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 Rough draft

The equal weight view implies that peer disagreement is unreasonable. Our evidence suggests that if we have an opinion on some interesting issue it will be easy to find a peer to disagree with us. Thus, the equal weight view seems to imply that few of our views are both interesting and justified. To undermine skeptical arguments from disagreement, it is tempting to try to undermine the equal weight view. I shall defend this increasingly unpopular view from recent attacks. I shall also concede in advance that we should probably not believe the arguments offered here are sound.

INTRODUCTION

Tilda is a friend and a peer, someone you trust to try to be truthful and someone you expect to be as truthful as you when she tries. One day over lunch, you discover that you and Tilda disagree about something. You believe p . She believes $\sim p$. You discover that this disagreement does not arise because you have evidence she lacks or she has evidence you do not. What should you do in light of this disagreement?

If you and Tilda truly are peers (i.e., you are equally intelligent and both of you had the same evidence concerning p prior to your disagreement) and you knew each other to be peers prior to the disagreement, the equal weight view (EW) says that you should significantly decrease your confidence in p and she should significantly decrease her confidence in $\sim p$.¹ Neither of you should be more confident that you are right and the other is wrong. Neither of you should be more confident that you responded rightly to the evidence than the other did. Suppose you both decrease your confidence in keeping with EW. If you do that and Tilda does likewise, the disagreement disappears. If you are no more confident in p than in $\sim p$, you no longer believe p . If you no longer believe p , you no longer disagree with those who believe $\sim p$.

There are different theoretical explanations as to why decreasing confidence is the right response to this kind of peer disagreement. Someone could argue that after the disagreement, the evidence for p and against $\sim p$ is equally strong. If the evidence for p and for $\sim p$ is equally strong, believing p rather than $\sim p$ (or believing $\sim p$ rather than p) is the wrong way to respond to the evidence. In responding that way, you might end up with the right belief because you might end up with a true belief, but you do not believe rightly. That is, you have no right to hold the belief that you do.

This approach seems wrongheaded. Suppose that prior to the disagreement, the evidence that you and Tilda shared strongly favored her position over yours. In learning about the disagreement, you and Tilda acquire new evidence. You had no evidence for p prior to the disagreement. All the evidence there was supported Tilda's position. Facts about the way you handled your evidence *might* be evidence for p , it might be evidence for $\sim p$, but I see no reason to assume that whatever evidence you acquire for believing p in learning about your disagreement will counterbalance the evidence that Tilda had in support of $\sim p$.²

¹ Elga (2007) once defended the view, but he has since abandoned it for a modified view that is

² For discussion, see Kelly (2010) and Weatherson (MS). Matheson (2009) argues that higher-order evidence functions as a defeater in explaining why the discovery of disagreement requires parties to the disagreement to be conciliatory.

Here is a better explanation of EW. You should never believe without justification. That is to say, you should not believe p without adequate reason for doing so. Moreover, you should not believe p unless you can adequately respond to the reasons that you have. The fact that you and Tilda disagree might be some evidence that bears on whether p , but there is no reason to think that this evidence swings so much weight that its discovery means that you and Tilda now both have equally good evidence for p and for $\sim p$. The fact that you disagree is a reason to think that you and Tilda were either out of your depths or suffered from some sort of performance error. This evidence undercuts the support that the evidence initially provided for your beliefs and for hers. It does so equally because it is just as likely that you are out of your depths as it is that Tilda is out of her depths. The two of you are just as likely to suffer from sort of performance error. Sometimes it is easy to work out who botched things up and did not respond correctly to the evidence you had, in which case the disagreement can easily be resolved. I think it is more plausible to think of disagreements as providing defeaters that undermine the support your evidence provides so that in the wake of disagreement your beliefs cannot be justified by whatever objective support relations the evidence might have initially provided to them.

One of the reasons that EW is so interesting is that it seems to imply that there are far fewer reasonable disagreements than we might have initially thought. Rational disagreements require disputes in which the opposition takes up opposing and incompatible positions and remain fully rational in their commitments even while they acknowledge that there is a peer who disagrees. If, as often seems to be the case, disagreements about interesting propositions involve peers, parties to these disagreements ought to decrease their confidence in such a way that the disagreement dissipates. Because the disagreement persists, the peers who disagree seem to be less than fully rational. Take a case that is near and dear to my heart. Feldman and I are complacent atheists. We both think that the evidence we have for our atheism is sufficient to warrant a high degree of confidence in the belief that God does not exist. We both see that it is hard to remain complacent if we also accept a conciliatory view such as EW. To complacently believe that there is no God, I would have to think that nobody who disagrees with me is a peer, and that seems to fly in the face of much of the evidence that I have. Perhaps EW is correct and I should not be so complacent in my atheism. If so, I suppose I can take some comfort in the fact that I can criticize Feldman for his complacency.

My aim in this essay is not to try to show that EW is correct. I do not know if I believe EW. EW seems quite plausible to me and the argument I shall discuss below for EW is one that I think is intuitively compelling. I want to focus on EW for two reasons. First, I do not think that EW has received a fair shake in the recent literature. Second, EW figures centrally in an interesting skeptical argument from disagreement that I think deserves careful consideration. Here is the skeptical argument from disagreement. Most of the interesting things we believe (i.e., most of what we believe about epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, politics, and religion) are controversial. Much of this controversy seems to involve peers who disagree with each other fully aware of the fact that there are peers that they disagree with. Because EW is correct, we cannot rationally remain committed to these controversial propositions. Thus, few of the interesting things we believe we believe rationally. To remedy this situation, we might look for new evidence and appeal to new arguments, but we should expect that much of the evidence we will find has been found and most of the arguments that seem new to us are just that. The pessimistic conclusion is that we should suspend judgment on most of the interesting things we believe.

Is this skeptical argument sound? Perhaps, but owing to recent skepticism about EW, I suspect that few will find this skeptical argument all that interesting. In the next section, I shall present an argument for EW. After that, I shall explain why recent attempts to undermine EW have been unsuccessful. The recent literature is filled with attacks on EW. What I have not

seen in this discussion is a satisfactory explanation as to why the argument for EW discussed in the next section fails. I present the argument one more time in the hopes that somebody will explain where the argument goes wrong.

AN ANALOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE EQUAL WEIGHT VIEW

What reason is there for adopting a conciliatory view such as EW as opposed to a steadfast view that tells us to (sometimes) maintain confidence in the face of peer disagreement? An intuitively compelling argument for the conciliatory view is an argument by analogy.³ Suppose your disagreement with Tilda concerns the time. You looked at your watch and judged that it was 5:00. She looked at her watch and judged that it was 5:05. When you come to know why you disagree, it does seem quite plainly irrational for you to stick to your guns and for her to stick to hers if neither of you has any reason to think that one of these watches is more reliable than the other. Suppose your disagreement concerns the temperature. You looked at your thermometer and judged that it was fifty degrees Fahrenheit. She looked at her thermometer and judged that it was sixty degrees Fahrenheit. When you come to see why you disagree, it does seem quite plainly irrational to stick to your guns if neither of you has any reason to think that one thermometer is more reliable than the other. If other disagreements are similar in the relevant respects, perhaps it is plainly irrational to stick to your guns. Steadfast views tell you that you should sometimes stick to your guns in cases of peer disagreement, so it seems we have good reason to reject steadfast views.

To block this sort of argument, EW's critics might offer one of two kinds of response:

- Type-I: Argue that it can be proper to stick to your guns by sticking to your favorite thermometer or watch.
- Type-II: Argue that the analogy between disagreeing instruments and disagreeing peers breaks down.

It seems to me that the only plausible response for the steadfast to offer would be a Type-II response.

If the analogy breaks down and the argument for EW fails, what alternative views might be offered in place of EW? EW tells peers that their response to disagreement should be *symmetrical* and *conciliatory*. You might take issue with the idea that the proper response to disagreement should be symmetrical or with the idea that the proper response is conciliatory. Because it says that the proper response is symmetrical, EW says in effect that even if someone's response to the evidence was initially the correct response they are no better off once the disagreement arises than the peer is who responded to the advice incorrectly. Because of this, it is not clear what work the original evidence can do once the disagreement arises. EW seems to give too much weight to facts about the way we respond to our evidence and not enough to the facts that constitute our original evidence in determining what we should believe. Moreover, it seems odd that both parties to the disagreement share equal responsibility for modifying their attitudes in the wake of disagreement when the mess made might be entirely the result of the way that one party to the disagreement has mismanaged his or her epistemic obligations. Why are you obligated to modify your attitudes in light of Tilda's mistakes? You also might take issue with the idea that the proper response to peer disagreement is always conciliatory. True, the discovery that your peer disagrees with you is upsetting. True, this discovery seems to provide new evidence that has some bearing on whether your original judgment is right. The problem with EW is that the fact of disagreement is one bit of evidence that should be considered alongside a much larger body of evidence and the facts about disagreement should not lead you to toss out the original evidence that you took to support

³ For discussion of the analogical argument, see Christensen (2007), Enoch (2010), Feldman (2007), Kelly (2010), and White (2009).

your view. By telling you to meet in the middle, EW seems to tell you to adjust your attitudes in such a way that the original evidence is completely neutralized. This seems like overkill.

Properly developed, there might be something to these criticisms. There are two points that I want to stress. First, these criticisms have no force when directed against views that tell you that it is wrong to stick to your guns by sticking to your thermometer, watch, calculator, etc. If they have any force against EW it must be because epistemology tells us to treat some persons as if they are not mere instruments for uncovering truths and responding to evidence. If the proper way to think of persons in epistemology is as instruments, there must be something right about EW. Second, even if EW calls for revision, it might be that the revisions that EW calls for are so minor that these revisions leave the skeptical argument from disagreement unscathed. It might be, for example, that justified belief in an interesting proposition requires some high degree of confidence in the truth of that proposition. Such confidence is warranted only if you have strong evidence for believing that proposition. You might think that the fact that your peer disagrees with you provides enough evidence against your belief that this high degree of confidence is no longer warranted. Alternatively, you might think that the fact that your peer disagrees with you is good evidence for believing that you have not responded properly to the evidence either because you lack the ability to settle the relevant question by means of the evidence you had or because something went wrong in the way that you responded to this body of evidence. If such evidence can defeat the justificatory support you had initially, perhaps maintaining a high degree of confidence in the wake of the discovery of peer disagreement is not warranted. What seems completely unwarranted is treating the discovery of peer disagreement with indifference. If you discovered that thousands of peers disagreed with you and you alone thought that you were right, it seems that your steadfast adherence to your original view would be unreasonable. Would it be unreasonable if the numbers were stacked against you to some lesser degree? It seems so. If the fact that two peers disagree with you and no peer has your back is enough to undermine your confidence to some degree, surely one peer should undermine your confidence to some degree. Perhaps all the skeptical argument requires is that some small concession is called for on your part. If such a small concession is sufficient to undermine the kind of justification needed for knowledge, it is enough to suit the purposes of the skeptical argument.

ARE CONCILIATORY VIEWS SELF-DEFEATING?

Some have argued that we ought to reject EW on the grounds that it is self-defeating. It is not self-defeating to give equal weight to two thermometers or calculators when you know that they are equally reliable. Thus, if EW ought to be rejected on the grounds that it is self-defeating, there must indeed be something about us that distinguishes us from instruments. I shall focus on Elga's discussion of the objection because it is the most developed version of the objection in the literature.⁴

As Elga states the objection, it comes to this.⁵ EW tells us how to respond to disagreements about all kinds of things. Some of these disagreements might have to do with shopping or football. Some have to do with disagreement itself. Suppose you and Tilda were disagreeing about disagreement. You accept EW. She rejects it. Now what should you do? It seems that EW calls for its own rejection. That is to say, if EW is correct, you should now believe it not to be. (Or, you should not believe it to be correct.)

Elga thinks that if a view calls for its own rejection, it is incoherent. Fleshing this out a bit, he says that the problem with EW is that EW is an inductive method (i.e., a method for

⁴ I first heard a version of this objection from Matt Weiner. In addition to Elga (2010), see Kelly (2005) and Weatherson (MS).

⁵ Elga (2010: 179).

taking evidence into account and forming beliefs in light of it) and that no inductive method can coherently recommend a competing inductive method over itself. Competing inductive methods are methods that offer contrary recommendations about how to respond to evidence. If an inductive method tells you to follow some competing inductive method, the methods will deliver contrary verdicts about what to do in some circumstance. Elga thinks any such method is incoherent.

An example should help us see the kind of difficulty he thinks arises for EW:

Suppose that *Consumer Reports* says, “Buy only toaster X,” while *Smart Shopper* says, “Buy only toaster Y.” And suppose that *Consumer Reports* also says, “*Consumer Reports* is worthless. *Smart Shopper* magazine is the ratings magazine to follow.” Then *Consumer Reports* offers inconsistent advice about toasters. For, on the one hand, it says directly to buy only Toaster X. But, on the other hand, it also says to trust *Smart Shopper*, which says to buy only Toaster Y. And it is impossible to follow both pieces of advice ... Moral: ... no inductive method can coherently recommend a competing inductive method over itself ... it is incoherent for an inductive method to recommend two incompatible responses to a single course of experience. But that is exactly what a method does if it ever recommends a competing method over itself (Elga 2010: 181).

I agree that something has gone wrong at *Consumer Reports* if it starts issuing this sort of advice. To state the precise nature of the problem, Elga suggests that there is, “a completely general constraint that applies to any fundamental policy, rule, or method ... [which is that] to be consistent, a fundamental policy, rule, or method must be dogmatic with respect to its own correctness” (2010: 185). It should be noted that if this objection shows that EW is false, it does so because it shows that every view that tells you to be conciliatory when it comes to your views about disagreement is false. Thus, if the objection to EW is sound, it is a sound objection to most extant views about the proper attitude to take towards views about disagreement. Thus, if you think that the justified degree of confidence you can have in your views about disagreement ought to decrease when armies of peers tell you that they reject your views, you should worry that there is something amiss with Elga’s self-defeat objection to EW.

In arguing that a view is self-defeating, what do you really hope to show? You might try to show that the view is not the sort of view you can rationally believe, but you might (also) try to show that the view is mistaken. It seems to me that defenders of EW might accept that their view is not a view that they can rationally believe. Of course, nobody likes to abandon their view, but even if they come to think that they have to abandon their view they do not have to reject that view as mistaken. It seems that Elga wants to try to show that EW is mistaken. In other words, it seems he wants to show that EW is false. Is EW incoherent? Does the incoherence of EW show that it is false?

Consider four ways in which you might charge that a view is incoherent:

- IC1: View X is incoherent if X implies there is body of evidence E such that it is possible for you to have E and view X says that you ought to disbelieve X if you have E.
- IC2: View X is incoherent if X implies there is a body of evidence E such that it is possible for you to have E and view X says you ought not believe X if you have E.
- IC3: View X is incoherent if X implies that there is a situation in which you should believe *p* and should not believe *p*.

IC4: View X is incoherent if X implies that there is a situation in which you should believe *p* and it is not the case that you should believe *p*.

It seems that *Consumer Reports* might be incoherent in all four ways. It might tell you to read another magazine to see if it should be trusted and that other magazine might tell you not to trust it. It might tell you on one page that you should believe some toaster is reliable and tell you on another page that you should not believe anything the magazine has to say about toasters. It might also tell you that it is not the case that you should believe anything it says about toasters and also tell you that it is the case that you should believe anything it says about toasters. Is EW incoherent in any of these ways? Does it follow that EW is mistaken if it is incoherent in one or more of these ways?

Consider the first two incoherence charges, IC1 and IC2. Is EW incoherent in either of these ways? EW does seem to imply that there are some bodies of evidence you could have where you either ought to believe EW is mistaken or ought not believe EW. It is not clear that this shows that EW is incoherent and not at all clear why this would show EW to be mistaken. Think about the right reasons view (RR).⁶ Among other things, RR tells you to believe those views supported by your evidence and stick by those views even when you discover a peer disagrees. It certainly seems possible that graduate students confined to Rochester might have evidence that supports EW, might have no evidence against that view, and might not have any reason to think that their capacity for responding to reasons has been compromised. If your epistemic obligation is to follow the evidence, it certainly seems possible that you could have (misleading?) evidence against RR. If so, IC1 and IC2 can also be leveled against RR. It can also be leveled against the evidentialist view that tells you that it is permissible to believe if you have sufficient evidence and impermissible to believe if you do not have sufficient evidence. Graduate students tied to chairs in William James' basement might have had evidence that supports a pragmatist view that implies that it is sometimes proper to believe propositions without sufficient evidence. It certainly seems that they could have rationally believed that the James' anti-evidentialist views were correct even if those views were mistaken.

As a general point, it seems that the justified acceptance of any philosophical view depends upon the quality of the evidence you have for believing the view. Conee and Feldman provide a sketch of a model of confirmation that seems plausible in rough outline:

We believe that sometimes when a person contemplates a proposition, the person acquires evidence supporting its truth. It is not necessarily the case that everyone gets this sort of *apriori* evidence by contemplating the same propositions. Just as some people have more acute visual faculties, some may be better able to get the evidence for some truths than others in this *apriori* way ... In considering propositions that are the best candidates for immediate *apriori* justification, one becomes conscious of something about the relations among the concepts employed in considering the proposition. This non-doxastic awareness of conceptual relations provides the evidence. Thought experiments can provide a different sort of *apriori* justification. Intuitive judgments about hypothetical particular examples can gain evidence from awareness of conceptual relations, as before. But philosophical principles that are properly generalized from thought experiments are not supported by such conceptual evidence. The *apriori* evidence for the principles supports them in a broadly

⁶ See Kelly (2005: 180) for an introduction.

inductive way (Conee and Feldman 2008: 93).

It seems that most of our philosophical views (including views about the proper response to disagreement) are going to be supported in this 'broadly inductive way' by the intuitions that we have about various examples. If this is the way that these philosophical beliefs are justified, it seems that the best support we can hope to have for our philosophical beliefs will be fallible. Fallible grounds can fail you. If they lead you astray, you still might be justified in your false philosophical beliefs. I do not see why views about disagreement would be any exception and this would include the *true* beliefs you might have about the proper response to disagreement.

If IC1 and IC2 apply to many independently plausible views (e.g., most to all philosophical views, the view that you ought to reject any view that is susceptible to the first or second incoherence charge, etc.), EW might not be in bad company. Why does it matter if IC1 or IC2 sticks? Remember that Elga says that EW has to be dogmatic with respect to its own correctness. If what he means is that EW has to say that you should believe that EW is correct, then there is indeed a problem with EW. Your evidence could point against EW and it might be that you should believe that EW is mistaken. If EW (i) tells you that you should believe that EW is not mistaken and (ii) tells you that it is not the case that you should believe that EW is mistaken, the fourth incoherence charge sticks. The problem with this retooled objection to EW is that EW does *not* say that you should believe EW. It might imply that you should believe EW if your evidence supports EW, but it does not tell you to believe EW whatever your evidence happens to be. The failure of Kantian ethics is not that we cannot derive from the categorical imperative the imperative to believe that the fundamental principle of morality is the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative is dogmatic with respect to its own correctness because it does not tell you to violate it by following some principle that tells you to act on maxims that cannot be universalized. If a moral view can be dogmatic with respect to its own correctness even if it allows that you can properly believe the view to be mistaken, maybe the same holds true for epistemic views. True, EW does not say that you should believe EW. It does not forbid believing EW is mistaken. In these respects, it is very much like the categorical imperative, which is dogmatic with respect to its own correctness. If a view can tolerate to believe that it is false or require you to believe that it is false and still be dogmatic with respect to its own correctness, perhaps IC1 and IC2 stick and EW *is* dogmatic with respect to its own correctness.

Maybe what Elga meant when he said that EW has to be dogmatic with respect to its own correctness is *not* that EW has to enjoin you to believe that EW is correct, but only that EW cannot offer a set of prescriptions that, *inter alia*, require you to violate EW. Such a view would not be dogmatic with respect to its own correctness, but nothing we have seen thus far indicates that EW tells you to believe something and refrain from believing it or that EW says that you should believe *p* and that it is not the case that you should believe *p*. That is to say, nothing said thus far indicates that IC3 or IC4 sticks.

Elga might have thought that the reason that EW is not dogmatic with respect to its own correctness is this: EW implies that you can have evidence that supports the hypothesis that some competing inductive method should be followed rather than EW. Suppose, for example, that your evidence supports RR. If you justifiably believe that RR is correct, you justifiably believe that you ought to follow RR rather than EW. If you are permitted to follow RR rather than EW and EW implies that this is so, then *this* is why EW is not dogmatic with respect to its own correctness. Thus, it might seem that if IC1 or IC2 stick, IC3 or IC4 must also stick. If so, we surely must reject EW.

The problem with this version of the objection is that it assumes that if you justifiably believe RR is correct, you have the right to follow RR and the right to violate EW. This assumes that anything you justifiably believe to be an inductive method must thereby be a genuine inductive method. This is false, however, and this is why neither IC3 nor IC4 applies

to EW. It certainly seems possible for you to justifiably believe that some method for determining your moral obligations is correct even if your evidence is misleading and your obligation is often to refrain from acting in the ways that your method requires. If this is possible, we have to draw a distinction between the methods justifiably believed to be correct and the methods that justify (i.e., the correct methods). Methods that are incorrect (i.e., that do not offer justifications for belief or for action) cannot be turned into correct methods just because your (misleading) evidence indicates that these methods are correct. The opposing view seems to rest on this idea that if your evidence indicates that *M* is a genuine inductive method and *M* says that you ought to believe *p*, just as you can justifiably believe that you ought to believe *p* you can justifiably believe *p*. It seems more reasonable to think that you might have misleading evidence about which inductive methods are genuine than to think that the evidence you have cannot be misleading or determines which inductive methods are genuine. It seems incoherent to say that objective relations between your evidence and hypotheses about which methods are genuine if those methods might later say that these very same objective relations between evidence and some hypothesis cannot justify accepting that hypothesis. This seems to be the point that Elga was trying to stress and yet it seems to cause trouble for the view that any method you justifiably believe to be genuine is a method that issues justifications.

To sum up, the only incoherence charge that would show that EW is false is IC3 or IC4. These incoherence charges stick only if EW issues contrary prescriptions. The thought that it does either rests on the mistaken thought that EW tells us to believe EW (and then indirectly tells us that we are not to believe it) or the mistaken thought that anything you justifiably take to be an inductive method is one. At best, the self-defeat objection shows that someone can have a body of evidence that would make it unreasonable to believe EW. In this respect, EW is like most views in epistemology and all of the extant views in the disagreement literature.

THE VIRTUES OF SELFLESSNESS

EW tells us that there is an agent-neutral epistemic norm, one that tells both parties to disagreement to be conciliatory. To show that rational disagreement is possible, Huemer has suggested that there might be agent-centered epistemic norms. If there are some agent-centered epistemic norms, rational disagreements of just the sort EW says are impossible might turn out to be possible after all:

Suppose two subjects have perfect ... knowledge of one another's epistemically relevant states (sensory experiences, memories, intuitions, or whatever is relevant to what one is justified in believing). Suppose that neither party makes any *procedural* error in forming beliefs: for instance, neither party makes any oversights or incorrect inferences, neither party incorrectly weighs two pieces of evidence, and neither party accepts premises he is not justified in accepting. Both parties form their beliefs by the methods one ought to use in forming beliefs. Could these individuals still end up with unresolved differences of opinion? On the *agent-neutral* view, both parties must fully agree with one another on all factual questions, for they have the same available evidence, and they weight that evidence in the same way. On the agent-neutral view, though *what evidence one has* often differs from one person to another, the epistemic force of a given piece of evidence is not itself agent-relative. That is, for any given piece of evidence, there is an objective degree to which that evidence supports a given conclusion, which should guide the thinking of

any person who is aware of the evidence. But for the agent-centrist, two parties could rationally assign different weights to the same piece of evidence, depending on *whose* evidence it was, even though both parties were equally certain of the existence of that evidence. This has the consequence that the two parties described above might rationally disagree after all is said and done (Huemer 2011: 19-20).

If there are agent-centered epistemic norms, perhaps it is a mistake to treat yourself as just one truthometer amongst many. Are there any agent-centered epistemic norms? If so, do such norms undermine the analogical argument for EW and blunt the force of the skeptical argument?

The epistemic egoist believes there are agent-centered epistemic norms that tell us that it is sometimes proper to display a kind of trust in your own attitudes that you do not give to others.⁷ An agent-centered epistemic norm would identify a condition C such that if you were in C, you would have some *prima facie* reason to believe *p* even if someone else would not have an equally good reason to believe *p* if they knew you were in C.⁸ On some formulations of epistemic egoism, the subject's non-doxastic mental conditions determine which reasons she has. On others, C is specified in terms of the subject's beliefs. Huemer opts for the first sort of formulation.

In previous work, Huemer (2007) defends phenomenal conservatism (PC), a view that holds that your seemings and appearances confer justification upon your beliefs. If a seeming or appearance is firm enough and you have no defeating reasons available to you, he thinks that the beliefs you form in response to these appearances will be justified. He thinks that it would be better to formulate phenomenal conservatism in such a way that it recognizes agent-centered epistemic norms (2011: 23). Moreover, he thinks there are cases where it is intuitive to say that an agent-neutral approach gets things wrong. Suppose Tilda intuitively believes *p* and has no defeaters. She might have some degree of justification for believing *p*. He does not think, however, that her intuition provides the same degree of justification for *you* to believe *p*. If you do not have her intuition but know about her intuition, he thinks that most of us would agree that she has a degree of justification you do not. The lesson he draws from this is that an agent-centered approach to intuitive justification is appropriate. If it is, then it seems that those disagreements that arise (in part) because of a difference in intuitions might be perfectly reasonable disagreements. If such disagreements involve peers, EW is mistaken to say that parties to this disagreement are somehow less than perfectly reasonable.⁹

Is an agent-centered approach plausible for other kinds of seemings or appearances? It does not seem plausible for the case of perceptual seemings or appearances. Here it seems that

⁷ For a critical discussion of epistemic egoism, see Foley (2001).

⁸ Huemer (2011: 18). One reason he thinks that PC should recognize agent-centered epistemic norms is that he thinks the arguments for PC do not support an agent-neutral principle that states that each of us should treat the seemings and appearances of all subjects as reasons for our beliefs. Since I do not think the arguments he has offered for PC lend any support to PC, I do not think this provides much support to an agent-centered formulation of PC.

⁹ Just to be clear, the reason that Huemer thinks that seemings and appearances confer different degrees of justification upon your beliefs and beliefs held by others is not that you have better access to your seemings and appearances and not because it is possible for others to have defeaters that you lack. Even if you and Tilda had the same defeaters and the same knowledge of your intuitions (never mind how), your intuitions can justify your beliefs to a better degree than they justify hers.

that perceptual appearances and seemings are like the readings on a thermometer.¹⁰ If perceptual appearances do not confer different degrees of justification upon two subjects' beliefs by virtue of the fact that these seemings are states of one of these subjects and not the other, I think that agent-centered PC (ACPC) faces an important objection. One of the (supposed) advantages of PC is that it can accommodate an intuition that Huemer takes to be the central intuition behind internalism:

It is that there cannot be a pair of cases in which everything seems to a subject to be the same in all epistemically relevant respects, and yet the subject ought, rationally, to take different doxastic attitudes in the two cases—for instance, in one case to affirm a proposition and in the other to withhold (2006: 151).

If you compare, say, two of your own intuitions concerning p and q respectively and you found that both p and q were intuitive, the internalist would say that if all else is equal, either both intuitions would justify or neither would. If you compared two of your perceptual experiences, the internalist who accepts the internalist intuition would say that, *ceteris paribus*, both experiences justify your beliefs or neither experience justifies your beliefs. To say otherwise, you would have to say that the following absurd speech could be true:

I seem to be aware of a dog, just as I seem to be aware of a unicorn. These two experiences seem equally reliable to me, and in general, seem alike in all epistemically relevant respects. However, I believe that there is a unicorn, and I do not believe that there is a dog. I have no reason to think that the unicorn experience is any more likely to be accurate than the dog experience; I just accept the content of the one and not the other, for no apparent reason (2006: 150).

If the absurd speech is absurd and the upshot is that two experiences justify equally provided that the subject has no reason to distrust one of the experiences, the same seems to apply to the subject's intuitions. Indeed, the same seems to apply to the full range of seeming states that confer justification (e.g., intuitions, apparent perceptions, apparent memories). Suppose the internalist intuition seems to tell us to trust our seeming states equally. Suppose further that we should trust our experiences and the experiences of others equally provided that we know about them perfectly well and have no reason to distrust them. Now it seems that there are two cases perfectly alike in all epistemically relevant respects that ACPC tells you to treat differently: the case in which someone tells you that p is true where you know that their belief is based on an apparent perception and the case in which someone tells you that q is true where their belief is based on an intuition.

It looks as if ACPC either has to reject the internalist intuition, admit that your intuitions justify your beliefs to the same degree your intuitions can justify the beliefs of others who know about your intuitions, or say that the experiences that others have can justify their beliefs without justifying yours even if both of you know of these experiences equally well. While I reject internalism, I do not think that the cases considered here give us any reason to do so. It seems quite implausible to say that if you and I both know about my experiences and have no defeaters, what I know about my experiences justifies my beliefs to a greater degree than what you know about my experiences can justify yours. Perhaps we should just take the internalist intuition at face value and say that your intuitions can confer the same degree of justification upon your beliefs as it does upon beliefs held by others. If so, we have no reason to accept ACPC.

¹⁰ This is a point on which Enoch (2010), Huemer (2011), and I agree.

Because ACPC is not yet a fully developed view, it is hard to tell what the view's implications are, but suppose ACPC says that a token intuition's epistemic efficacy can vary from person to person depending upon whose intuition it is. Now, suppose that while reflecting on some trolley cases, you walk through a contraption you take to be a security scanner at the airport. The technician says that the device you walked through was not a security scanner. It was a teletransporter. You are concerned. You think now that you had just previously had the intuition that it was wrong to push someone off of a footbridge, but you realize that if the teletransporter had been on, that would have been someone very similar to you that had that intuition. You ask the technician whether the machine was on and she says that it was off. In discovering that you are numerically identical with the person who walked into the machine who had the intuition about the footbridge does your confidence in your judgment about the permissibility of pushing someone off the bridge 'tick up' now that you know that the intuition was truly yours and not just the intuition of someone very, very similar to you? I have a hard time believing identity is what matters in reflecting on ethics.

There is a further strange feature of ACPC that should be mentioned. If you thought that you were somehow better at uncovering the truth than Tilda was, you might think that your seemings and appearances are better at justifying beliefs than her seemings and appearances are. Maybe you think that she needs glasses or that she needs to drink less. Maybe you think that she is impetuous or careless. Remember that this is *not* what you think. By your lights, Tilda is just as likely to uncover the truth as you are. If someone wanted to find out whether p and was trying to figure out whether to send you or to send Tilda on a fact finding mission, you could say that it should not matter to them who they decided to send on this fact finding mission. If you justifiably believe that you and Tilda really are peers, surely you must think that there is an explanation as to why this is. It would be easier to explain why you and Tilda are peers if you can assume that your seemings and appearances justify equally well. If you were convinced that your seemings and appearances did not justify your respective beliefs' equally well, you would be hard-pressed to explain why you and Tilda are equally good at uncovering the truth. Of course, defenders of ACPC would not say that your seemings and appearances are better at justifying your beliefs than her seemings and appearances are at justifying her beliefs. They would say that your appearances and seemings are better at justifying your beliefs than hers and that her seemings are better at justifying her beliefs than yours. This is modeled on the ethical egoist's idea that considerations having to do with your well-being can give you a reason to act even if it gives Tilda no reason to act. The obscurity of ACPC seems to be that you can know that your reasons are better at justifying you in your beliefs than Tilda's are in justifying your beliefs even if you know that you neither you nor Tilda enjoys an advantage over the other when it comes to uncovering truth. It is hard to believe that you can know your reasons to be better for the purposes of justifying your beliefs when your information indicates that your reasons are just as likely to lead to truth as Tilda's reasons are. Perhaps the obscurity is due to the idea that in the ethical case, the egoist believes that there is not some common aim that all agents pursue in common. Each agent should perform the action that serves their interests and there is no common set of interests we all share in common. In the epistemic case, there is a common aim that all should pursue in common, which is to fit our beliefs to the facts. The facts do not vary from person to person in the way that some outcomes will serve the interests of some agents better than others.

To motivate ACPC, Huemer appealed to the intuition that your intuitions might justify your beliefs in ways that they do not justify Tilda's beliefs. Something in the neighborhood of this intuition can be accommodated by a view that recognizes only agent-neutral norms. Think about the case of visual experience. If you and Tilda are in different places and your experiences differ, Tilda's experiences might justify your beliefs if you know about her experiences. Suppose, however, that you and Tilda are both in equally good position to see

what is happening in the street below and she has an experience as of a car zipping down the road and you do not. In this case, you might know about her experience and her experience might not provide much justification for your belief. Given that you both had similar vantage points on the street below, you should expect your experiences to be similar and the fact that you did not have an appearance that she did is some reason to distrust the experiences you and her had. Similarly, if you and Tilda are considering the same intuition pumps or the same proposition and your intuitions subsequently differed, it seems you would both have reasons to worry about your intuitions. If, however, Tilda has considered some intuition pump that you have not and you know that she finds some proposition intuitive, you might think that Tilda's intuition gives you some reason to believe much in the way that the experiences she had when she had a better vantage point gave you reasons to believe things were the way they seemed to her to be.

PC might be able to accommodate these points even if ACPC cannot. Remember that PC says that if it seems to you as if p , you have some degree of justification for believing p . The pressure to endorse ACPC came from the thought that I can know about your seemings without this knowledge providing me with much justification for my beliefs. It is important to recognize that there is a difference between (i) p seeming true to me and (ii) me knowing of a seeming state with p as its content. Knowing of a seeming state is not the same as something seeming true. PC can say that you have justification only when something seems true to you. If I look out the window and see a fox in the garden, it seems to me that there is a fox in the garden. If I am hallucinating and my experience is indistinguishable from the experience I had when I saw a fox, it seems to me that there is a fox in the garden. If you know that I am having an experience, it does not seem to you that there is a fox in the garden. Knowing that I am in a state by virtue of which it seems to me that p does not put you in a state by virtue of which it seems to you that p . Properly understood, PC says that if it seems to you that there is a fox in the garden because you are having a certain kind of visual experience and it seems to Tilda knows that you are having this kind of experience, PC says that you have some degree of justification for believing that there is a fox in the garden, it says that Tilda would have that same degree of justification if (contrary to fact) it seemed to her that there is a fox in the garden, and it allows that Tilda has some degree of justification for believing that you have the kind of experience one would if they saw a fox in the garden. It does not say that you and Tilda are epistemic peers because it does not have to say that your reasons and her reasons are identical. Your reason for believing that it is not good to let the kids play in the garden is that there is a fox in the garden (as there appears to be) and her reason for believing that it is not good to let the kids play in the garden is that it seems to *you* that there is a fox there. These are different reasons. To say otherwise is to insist that *your* reasons are limited to the facts that Tilda knows. Tilda knows that you have such and such a kind of experience, but not whether what you experienced is so. Surely your reasons include the things that you yourself can plainly see.

There is no inconsistency in saying that you have non-inferential justification for believing p when p seems true to you and in saying that seemings or appearances are not themselves the reasons that provide this justification. Seemings and appearances might play the role of evidence that can justify belief inferentially, in which case knowledge of them might provide a very different sort of justification for your beliefs than the justification you have when something seems to you to be true. There is no need for agent-centered norms in this account. Once we get ride of the agent-centered norms, we can see that PC gives us no reason to doubt EW. The combination of EW and PC would say that in cases of peer disagreement where everything that seemed true to you seemed true to Tilda and everything that seemed true to Tilda seemed true to you, you and Tilda cannot rationally disagree. In this state, you and Tilda would not just have the same knowledge of seemings, there would be no difference in what

seemed true to you. It certainly seems plausible that in this state if you and Tilda discovered that you had incompatible beliefs while every proposition you considered you agreed seemed true or seemed false you could not both be rational.

Not all epistemic egoists think that we should think of your reasons as consisting of seemings and appearances. Some authors who think that there is something like a justifiable bias in favor of your own position explicitly reject the view that our reasons are limited to seemings and appearances.¹¹ Instead, our reasons include things that seem true or things that appear true. If we move away from the view that limits our reasons to states of mind or facts about such states to what appears true to us (i.e., the apparent facts), we might formulate a more plausible form of epistemic egoism.¹²

Enoch argues that we cannot and should not treat ourselves merely as truthometers. He accepts that we should treat thermometers as thermometers. Why should we treat ourselves different from mere instruments to the truth? He says:

Suppose we accept the Equal Weight View. Then, to repeat, ‘upon finding out that an advisor disagrees, your probability that you are right should equal your prior conditional probability that you would be right.’ But, of course, the prior conditional probability mentioned here is your prior conditional probability. And here too you may be wrong. Indeed, you may have views on how likely it is that your prior conditional probability is right (or that your belief about these probabilities is true), and how likely it is that, say, Adam’s prior probability is right. Perhaps, for instance, you think both of you are equally likely to be right about such matters. So if you and Adam differ on the relevant prior conditional probability, the Equal Weight View requires that you give both your views equal weight. But of course what does the work here is *your* prior conditional probability that you or Adam would be right about prior conditional probabilities. And here too you may have views about how likely you and others are to get it right, but here too this view will be *your* view, and so on, perhaps ad infinitum (2010: 961).

The argument is supposed to show that *you* play an ineliminable role in revising your own beliefs, a role that others cannot possibly occupy.¹³ This is supposed to show that a kind of detachment from the first-person perspective that comes with treating oneself merely as a truthometer is not genuinely possible. Not only are there limits to the extent that we *can* treat ourselves as truthometers, he argues that it would not be ideal to regard oneself as a mere truthometer. He suggests that once we appreciate that the ineliminability of the first-person perspective involves some degree of self-trust, we should sometimes treat the disagreement that arises between you and your peer as a reason to revise your views about the reliability of your peer without accepting that there is an equally good reason to revise your views about your own reliability (2010: 979).

So far, all Enoch has argued is that we might be psychologically constituted in such a way that it would be difficult or impossible to live up to the epistemic ideals EW puts forward, not that we should think that these ideals are no such thing. To show that there is nothing particularly good about living up to EW’s standards, he offers an interesting objection to the view. Assuming that the first-person perspective truly is ineliminable, it is appropriate to have

¹¹ See Enoch (2010) and Wedgwood (2010).

¹² Williamson (2000) defends this approach. In Littlejohn (2012), I defend a propositional account of reasons that is more modest than Williamson’s account.

¹³ Wedgwood (2010) makes a similar point.

some moderate degree of self-trust. Because it is appropriate to have this self-trust, he thinks it is appropriate to regard Tilda's belief that $\neg p$ as a reason to believe that she is less reliable than you initially reckoned:

After all, when you believe p , you do not just entertain the thought that p ... you really *believe* p , you take p to be true. And so you take Tilda's belief in $\neg p$ to be a mistake. And, of course, each mistake someone makes ... makes him somewhat less reliable ... and makes you somewhat more justified in treating him as less reliable ... Why should *this* mistake, then, be any different (Enoch 2010: 983)?

Enoch's argument that it can be proper to demote a peer for disagreeing with you seems to be this. To determine how reliable someone else is you need to see how well their attitudes fit with the facts. Suppose that they believe p but p is actually false. If you know about this mismatch, you have some evidence that concerns the reliability of this subject. In judging that they falsely believe something about p , you enter into a disagreement with this subject.

Christensen (2007) says that while disagreement might be a piece of evidence against Tilda's reliability, it is equally evidence against your reliability. If so, your position and Tilda's position are symmetrical and the objection to the equal weight view is removed. Enoch says that the objection is confused. Since your reason for demoting Tilda is that p is true and her belief about p does not fit the facts (and not that she has a belief that differs from one of your beliefs), you have a reason to demote her that is not also a reason to demote yourself.

Enoch agrees that there *is* evidence against your reliability when you discover that you and Tilda disagree. He seems to think that you can justifiably reason as follows:

It is a fact that p .
Tilda believes $\neg p$.
There is evidence against Tilda's reliability.

Moreover, it seems that he thinks that Tilda can justifiably reason as follows:

It is a fact that $\neg p$.
You believe p .
There is evidence against your reliability.

Thus, there is a kind of symmetry here, but not the kind of symmetry in which you justifiably demote yourself and your peer to the same degree in the wake of disagreement. If this is right, the upshot is supposed to be that there is an important difference between how you treat yourself and a thermometer. If two thermometers disagree, you should not take the disagreement to be asymmetrical evidence about the unreliability of a thermometer. If two truthometers disagree (and you are neither truthometer), the same point applies. If, however, you discover that you disagree with a truthometer, you are not epistemically required to demote yourself in the way that you would demote others. Presumably this is because only one of the two arguments just sketched above is available to you and the one available to you is one that you can justifiably rely on to demote someone previously taken to be a peer.

The success of the objection seems to depend upon whether the reasoning sketched above could justify you in demoting Tilda. (It also depends upon whether the reasoning above could justify Tilda in demoting you.) This much is clear. You can run through the first argument, Tilda can run through the second, but neither of you can run through both. Only someone who believes p can reason from the first premise of the first argument and only someone who believes $\neg p$ can run through the first premise of the second. Since neither you nor Tilda believe both p and $\neg p$, neither of you can run through both arguments. The crucial question, however, is not simply whether an argument is available to you that is not available to Tilda, but whether you can justifiably accept the argument's conclusion on the basis of accepting its premises. That depends (in part) upon whether you can justifiably accept the

argument's premises. I do not see why we should think that you do justifiably accept the premises. Enoch is right that we often deploy this kind of reasoning when we try to work out who is a peer and who is not and right to suggest that we often justifiably rely on this kind of reasoning to make these assessments. This is a special case. This is a case where the equal weight view says you cannot justifiably accept the first premise even if you do maintain belief in the wake of the discovery that you disagree with Tilda. Enoch's objection seems to beg the question against EW.

Enoch's egoist view has some strange implications that I think give us good reason to be suspicious of any egoist view. You probably should not think to yourself that it is just as likely that she is right about p . You know that you disagree and if you are committed to saying that it is just as likely that p as $\sim p$, you cannot persist in your belief that p is true. Not rationally, at any rate. So, you must banish from your mind the thought that it is just as likely that Tilda is right. Presumably on Enoch's view you could *know* that the proper response is sometimes to maintain your belief and demote Tilda. Focus on the first part, the thought that it is proper for you to maintain your belief. If you can know this, what can you say when others ask? Suppose some friends ask about the disagreement you recently had with Tilda. They know that when you are forced to concede that you are mistaken or forced to concede that you did not know you were right, you tend to get a bit blue. You do not seem blue, they say, so what happened? You say you really do not want to talk about the disagreement, but you admit that you can properly remain confident that you were right and that Tilda was wrong. Later you discover that your friends (who happen to all be peers of yours) were telling others that *they* were confident that you were right and that Tilda was wrong. You ask them what their grounds were for demoting her from peer status. They say that you said earlier that you knew that you were properly confident that what happened was that she responded incorrectly to the evidence and that you did not. At this point, you might say one of two things. First, you might say that this is indeed a good reason for them to think that you responded to the evidence correctly and that Tilda should be demoted. Second, you might say that this is no reason for them to think that you responded to the evidence correctly and no reason to demote Tilda.

The problem with the first response is that it seems that from a third-person perspective we are all truthometers and that the proper way to respond to disagreement between truthometers when you are not a party to the disagreement is to treat them as *mere* truthometers. As such, you should treat them as mere instruments. Knowing this, you cannot endorse others treating you as something more than a mere truthometer or a mere instrument. You should not treat yourself that way, Enoch might say, but you surely cannot condone others treating you as somehow better than equally reliable truthometers. You cannot say that *they* have any good reason to demote Tilda given their epistemic position as outsiders.

The problem with the second response is that it seems quite plausible that if you know p , you can properly assert that p . That is to say, there cannot be a purely epistemic case against telling someone p if you yourself know that p . Intuitively, it does seem that it would be *improper* for you to tell others that *they* can be properly confident that you responded to the evidence correctly. This is in keeping with Enoch's view, of course, because Enoch's view implies that if others were to believe that it would be proper for them to be more confident that you responded correctly to the evidence than Tilda did, that belief would be mistaken. The oddity of Enoch's view comes to this: you know that it would be improper for you to say that others should be more confident that you responded rightly to the evidence and that Tilda did not but would be proper for you to say that you should be more confident that you responded rightly to the evidence than you are that Tilda did. If your peers then asked why you could say that *you* knew that it was proper for you to be more confident that you responded rightly to the evidence when *they* could not know that it was proper for you to do so, they might suspect that you know something they do not. No, you assure them, you do *not* know

something they do not. You do not have insider's information, you tell them, you are simply an insider. At that point, your friends will stop listening to you. If I were you, I would expect a demotion.

Here is one final worry about epistemic egoism. Earlier, I distinguished between two ways of responding to the analogical argument. The Type-I response was to say that it can be proper to stick to your guns by sticking to your favorite thermometer or watch even when your watch or thermometer conflicts with instruments you previously thought with good reason were equally reliable. The Type-II response was to say that there is an important difference between sticking to your guns and sticking to your favorite instruments. Suppose that you enjoy building thermometers. You take two thermometers and put them into a beaker containing water and discover that the thermometers give different readings. The first says that the water is seven degrees Fahrenheit cooler than the second thermometer says it is. Because of your previous experiences you had thought that both thermometers were equally reliable. At this point you can see no reason for trusting one thermometer over the other. You notice that the first thermometer has your initials carved into the handle and that the second has Tilda's initials carved into the handle. You know that you build your thermometers the way that you do because you have considered the evidence carefully and have carefully considered beliefs about the proper way to build a thermometer. You know that Tilda has her own considered views about the proper way to build a thermometer and know that her way of doing things is not exactly the way that you do things. Since your thermometer is constructed the way it is because you believe that this is how thermometers should be made and her thermometer is constructed the way it is because she believes that there are better ways of making thermometers, I cannot see how the epistemic egoist could dissuade you from thinking that this new bit of information about the construction of the devices gives you the right to think that it would be proper to be more confident in the first thermometer's reading than the second. Thus, it seems as if the line between Type-I and Type-II responses to the analogical argument has been blurred. To maintain that these truly are different kinds of response, it seems we have to bracket facts about an agent's beliefs and the relations between those beliefs and the construction of instruments in determining what response is appropriate when instruments offer different readings. I do not see how the epistemic egoist could insist on bracketing these sorts of facts. If the (apparent) fact that this is the right way to build thermometers can justify further beliefs that you have and justify having greater confidence in your own beliefs than you have in Tilda's, why wouldn't these (allegedly) justified beliefs justify further beliefs in the confidence in your instruments? Since, however, it seems that the only facts that you can properly bring to bear in determining how confident you can be in your instruments are the facts that you knew prior to discovering which of the thermometers was made by you (i.e., facts about past successes and failures that determine a track record), it seems facts that the epistemic egoists take to justify your greater self-confidence cannot justify greater confidence in your own interests.

CONCLUSION

In an attempt to undermine the skeptical argument from disagreement, it is tempting to try to attack EW. I think we should resist this temptation. EW's popularity is waning, but the objections to the view do not hold up well to scrutiny. Contrary to what many have suspected and some have tried to argue, there is no good reason to think that EW is self-defeating. Thus, while there is nothing self-defeating about treating all instruments on par, there is nothing self-defeating about treating yourself as one instrument amongst many that might be used for uncovering the truth. Contrary to what the egoists have argued, I do not think there is any justification for having greater confidence in yourself than you have in your peers. The

implications of this egoist view seem to me to be quite strange and the motivation for them is quite obscure.

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