

***Dealing with Disagreement from the First Person Perspective: A Probabilist Approach***  
**5939 Words**

**Trent Dougherty, Baylor University [Trent.Dougherty@Baylor.edu](mailto:Trent.Dougherty@Baylor.edu)**

*1.0 Introduction*

The thesis of this paper is that, sometimes, disagreement with an epistemic peer—of what I take to be the most relevant sort—can be settled in one’s favor by considerations pertaining to one’s own perspective, even when one knows that the other party to the disagreement is one’s peer in the relevant sense. That is, a fairly robust form of epistemic and evidential peerhood is in fact consistent with reasonable disagreement. The relevant perspectival fact is the fact that certain key evidence is arrived at via introspection. I will not assume or argue that S’s own perspective can influence how to settle disagreement in S’s favor *just because it is S’s*. Evidence doesn’t get any special status just because it is one’s own and not another’s. Rather, the relevant fact about introspection is that it typically (though not necessarily) provides stronger epistemic support than our source of evidence concerning others mental states—testimony. A special feature of my approach is that I will bring the work of Richard Jeffrey to bear upon the problem at several points. His brand of probabilism will be the lens through which I’ll view the issue.

First I will set the stage by stating some assumptions, attempting to convey the usage of key terms, and providing a characterization of the problem, a characterization which I hope will bring some clarity to the way we think about disagreements. Then I will present the thesis first informally, then somewhat more formally in a way informed by Jeffrey’s probability kinematics. Finally, I will consider a plausible though inconclusive objection. Because I apply the ideas of Jeffrey to the issue of disagreement and eschew any special principles unique to cases of disagreement, I call my approach the probabilist approach to disagreement.

*1.1 Doxastic Attitudes*

In a moment I’ll discuss the notion of an epistemic peer I’ll be working with, but first I’ll say a few words about how I’ll understand doxastic attitudes, since they feature in my understanding of a disagreement. There are broadly two ways of thinking about doxastic attitudes, and the literature on disagreement includes discussions in terms of both of these. There is what I will call the Triadic Notion (TN) and what I will call the Graded Notion (GN). The triadic notion is sometimes called the “all-or-nothing” view and is represented by Richard Feldman.<sup>1</sup> According to TN there are three doxastic attitudes: belief, disbelief (belief that a proposition is false), and suspension of judgement (i.e. neither believing nor disbelieving). According to GN doxastic attitudes come in a continuum of degrees typically called “degrees of belief” or “degrees of confidence” or, preferable to me, “degrees of certainty.” This is a family of notions rather than one determinate notion. It should also be noted that there are ways of combining the insights of both views: belief itself might be an all-or-nothing affair—either you believe something or you don’t—but it might be attended by some quality—perhaps confidence—that comes in degrees. It is natural to talk about the strength of a belief and illustrate this with the difference between the strength of one’s belief in, say, one’s existence and one’s belief that one will live in the same

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<sup>1</sup> See his “Reply to Plantinga” 2003, “Respecting the Evidence” 2005, “Epistemological Puzzles about Disagreement” 2006, “Reasonable Religious Disagreements” 2007.

house in 10 months (or some example that suits you). So on some conceptions of GN it is incompatible with TN and on others it is not.<sup>2</sup> In the literature on disagreement, GN is represented by David Christensen,<sup>3</sup> who sees much of his work as a generalization of Feldman's.

I bring this up because I'm one of those people to whom GN makes much more sense than TN. Also, note that there are important kinds of disagreements glossed over by TN. The person who thinks a thesis very likely, nearly certain in fact, and the person who thinks it just barely likely enough to believe have a substantive disagreement. Authors who work in the TN framework often present the results of theorizing about disagreement as "skeptical" or "anti-skeptical" according to whether they think one need or need not suspend judgment in the face of peer disagreement. This way of thinking limits the potential relevance of disagreement by ignoring the case where two people both believe a proposition, but to very different degrees.

So to do justice to the relevant range of epistemic divergences, we should think of doxastic attitudes in the more fine-grained way that takes into account some graded notion. This does not commit me to a particular ontology of degrees of belief. My point is this: it is perfectly clear given the examples above that the relevant doxastic attitude is graded. Whether it is beliefs themselves or some other item necessarily attached to belief is what I declare official neutrality on. So I think in terms of GN but will also not assume that the GN picture is incompatible with the TN picture. Thus, for ease of exposition if for no other reason I will write as though TN is compatible with GN.

How we think of doxastic attitudes affects how we think about disagreement in another way as well. Consider the following plausible thesis:

*Cancellation Thesis:* Testimony by equally reliable sources with the same evidence always cancel each other out completely.

As we will see below, there is a way of determining just when this is true. The cancellation thesis, if true, would manifest itself quite differently under the TN and GN pictures. In the TN picture, as in Feldman, it manifests itself as a skeptical outcome:

SJ We ought always to suspend judgment in cases of peer disagreement.

In the GN picture, as in Christensen, we get a "split the difference" outcome, which is inconsistent with SD.

SD We ought always to split the difference in cases of peer disagreement.

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<sup>2</sup> For example some Orthodox Bayesians eschew any notion of all-or-nothing belief. Others define it in terms of degrees of belief over some (possibly context-sensitive) threshold (See Weirich 2004). Yet others provide a substitute notion not related to degrees of belief (for this last option see Kaplan 1996).

<sup>3</sup> See "The Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News," 2007. Tom Kelly—in "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement" (2005) and "Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence" (forthcoming)—slips back and forth between a graded model and a triadic model.

Both Christensen and I want to generalize SD, but any generalization of it will be inconsistent with SJ. According to SD, the only time we ought to suspend judgment is when the parties to the disagreement have credences symmetrical about .5. The theory that I will present denies the cancellation thesis. It also denies both SJ and SD. This is important to keep in mind, for my thesis is not anything like the following:

MW Parties to peer disagreements can reasonably disagree and maintain just as much confidence in their views after disagreement as before.

On the contrary, my thesis is much, much more humble. It is simply that sometimes one may continue to reasonably believe—even if weakly—what one came into the disagreement believing. More generally, one's credences may remain balanced in favor of their prior belief. This is indeed a weak thesis, but it is strong enough to entail the negation of the skeptical outcome and the “split the difference” view.

### 1.2 Characterizing Disagreements

There has been some confusion about the nature of disagreements, and I want to say how I think of them. I believe this will bring some clarity to the issue. There are two main kinds of cases in the literature used to illustrate cases of disagreement. Some are cases of basic beliefs for which no discursive reasons can be articulated. A standard example is Feldman's case (Feldman 2006) where Pro and Con are looking out across the quad and Pro thinks he sees the Dean in the quad, but Con thinks he sees no one on the quad. Others are cases of inferential beliefs the arguments or reasons for which can be articulated. An example of this is van Inwagen's adverting to his disagreement with David Lewis concerning compatibilism.<sup>4</sup> He avows that each man has read and understood all the same arguments relevant to the issue, which run into multiple volumes. I'm inclined to think that, in spite appearances to the contrary, there is not a significant difference between these two kinds of cases in terms of their impact on assessing the epistemological significance of disagreement. The reason I think this is that every discursive argument rests ultimately on a set of basic beliefs about what premises are true and what inference rules are licit.<sup>5</sup> It doesn't seem to me to matter whether we think of a disagreement concerning discursive arguments as one disagreement about several things or several disagreements about one thing each, but multifaceted disagreements can be decomposed into individual disagreements. Thus, it seems to me that we ought to focus on basic disagreements, then we can construct them into more natural bundles if need be.

### 1.3 Characterizing Epistemic Peers

The above comments attempt to communicate how I am thinking about disagreements. Now I'll present a notion of peerhood which I hope will bring some clarity to the issue. There are many respects in which two individuals A and B might be epistemic peers. Here are a few: they could be alike in respects of: 1. Intelligence, 2. Informedness (in the relevant domain), 3. Open-mindedness, 4. Honesty, 5. Diligence, and surely many others. Gutting 1982 makes peers alike

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<sup>4</sup> van Inwagen 1996, unpublished-A, and unpublished-B.

<sup>5</sup> It is not necessary for an agent to represent the rules of inference to themselves with a very high degree of awareness in many cases, else we'd land in Carroll's Paradox. Another way to express this point—I think it's the same point—is that every discursive argument has some corresponding conditional which, but for medical limitations, we could entertain in such a way that, given our constitution, would either appear to us valid or not as a basic judgment. At any rate, in a disagreement methods of inference are liable to come up in full disclosure.

in “intelligence, perspicacity, honesty, thoroughness, and other relevant epistemic virtues” (83); Kelley 2005 adds thoughtfulness and freedom from bias; Feldman 2007 lists parity of “intelligence, reasoning powers, background information, etc.” Peerages composed of various combinations of these respects are all interesting (to me anyway)<sup>6</sup>, but I want to consider a particular kind of peerage that might be thought to be *grounded* in some of the above features but I’m more interested in the *result*: that neither A nor B have any reason to think that the probability of A making a mistake about the matter in question differs from the probability of B making a mistake about the matter. For whatever reason—it could be because they are peers in one or more of the above respects—when it comes to some proposition *p*, the expectation of error in *p*-like cases is the same for both A and B. I think this is a better way to think about peerage than the standard virtue accounts for a number of reasons. First, it avoids having to make such decisions as whether peers must have each individual virtue to the same degree or whether they just have to be equal with respect to some organic all-things-considered summary judgment as to overall epistemic virtue. Second, relatedly, it could be that two individuals differ in respects of various virtues, but nevertheless are peers in an intuitively relevant sense in that while one person is more diligent the other is more intelligent and so makes up for lack of diligence. Finally, consider: either considerations pertaining to virtuosity make it the case that each of two peers is as likely to get it right as another or it does not. If it does, then why not just define peerhood in these terms as I do, if it does not, then why should it even be relevant.<sup>7</sup>

My account, then, is in line with Elga 2007’s account of peerhood as “being as good as you at evaluating such claims” (484)<sup>8</sup>, and with Christensen 2007 who mentions that neither party have any reason to think that it’s more likely that she will react to the evidence in the right way than her interlocutor (188),<sup>9</sup> and Kelley forthcoming, “neither...he or she is more or less reliable about the relevant domain” (1). I think these accounts are on the right track, but we can make this precise by applying common statistical standards regarding the accuracy of reports. I will present the Bayesian explication used by Jeffrey in considering cases of disagreeing testimony.<sup>10</sup> Let *p* be the proposition in dispute. Let A(*p*) be “A says that *p*” and let B(*p*) be “B says that *p*”.

$$\begin{aligned} \Pr(A(p)/p) &= \Pr(B(p)/p) = r \\ \Pr(A(\sim p)/\sim p) &= \Pr(B(\sim p)/\sim p) = t \end{aligned}$$

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<sup>6</sup> Sometimes one encounters people who think that peerage with respect to total evidence is not interesting because, surely, no two actual individuals ever share total evidence. One reason this kind of peerhood might be interesting is that it is the kind relevant to proposed counter-examples to the form of evidentialism which entails the thesis that any two individuals exactly alike in respects of evidence are exactly alike in respects of justification. Another reason is that if it is not possible for total-evidence-peers to rationally disagree, then it seems that people who differ only slightly with respect to evidence cannot rationally differ greatly, and, surely, some near-peers differ in their conclusions more than they differ in their evidence.

<sup>7</sup> For another criticism of virtuosity accounts of peerhood see Elga 2007, note 21.

<sup>8</sup> Elga adds a proviso in his note 21 which I will not address, but he notes that it’s nonstandard.

<sup>9</sup> In one of his main examples Christensen mentions that “I know that our skills, education, and track records are equally good” (197), but I take it that his account is more akin to mine than the virtuosity accounts of peerhood and that the items he mentions there could simply serve as the basis for the kind of peerhood I endorse.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Jeffrey, “Alias Smith and Jones,” in *Probability and the Art of Judgment* (CUP, 1992), 110. I have changed the equations a bit to make it more perspicuous how they are working. This explains why I skip ‘s’ and go right to ‘t’.

Jeffrey points out that if A and B have any reliability at all, the testimony of A and B will exactly cancel out, leaving the evidential status of p just as it was before the disagreement iff  $r = t$ , which is just what I'm assuming with peerage.<sup>11</sup>

What we want to stipulate is that on background evidence if p were true, the probability of A correctly saying so is the same as B correctly saying so (and we've just denoted this value with 'r'), and likewise on the assumptions that p is false (denoting that value with 't') We will want to add the assumption of conditional independence.

$$\Pr(A(p)\&B(p)/p) = r^2 \ \& \ \Pr(A(\sim p)\&B(\sim p)/\sim p) = t^2$$

That the value of the conjunction of the outcomes may simply be multiplied expresses their independence, just as you'd expect with independent dice.

One nice advantage of this account of peerhood is that it easily generalizes to the case of the near-peer, which is perhaps more common in real life. So suppose we think of B as 70% as reliable as A. Then the equations change in the following way.

$$\begin{aligned} \Pr(A(p)/p) &= r; \Pr(B(p)/p) = .7r \\ \Pr(A(\sim p)/\sim p) &= t; \Pr(B(\sim p)/\sim p) = .7t \end{aligned}$$

The fact is that peer testimony will always count as some kind of evidence and this evidence ought to be taken into account and weighted by the (apparent) reliability of the peer. I think it is an advantage that the error-statistical view of peerhood is just a special case of a more general principle of respecting all evidence. I'll have more to say about this below.

This completes my analysis of the key terms involved in the discussion. I have canvassed briefly my understanding of peers and disagreements. In the next section, right before presenting my solution, I will illustrate why the problem might seem insoluble.

#### 1.4 Initial Illustration

Characterizing the problem in terms of the above allows us to see how initially implausible it is that there could be reasonable disagreements among epistemic peers. For consider a situation in which you have two meters M1 and M2 which are meant to detect the presence of X particles. They are "peer meters" in that they have the same chance<sup>12</sup> of a false positives, etc. per above.<sup>13</sup> You take them both to your basement, turn them on, and are disconcerted to find that one reports positive for X particles and the other negative. What could be more obvious than that the two reports cancel out and you are left with no reason to favor one hypothesis over the other? But let's make it more personal. Suppose you only have one meter, but you have two kids—twins, Ted and Todd. You send them down to the basement telling them to report their findings back to

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<sup>11</sup> It is important for me to note that Jeffrey is here considering *clear* testimony. This is what makes his statement here consistent with what I later borrow from Jeffrey to break the tie.

<sup>12</sup> I think the best way to understand this, for a variety of reasons, is dispositional, but we could make it the probability on background evidence I think, and, without too much trouble, I think we could even make it a track-record based probability, though I think that is more likely to lead to confusion.

<sup>13</sup> The false positive rate above would be  $1 - t$ .

you. The meter is such that it will flash a green light if there are X particles present and a red light if there are not. Ted and Todd come back upstairs and, bewilderingly, report opposite results. Ted says “red” while “green” says Todd. How odd. What are you to do? They both swear that it seems clear to them what color light went off. On your background evidence, they are equally reliable at telling colors and whatnot. Clearly, something has gone wrong in one of the kids. But which? You have no information whatsoever to discriminate between them. It would be the height of unreasonableness to pick the answer of your favorite twin (and how bad of you to have a favorite!). What could be more clear than that the reasonable thing to do is to suspend judgment? Now let’s make it a even more personal. Suppose you are Todd. You would no doubt be aggravated at Ted, but it would be the height of unreasonableness, given that on your background evidence he’s no more likely than you to make a mistake, to assume that you were the fortunate son. Reasonableness requires objectivity, and, plausibly, objectivity here requires the third person perspective. And from that perspective, reasonable known peer disagreement seems impossible.

I briefly want to register my agreement with Christensen 2007 against Foley 2001’s complaint that “it is deeply misleading to think about [conflicts of opinion] in terms of a model of neutral arbitration between conflicting parties” (79). Christensen notes “There is, I think, no reason to suppose that taking the required sort of semidetached perspective toward my beliefs should be impossible from the first person perspective. The first-person perspective is not the dogmatic perspective: it does not entail denying or ignoring the possibility that I have made a cognitive error” (204). I think this is exactly right, and, though I shall presently make a case to which the first-person perspective is essential, it is one which gives no special status to the first-person perspective as such, i.e. does not in any way license the favoring of one’s own position apart from epistemic factors.

Having set out my assumptions and my understanding of key terms and framing the challenge as best I can, I will now attempt to describe how I think considerations pertaining to one’s own perspective can settle peer disagreements in one’s favor even with the robust assumptions of identity of evidence and identity of reliability. After that, I’ll consider an objection from Feldman.

## *2.0 The Advantage Provided by One’s Own Perspective*

### *2.1 Informal Presentation*

It will suit my purposes to introduce another example. Nothing hangs on any differences between this example and the previous one. Pro thinks the principle of conditional excluded middle is true. Con thinks it false. These are basic intuitions. Assume that Pro and Con are peers in Jeffrey’s sense. Since we have chosen to treat disagreements by treating basic disagreements we can represent peerage as the conditional probability of the believed proposition  $p$  upon the fact that a basic faculty of an individual  $S$  “asserts” to them that  $p$  is the case. This conditional probability will be the same for each of them since they are peers, and this will be so from each of their perspectives if they are justified in believing that they are peers (again, for the purposes of the model, we’ll make the simplifying assumption that they are perfectly justified in this regard, nor is there any doubt about what they heard the other say, though a more general account would take these kinds of considerations into account, as I will later). However, one is in a better position to affirm that one’s own basic faculty has made an assertion than that those of

one's interlocutor have. We know what we seem to see, or remember, or intuit via introspection. And introspection, though fallible, still delivers more epistemic support than testimony in the ordinary case (There may be possible cases where this isn't so). And testimony is our only way of getting evidence that our interlocutor has had the results he seems to claim to have (at least in the ordinary case. There may be possible cases where we know the contents of another's mind via introspection).

For example in the Logical Languishing case just introduced above Pro knows via introspection that it seems to him that CEM is true. Let it be likely to degree  $d$  based on this that it *is* true. Con testifies that it seems false to him. Taken by itself, this yields a probability of  $d$  that it is false. Now that they have shared evidence it might seem like they each ought to suspend judgement. For this seems to be the result of the model I suggested above. However, this ignores the fact that Pro will be more certain that it seems to him that CEM is true than he is that it seems to Con that it is false. Thus, the relevant possibility that they do not really disagree entails the relevant possibility that Pro doesn't have defeating evidence from Con after all. This is basically what Gupreet Rattan calls "reflective suspension of equivocation."<sup>14</sup> It's not just that Con might be insincere—whether lying or joking—though that's a realistic possibility. In philosophical disagreements there is considerable possibility that people are talking past one another, that one's interlocutor doesn't really have in mind the same proposition when they appear to deny what you affirm or that it is so to the extent they seem to indicate. For example, there's some concern for Pro that Con is actually thinking about the Principle of Conditional Bivalence. It is very easy to mistake CEM for PCB, and even those familiar with the distinction can overlook it. The two principles might be conceptually connected in one person's mind in a way they are not in another's, and this could even be opaque to them, so they couldn't convey it to you in testimony (this brings up a related point: we can double-check our own mental states in a way we just can't with others). This could affect the content of what it is they really seem to see to be true. Con could also—as far as Pro can tell—be confusing its seeming to him that CEM is false for its seeming to him that  $X$  and that  $X$  obviously entails  $\neg$ CEM (for some appropriate  $X$ ). This is an easy confusion to make. There are many live possibilities for the disagreement being apparent rather than real (even if it is real), and thus many live possibilities for there being no defeating evidence in the offing. Note too that prior to considering the epistemological significance of disagreement, we will have been inclined to suspect that someone disagreeing with us on a basic matter that seems clear to us is not meaning what they seem to say or not being "on the same page" somehow. This isn't much, but it can be substantive, and can be enough to tip the scales in large-scale disagreements.

Two things seem intuitively right to me prior to assessing the epistemological significance of disagreement: both that one can be rational to continue to believe in the face of apparent disagreement of an apparent peer, and that one cannot do so with the strength with which one began. Surely, I think, if rational belief survives peer disagreement, it does so with some loss. The treatment I have offered ratifies both these judgments. That is a point in its favor. Finally, if each party is assumed to recognize the other as an epistemic peer, then, since their position is symmetric, they ought to hold the other rational as well, recognizing that from their perspective, they have better evidence that they have the intuition they take themselves to have than that their interlocutor has the intuition they seem to claim to have.

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<sup>14</sup> "The semantic Significance of Disagreement," unpublished MS.

Now that I have given an informal presentation of the intuitive idea, I'll model the phenomenon probabilistically, again using Jeffrey as a guide.

### 2.3 Formal Presentation

In old-fashioned presentations of Bayesianism, learning from an item E of evidence is represented by the following formula:

$$\text{Classical Conditioning: } P_{\text{NEW}}(H) = P_{\text{OLD}}(H|E)$$

This rule appeared at a very high level of idealization in that it treated all evidence as being certain. In his magisterial attempts to fill out the Bayesian picture, Richard Jeffrey pioneered new ways of modeling learning from evidence using what he called "Probability Kinematics" which is essentially any more complex formula for updating which tries to take into account the fact that our learning takes place piecemeal and imperfectly. The result is often called "Jeffrey Conditioning" in his honor.

Fascinating history and technical details aside, Jeffrey ended up endorsing updating using the Theorem of Total Probability<sup>15</sup>,  $\Pr(A) = \sum_n \Pr(A|B_n)\Pr(B_n)$ .

$$\text{Jeffrey Conditioning: } P_{\text{NEW}}(H) = P_{\text{OLD}}(H|E)P_{\text{NEW}}(E)$$

Note that the sole difference between classical conditioning and Jeffrey conditioning is the additional ' $P_{\text{NEW}}(E)$ ' added to the end. As a result, the rule for updating on experience becomes a temporalized instance of the theorem of total probability, a fact out of which Jeffrey makes much hay. The key feature for present purposes is that in calculating the probability of A one "weights" the conditional probability on the evidence B— $\Pr(A|B)$ —by the probability for one of the evidence itself— $\Pr(E)$ . So if I now think that E makes H probable to degree n, then if I form the justified belief that E, Classical Conditioning directs me to assign to H probability n. But this ignores the fact that I might well be uncertain about E. I might justifiably believe E only to degree m. Jeffrey Conditioning directs me in this case to assign to H the probability nm.<sup>16</sup>

So the first key feature of Jeffrey's theory of learning from experience is that we must accommodate the fact that most basic evidence is uncertain and "uneven" (i.e. of varying strength). The second—which he called "soft-core empiricism" is that "probabilistic judgment may be appropriate as a direct response to experience, underived from sure judgment that the experience is of such and such a character" (1992, 45). This is a rejection of classical foundationalism which affirms that the foundations of knowledge are statements about the content of our experiences, and that these are certain. Jeffrey's account is more true to life. Of course, we may well form beliefs about the character of our experience. That's perfectly consistent with what Jeffrey says here. The use to which this directness thesis is put, however, is to use experience to set the most basic "prior" probabilities  $\Pr(E)$ . Jeffrey is a moderate foundationalist, for he does believe that some beliefs bottom out in experience—though they

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<sup>15</sup> For his most recent discussion, see *Subjective Probability: The Real Thing* (CUP, 2004), 53-55.

<sup>16</sup> I safely gloss over possible subtle technical details which do not bear upon the present issue.



needn't be certain—and that these beliefs derive their probabilities from their manner of experience.

So then consider the relevant evidential probability profile for Pro.<sup>17</sup> 'P<sub>PRO</sub>' represents the evidential probability on Pro's evidence. Let V be the proposition that CEM is valid.

$$P_{\text{PRO-NEW}}(V) = P_{\text{PRO-OLD}}(\text{It is valid/It seems to me, Pro, to be valid}) \times P_{\text{PRO-NEW}}(\text{It seems to me, Pro, to be valid})$$

$$P_{\text{PRO-NEW}}(\sim V) = P_{\text{PRO-OLD}}(\text{It is invalid/It seems to him, Con, to be invalid}) \times P_{\text{PRO-NEW}}(\text{It seems to him, Con, to be invalid})$$

Since we are assuming that Pro and Con are peers on the matter, the first terms of each equation—the conditional probabilities--will be the same (and it would be special pleading to cast out the old conditional probabilities in the face of present disagreement). However, notice that the second terms—the “prior” probabilities of the evidence--will be unequal because <It seems to me to be valid> will be known via introspection whereas <It seems to him to be invalid> enters Pro's stock of evidence via testimony. Thus P<sub>PRO-NEW</sub>(V) will be higher than P<sub>PRO-NEW</sub>(~V). So even though they have the same stock of propositions in their evidence,<sup>18</sup> their mode of obtaining that evidence is different, which will give different evidential probabilities to the items.<sup>19</sup>

And it's just the same—*mutatis mutandis*—for Con.

So even though Pro knows that Con is just as reliable in the matter—represented by the equality of the conditional probabilities—Pro is in a better epistemic position with respect to his own perspective and so his own belief comes out more probable on total evidence (and, again, the situation is isomorphic with Con).

One real advantage of my approach over similar treatments in Cristensen 2007 and Elga 2007 is that it clearly respects the following intuition, which theirs do not.

**TotEv** In judging the epistemic status of a belief, the only body of evidence that's relevant is total evidence, all the evidence a person has.

TotEv is very intuitive, but like many intuitive truths it can sometimes be seen better considering some negative aspect. So consider that if TotEv is false, then it's sometimes acceptable to

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<sup>17</sup> The total probability space can be partitioned with varying degrees of granularity. I focus here only on the cells which do the heavy lifting. Interesting observations may be made at finer levels of granularity. For example, whether one is a fallibilist or an infallibilist concerning certain kinds of introspection might make a difference to how you partition the total probability. I bracket these and other considerations for present purposes as I see no reason to suppose they significantly affect the outcome. At any rate, mine is a compossibility thesis and I focus on at least one natural kind of case.

<sup>18</sup> I am assuming a theory of propositions as structured, so that modes of understanding don't factor into the identity of propositions.

<sup>19</sup> For defenses of the propositional theory of evidence, see my “Omitted for blind review” and “Omitted for blind review,” forthcoming.

compute the epistemic status of a belief while ignoring some evidence. But it's never OK to ignore evidence. So perhaps another way to put this point is the Respecting the Evidence Principle:

**REP** It's never OK to ignore evidence in the calculation of the epistemic status of a belief.

Given that I appeal to no special principles concerning disagreement and endorse the theorem of total probability-based version of updating, my view is shot through with respect for these principles. However this is not the case with Christensen 2007 and Elga 2007. In the case of Christensen there is the troubling principle Independence. In his 2007 he says "I should assess explanations of the disagreement in a way that is independent of my reasoning on the matter under dispute" (199). In his forthcoming he puts it this way.

**Independence** In evaluating the epistemic credentials of another person's belief about P, in order to determine how (if at all) to modify one's own belief about P, one should do so in a way that is independent of the reasoning behind one's own initial belief about P.

It is hard to imagine how belief modification independent of certain facts could fail to leave out evidence. How could one take into account a fact while reasoning independently of it? There is reason to think that Christensen wants to respect TotEv. He says "But my friend's belief is additional evidence, which bears upon the probability that I made a mistake in my initial judgment" (209). It's just not clear to me either from Independence itself or from his illustration in cases that "reasoning independently of X" doesn't mean bracketing X evidentially. But on my view there is no such difficulty. And at any rate Independence remains obscure for other reasons and Christensen is forced to defend it against several objections in his forthcoming.

There is no such ambiguity in the case of Elga 2007 however. His approach explicitly involves "*bracketing off or setting aside* certain considerations...we remove or extract...information from your current state of belief" (489). The result is that "the disputed reasoning has been extracted" (490). This sounds like a situation which could be described by Independence, and Elga and Christensen's views are quite similar in many respects. This lends some support to the idea that, like Elga 2007, Christensen 2007 is also failing to respect TotEv. That my approach does respect TotEv, and does so clearly, is a consideration in its favor.

There is a related advantage my Jeffrey-esque approach has. I have already noted that Independence is obscure and subject to many objections and interpretive dilemmas. Elga 2006 is also the source of a special principle concerning disagreement.

**Equal weight view** Upon finding out that an advisor disagrees, your probability that you are right should equal your prior conditional probability that you would be right. Prior to what? Prior to your thinking through the disputed issue, and find out what the advisor thinks of it. Conditional on what? On whatever you have learned about the circumstances of the disagreement. (490)

There ensues a discussion of some nuances of the phrase “circumstances of disagreement” the individuation of which must—he says—be at just the right level of granularity for his view to be plausible. There are many concerns about this view raised in Jehle and Fitelson’s forthcoming “What is the “Equal Weight View?”” In general, special principles about disagreement create more confusion than clarity. My position is that the relevant question concerning any target proposition  $p$  is simply What is the probability of  $p$  on my total evidence? My evidence might include or even be limited to my own experience and the reported contrary experience of an apparent peer. The latter makes for an interesting case where my evidence is counterbalanced. There is nothing about this case, though, which is in any way substantively special. And the attempt to provide special principles for dealing with it will either be false, true-but-confusing, or mere consequences of the most general epistemological principle to believe in accordance with your total evidence. The approach I have advocated above begins and ends with this platitude.

A final advantage I will mention along these lines is that by treating the epistemology of disagreement only by adverting to the probability on total evidence I avoid confusions about special principles for belief modification in the face of disagreement such as the “split the difference view” (which is frequently, strangely, confused with the Equal Weight View). As Christensen forthcoming (note 10) makes clear “Much work would have to be done to refine... a certain kind of special case into a general principle for disagreement-based belief-revision.” He goes on to note at least six major complications such a disagreement-specific principle would have to account for. On my probabilist approach all these factors just fold into the calculation of the probability, no special principles needed.

In this section I have given a formal model of my approach, essentially just showing where the factors I advert to find a home in a part of an equation which is already part of a pretty well worked out general epistemology. I have also noted what I take to be several advantages of the pure probabilist approach over previous approaches. Now I turn to an objection from Feldman.

### *3.0 Is it Enough?*

In his “Epistemological puzzles about disagreement” Feldman considers a similar reply and dismisses it quickly.

However, I think that the prospects are really quite bleak. This is because, in fact, the doubts about the existence of the (apparent) insights or intuitions of the conversational partner are really extremely minimal, far too weak to make one’s overall evidence have the desired characteristics. (224)

I have admitted that the evidential differentials in atomic cases are not large. However, I have also urged that they are greater than Feldman seems to indicate here. I have described a case above which illustrates how these doubts can be non-trivial. And in the context of a discussion of justified belief, the “desired characteristics” seem to be limited to justifying belief. So the substantive question is whether the evidential differential, the modicum of doubt that there really is any disagreement and thus doubt that there is any defeating evidence arising from a disagreement is significant enough to allow for justified belief. What’s interesting in this regard is that Feldman’s statement above appears to contradict what he says elsewhere when he endorses the following principle.

EC Believing is the justified attitude when the person's evidence *on balance* supports a proposition, disbelieving is the justified attitude when the person's evidence on balance supports the negation of a proposition, and suspension of judgment is the justified attitude when the person's evidence on balance supports neither a proposition nor its negation.<sup>20</sup>

It seems to me that the earlier Feldman is correct in this disagreement<sup>21</sup> for if the evidence on balance supports p, how could suspending judgement possibly be the more fitting attitude than belief, even if weak?

Above, I advocated breaking large disagreements down to basic beliefs. This puts the “clash of intuitions” at the base. I have modeled my analysis above only in cases of these basic clashes. However, disagreements on philosophical issues—such as the frequent example concerning free will—involve the aggregation of very many such intuitions. Thus, the “reflective suspicion of equivocation” will also aggregate. This will ramify the degree of reflective suspicion of equivocation considerably. Thus the degree to which the considerations I've urged have a preserving effect on belief will vary by case. At the level of the clash of intuitions, one's grip remains, but remains very tenuous (that it does remain, though, distinguishes my position logically from skeptical views or the “split the difference” view. If I am right, such theses are false). At the aggregated level of large-scale philosophical, political, or religious disagreements, the combined effects of little possibilities of equivocation can become much more significant.

In the end, it is better to endorse believing—albeit weakly—with EC than to cast about for a reason to form an exception to EC. Surely EC is more plausible than any doubts we might have about cases of marginal evidential difference. If this is right, then, in Feldman's words “this would show that there can be reasonable disagreements after full disclosure.”<sup>22</sup>

This paper is respectfully dedicated to the memory of Richard Jeffrey (1926-2002).

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<sup>20</sup> Feldman and Conee 2004, 102, emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> I will not speculate whether the latter-day Feldman is an epistemic peer with the earlier version...

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

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