaining from using—suspending *acceptance* of²⁶—our beliefs as premises in an argument or as a

necessarily revealed to be incoherent when their underlying contradiction, a variant on Moore's Paradox of the form "I believe P but I lack adequate reasons that P," is revealed; whereupon the implicated beliefs are automatically dropped. Adler thus argues that anecdotes about what people believe when unaware of the contradiction in their beliefs or what actions they take up on insufficient evidence are irrelevant. James Montmarquet, in his "Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (Oct., 1992): 331-41, agrees that we have lack of "libertarian" free will in the choice of our doxastic attitudes, but denies that this extirpates or weakens epistemic culpability in all situations, as we bear strong responsibility for our beliefs by being beholden to the intellectual virtue of paying due concern for the truth, which is expressed through belief formation that is praiseworthy, and not—Montmarquet cites—as Hilary Kornblith argues, indirectly and in a distilled sense by our actions. So, Montmarquet thinks, just as we say that a recidivist criminal bears responsibility for his actions despite his predisposition to crime, we say that a careless believer is responsible for his ill-conceived beliefs despite his predisposition to poorly-formed beliefs. Sharon Ryan, in her "Doxastic Compatibilism and the Ethics of Belief," *Philosophical Studies* 114 (2003): 47-79, has argued effectively that Alston's separation of deontological justification from epistemic justification is a non-starter if we are already Humean compatibilists about action, since an analogous solution with respect to belief is ready at hand. The solution I take up, which is to call for critical reflection by the prospective knower, is Montmarquet's. Montmarquet's account suffers the disability of not explaining why the fact that he thinks his account preserves the naturalness of being able to impute blame on a person's ill-formed belief should lead us to say or think that the imputation is warranted, but extinguishing these concerns is not germane to, and hence beyond the scope of this paper, this paper in general presupposing that the agent in some genuine respect is responsible for his malformed belief, whichever analysis turns out to be true.

²⁵ This redeems my promise in fn. 16 to explain what is this "private undisclosed evidence" that may serve to save reasonable disagreements from extinction. Note that this *isn't* metajustification, as it is not used in argument, but rather, is a term used to represent our subjective experiences, the recognition of which allows us to posit a new kind of reasonable disagreement that avoids the problems associated with insisting that there are reasonable disagreements *per se*.

²⁶ Earlier, I argued that single-person cases are not analogous to multiple-persons cases of disagreement. Additional light is shed on this by applying Elgin's rules for dealing with disagreement, which suggests just as much. Consider an example of refusing to accept a belief by not using it as a basis for action: you are deathly afraid of flying, and believe that the plane you are presently boarding will crash into the Ural Mountains. However, you are aware that the odds of that happening are vanishingly small. Further, you have a meeting to attend in Moscow. So, you get on the plane anyway. This is an example where I am clearly not considering my own track-record. Rather, I immediately turn to what's

basis for action, where our interests are cognitive (64).²⁷ This is clearly implied by what I said in the previous paragraph: since belief is involuntary, belief isn't ratified until one has ascended, as it were, to a second-order perspective, by way of voluntary reflection, and in which one puts in view all the relevant psychological evidence and first-order evidence in front of him. At this level, fairly rejecting an opponent's view requires actually situating oneself as much as possible in the opponent's epistemic position.

And—I should add to preempt justified worries—once we have done this, our original positions aren't determined to being made to coincide with our opponent's. That all depends on whose experiences and way of evaluating the relevant shared evidence was right all along. (So it isn't the case that we will, by doing this, all just end up in the opposite camp from which we started, resulting in an epistemic climate with respect to the disputed proposition formally identical to the previous.) This, by the way, I submit, is one reason why we are naturally disinclined to cede too much ground to our opponent in a dispute. For we recognize that if we accepted their response instead of ours (i.e., if we rejected p , which we started out with pre-revelation of disagreement, we now accept \bar{p} , which our opponent holds) our response would be unjustified unless we actually worked to position ourselves in a way that makes possible a fair critique of our opponent's view.

This is a lengthy, and even arduous task (think about all the experiences you haven't come by of your opponent's!), but without having been put through it, an honest believer cannot but suspend acceptance in the meantime. This is why oftentimes we instead choose to curtly dismiss our opponent's view. The comfort of automatic belief is liberating, the labor of examining it oppressive. But since belief is two-leveled (relative to a given judgment), consisting of how it reacts naturally to

relevant: the evidence (in this case, statistics about the frequency of plane crashes).

²⁷ Though I co-opt Elgin's account, I disagree with her on some of its particulars. For example, Elgin suggests that suspending acceptance on many matters would be a "cognitively impoverishing stance" (65). I take Kornblith's more optimistic position: recognizing that we should withhold acceptance because of facts about our epistemic conditions does *not* "suggest that we should stop thinking about these matters." See Hilary Kornblith, "Belief in the Face of Controversy," in *Disagreement*, eds. Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 50-2.

its owner's environment and the meta-perspective the owner takes up to ratify it, improving its epistemic status is always a possibility, for which, as I have argued throughout, the conciliationist strategy best plays the role.

7. Conclusion: The Best Solution to TEV's Problems Is the Conciliationist Solution

What is the upshot of all this? Consider Feldman's *Forked Road* again. There, we saw that he suggests that the picture provided for action affords no available analogue for resolving disagreement about beliefs. I cannot rationally believe P and at the same time judge that your belief *not-P* is just as reasonable. But, if we endorse Elgin's account, we see that this needn't be true. We can understand reasonable disagreement to simply reflect the fact of our varied experiences. So, van Inwagen needn't be a philosophical skeptic. He can consider Lewis wrong, but not irrational. He cannot, after all, but believe what he does believe. On the other hand, by not foreclosing the debate between Lewis and himself in not judging him irrational,²⁸ he allows for himself to acquire the relevant experiences to, if Lewis is in fact right, "see the light" and thereby acquire the correct belief without ever having been forced to accept a false belief, and thereby stall his own or others' intellectual progress. The general lesson is that once we recognize the fact of our beliefs being involuntary and, for the most part, products of our own experiences, we will be less inclined to convict others when their opinions diverge from ours. Instead, we will be all the more aware of the constant susceptibility of the epistemic status of our prior beliefs to downgrades caused by the newly-received content brought by our always-changing experiences.

Ultimately, it is hoped that if we haven't already insulated our prior beliefs from the

²⁸ Notice that accepting this account doesn't mean accepting, once again, SNIW, which we refuted. There, the strategy applied to circumstances where it is postulated that even though we share all the same evidence, we are rational in maintaining our own beliefs while not judging each other unreasonable. On Elgin's account, we recognize that our evidence bases differ, because our subjective experiences differ. Therefore, SNIW stands refuted, and endorsing Elgin's account doesn't imply endorsing SNIW.

reflective demands that could be exerted on us by future countervailing evidence (assuming there is disagreement), as the TEV acolyte will have done, the hard work that we perform to eradicate doubt from disagreement may bear fruit, and consummate in a rightfully earned object. What is this object? This object, the end of a community of prospective knowers, is what one strategy in particular makes possible in the moments leading to it—that of the acquisition of newly shared knowledge. What is this strategy?

Well, if I have done my work well enough, it should be clear that that approach which alone seems to allow us to consistently and rationally maintain a balance between positioning ourselves to learning, by refraining from prematurely accepting belief when in the face of disagreement with an epistemic peer, and recognizing our own cognitive authority, is *conciliationism*.

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