

PEER-HOOD

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ABSTRACT: When one is involved in a disagreement with another individual it is important to know how much weight to give to the disputant's testimony. I argue that it is not necessary to have background information about the individual with whom one is disagreeing in order for one to rationally regard the disputant as an epistemic peer. I contrast this view with an alternative view according to which it is only rational to regard a disputant as a peer in cases where one has background information to indicate that the disputant is a peer. I show that unless we make some implausible assumptions about the truth-effectiveness of reconsideration, it is better to regard unknown disputants as peers because doing so increases the ratio of true to total beliefs in one's belief set.

KEYWORDS: disagreement, testimony, reductionism, peerage, defeater

1. The Positive Reasons and No Undefeated Defeater Views

To discover that a peer disagrees with you is to become aware of evidence that you were unreliable in forming the belief that is the subject of the disagreement.¹ When one acquires evidence of this sort one ought to reconsider the contested claim, because if the initial consideration of the claim was conducted unreliably, then one cannot remain confident that it produced the correct degree of belief.² If,

¹ Though there is disagreement concerning what the rational response is to such a disagreement, it is generally thought that in such cases some evidence of first-person unreliability is obtained. For discussion see David Christensen, "Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy," *Philosophy Compass* 4/5 (2009): 757, Sanford Goldberg, "Reliabilism in Philosophy," *Philosophical Studies* 124, 1 (2009): 106-10, and Thomas Kelly, "Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence," in *Disagreement*, eds. Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 137-40.

² Contrast my suggestion that *reconsideration* is the rational response to disagreement with a peer with so called 'steadfast' and 'equal weight' views. Steadfast authors allow for cases in which personal information, or an incommunicable insight breaks a presumed symmetry between the ostensible peers, allowing one to retain his original view. See Jennifer Lackey, "What Should We Do When We Disagree?," in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* Vol 3, eds. John

however, one becomes involved in a disagreement with an individual who one regards as an epistemic inferior, then one does not thereby acquire evidence that his initial consideration of the claim was conducted unreliably. This is because in cases of disagreement between two individuals where one of the individuals has some epistemic advantage over the other, it is reasonable to explain the disagreement in terms of the error of the disadvantaged party. In cases of peer disagreement this explanation for the disagreement is unavailable because given that the individuals are peers there can be no epistemic advantage held by one of the parties over the other, and so the error cannot reasonably be attributed to one or the other party in particular, therefore both parties ought to reconsider the contested claim in cases of peer disagreement.

In light of this it is important to describe the conditions under which it is justified for an individual to regard another individual with whom he is disagreeing as an epistemic peer. There are two general ways in which these conditions might be described. One might say that in order for an individual with whom one is disagreeing to be appropriately considered an epistemic peer one must have positive reasons for believing that the disputant is equally reliable. These positive reasons will consist of information about the reliability of the disputant concerning the subject matter of the disputed claim. Alternatively, one could argue that one is justified in regarding a disputant as a peer without positive reasons for believing that the disputant is equally reliable. On this view a disputant is considered a peer if there are no undefeated defeaters³ for the default presumption of equality. Let us call the first view the positive reasons view and

Hawthorne and Tamar Szabó-Gendler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 274-93, and Peter Van Inwagen, "It is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and For Anyone, to Believe Anything Upon Insufficient Evidence," in *Faith Freedom and Rationality: Philosophy of Religion Today*, eds. Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 137-53. Equal weight views argue that it is always rational to arrive at a midpoint between one's initial belief and the divergent belief of one's peer. Reconsideration is a new suggestion, as we will see it is compatible with either restoring one's original view or revising it. For equal weight views, see Adam Elga, "Reflection and Disagreement," *Noûs* 41, 3 (2007): 478-502, Richard Feldman, "Epistemological Puzzles about Disagreement," in *Epistemology Futures*, ed. Stephen Hetherington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 216-36, and David Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: the Good News," *Philosophical Review* 116 (2007): 187-217.

³ By the term 'undefeated defeater' I mean a proposition believed by the disputing subject that renders his disputed belief unjustified, and which he has no reason to doubt. For discussion of defeaters see Michael Bergmann, "Defeaters and Higher-Level Requirements," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 55 (2005): 419-36, sec.1, and John L. Pollock, "Justification and Defeat," *Artificial Intelligence* 67 (1994): 378-80.

the second view the no undefeated defeater view. Choosing between these alternatives commits one to a view about which disagreements are discharged rationally and which aren't; for example, on the positive reasons view but not the no undefeated defeater view it would be wrong to respond to the disagreement of a total stranger by reconsidering one's own belief.

I believe that the no undefeated defeater view is the correct view of when one is justified in regarding a disputant as a peer. In this article I will argue that adopting the no undefeated defeater view is better than the positive reasons view at promoting the goal of having true beliefs. It may be true that the positive reasons view is superior to the no undefeated defeater view from the standpoint of promoting other goals such as having a stable set of beliefs or saving time. These other goals, however, are less important from an epistemic point of view than the goal of believing what is true.

2. Comparison With the Reductionist/Anti-Reductionist Debate

There are some similarities between the issues I am discussing and a debate that exists within the epistemology of testimony. Here I refer to the debate concerning whether testimony is a basic source of justification, or whether the justification for believing a bit of testimony reduces in every case to non-testimonial evidence (i.e. memory or induction) about the reliability of the attester.⁴ These views have been labeled anti-reductionism and reductionism about testimony, respectively. We can see here the rough correspondence between these views and the positive reasons and no undefeated defeater views that I have described. The positive reasons view, like the reductionist view, requires an agent to possess some information about a person providing him with testimony in order for the agent to be justified in responding to the testimony in a certain way. On the positive reasons view one must have information about the reliability of a disputant in order for one to be justified in responding to his testimony by reconsidering one's own belief. Similarly, on the reductionist view the same kind of information is required about an attester in order for one to justifiably believe the testimony of the attester. The no undefeated defeater view, like the anti-reductionist view, asserts that background information about the reliability of an agent providing one with testimony is not necessary for one to be justified in reacting to that testimony in a

⁴ For further discussion of this debate see Elizabeth Fricker, "Against Gullibility," in *Knowing From Words: Western and Indian Philosophical Analysis of Understanding and Testimony*, eds. Bimal Krishna Matilal and Arindam Chakrabarti (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994): 125-61, and Tyler Burge, "Content Preservation," *The Philosophical Review* 102 (1993): 457-88.

certain way. The no undefeated defeater view says that as long as one doesn't have an undefeated defeater for the belief that a disputant is equally reliable concerning the subject matter of the contested claim, one is justified in regarding the disputant as a peer, and is thereby required to reconsider the claim. Similarly the anti-reductionist says that one is justified in believing the testimony of an agent in the absence of background information about the attester as long as one does not possess an undefeated defeater for the default belief that the agent is reliable concerning the testimony that he has provided.

The broad similarities between the views consist in their shared concern with providing conditions under which it is reasonable to regard another agent as a reliable source of information. The positive reasons and reductionist views assert that one is only justified in regarding an agent as a reliable attester (or disputant) when one has some background information about the reliability of the agent. The no undefeated defeater and anti-reductionist views, on the other hand, assert that we are always justified in regarding others as reliable in these contexts unless we have some undefeated defeater for the default presumption of reliability.

Although there are these broad similarities between the two debates there are also significant differences. The reductionist/anti-reductionist debate concerns the conditions under which testimony in general is a source of justification for our beliefs, whereas the positive reasons/no undefeated defeater debate concerns the conditions under which one is justified in regarding another agent as a peer in the special context of disagreement. Testimony that constitutes disagreement is a proper subset of testimony in general because in order to receive disagreement testimony one must already have an opinion on the matter that stands in opposition to that of the attester. Some instances of receiving testimony are like this but not all, often testimony is provided to us regarding subjects that we had no opinions about prior to receiving the testimony, and indeed these are the paradigm cases of testimonial exchanges in the testimony literature.

Even if we supposed that one is justified in believing the non-disagreement testimony of a stranger, we certainly could not say the same of disagreement testimony. When you hold an opinion that is opposed to the testimony of a stranger there is no question of believing as the attester believes solely on the basis of his testimony, after all you have reasons to doubt what he is saying that are independent of the fact that you don't have background information about him, namely whatever reasons you had for taking up the contrary belief in the first place.

In non-disagreement testimony cases all that the agent receiving testimony has to go on in forming his belief is the testimony itself, but in disagreement cases

this is not all that the agent has to go on, additionally he has whatever reasons that motivated him to take up the contrary view also. Since the possession of a contrary opinion is a necessary feature of any receipt of disagreement testimony it is never of immediate concern in such cases to describe conditions under which one is justified in believing as the attester believes, because in such situations one's own contrary opinion prevents one from immediately believing as the attester believes regardless of whether the agent possesses background information about the attester or not. In such contexts the immediate concern is with determining the conditions under which one is justified in regarding the attester as a peer. The point is that the conditions under which it is reasonable to believe as an attester attests, whatever they are, are irrelevant in cases where the testimony is provided against a backdrop of contrary opinion. I point this out to assure the reader that although there are connections between the two debates, they are in fact separate and proceed along distinct tracks. I will now turn to providing motivation for my preferred view about judgments of peer-hood, the no undefeated defeater view.

3. The No Undefeated Defeater View and the Goal of Having True Beliefs

Providing motivation for the no undefeated defeater view requires one to explain why there is some epistemic advantage in regarding disagreeing strangers as peers as opposed to not regarding disagreeing strangers as peers. I believe the epistemic advantage of regarding disagreeing strangers as peers is that it is better than the alternative at promoting the goal of having true beliefs. I will now explain why this is so.

The positive reasons view says that background information is necessary in order for one to justifiably regard a disagreeing disputant as a peer, and that in the absence of this information one is not justified in regarding the disputant as a peer. The no undefeated defeater view says that background information is necessary to establish that a disagreeing interlocutor is *not* a peer, and that in the absence of this information one is justified in regarding the individual as a peer. Whichever view one takes it remains the case that when one receives disagreement from an individual that one justifiably regards as a peer (whatever one's story about how these judgments are justifiably made); one ought to reconsider his opinion in response to this incoming evidence of unreliability. Let's see how the truth of this thesis about reconsideration interacts with the alternatives under consideration.

Suppose that one accepts the reconsideration thesis and also the positive reasons view. Such an individual believes that one must reconsider one's opinion when that opinion is challenged by the disagreement of an individual who one justifiably regards as a peer, but also that the range of individuals that it is justified

to regard as peers is restricted to that set of individuals who the agent possesses positive reasons for regarding as equally reliable. As such, the agent will have significant disagreements (disagreements that require belief reconsideration) only with a narrow range of people, the people who the agent happens to know well enough to have reasons to regard as peers.

Things are different for an individual who accepts both the reconsideration thesis and the no undefeated defeater view. Such an individual believes that one must reconsider one's own opinion when that opinion is challenged by the disagreement of an individual that one justifiably regards as a peer, but also that the range of individuals that it is justified to regard as peers is not limited to that set of individuals that the agent has reasons for regarding as peers, rather, it is limited to that set of individuals that the agent lacks reasons for doubting to be peers. As such the range of individuals with whom one can have significant disagreements is necessarily larger on the no undefeated defeater view than it is on the positive reasons view, for consider, if an individual has positive reasons for regarding another person as a peer then he lacks reasons for doubting that he is a peer, but the converse does not hold.⁵ So anyone who is justifiably considered a peer on the positive reasons view is also considered a peer on the no undefeated defeater view but not vice versa.

Adopting the no undefeated defeater view over the positive reasons view can't leave an agent with a smaller range of individuals with whom to have significant disagreements, therefore adopting such a view can't have the consequence that an agent will experience fewer significant disagreements than he would on the alternative. Since significant disagreements require belief reconsideration we see that adopting the no undefeated defeater view entails that an agent will be involved in more instances of belief reconsideration than he would if he adopted the positive reasons view.

⁵ Strictly speaking the range of individuals one can have significant disagreements with on the no undefeated defeater view is *at least as large as* the range of people one can have a significant disagreement with on the positive reasons view. The only circumstance, however, in which adoption of the no undefeated defeater view could leave one with a range of individuals with whom to have significant disagreements that is *no larger than* the range of individuals he would have had by adopting the positive reasons view is in the case where the individual has background information about *all* the people that he could have a disagreement with. It is only with respect to the set of unknown people that the two views differ, so if there is a strange agent out there who could not or will not encounter agents unknown to him, then for him there will be no gain in the number of significant disagreements from adopting my preferred view. Such circumstances are unlikely to actually obtain.

So far I have shown that an agent who accepts the no undefeated defeater view will be involved in more instances of belief reconsideration than he would be if he accepted the positive reasons view. I will now argue that an agent is likelier to hold true beliefs if he engages in more, rather than less, instances of belief reconsideration. Thus, from the standpoint of holding true beliefs the no undefeated defeater view is superior to the positive reasons view.

To see the point consider the ways in which the theoretical alternatives would work in some general sorts of cases⁶. Case 1: an agent A believes that p , and encounters an agent B who believes that $\sim p$. A does not possess any relevant background information about B, either in the form of positive reasons to believe he is a peer, or undefeated defeaters for the belief that he is a peer. Additionally it is the case that B is not in fact a peer, and is actually wrong about $\sim p$. According to the no undefeated defeater view A ought to reconsider whether p , because A is receiving disagreement from an individual that he is justified in regarding as a peer. According to the positive reasons view it is not the case that A ought to reconsider whether p , because he is not receiving disagreement from an individual that he is justified in regarding as a peer, given the lack of positive reasons for believing that he is. At first blush it might seem that A is better off accepting the positive reasons view in case 1 over the no undefeated defeater view, because in case 1 A holds the correct belief before the disagreement, and the no undefeated defeater view requires him to reconsider it while the positive reasons view does not. This argument, however, relies on a misunderstanding of the role of reconsideration in contexts of disagreement. Reconsidering one's belief in response to a disagreement does not imply that one becomes favorably disposed to the opinion of one's disputant. Rather, reconsideration in response to disagreement requires only that an agent reason about the connection between some body of evidence that was used in coming to a belief about the disputed claim and the claim itself. If one reconsiders whether one's evidence verifies one's original belief and finds oneself unmoved, then one can justifiably retain one's original position. It is only if we assume that reconsideration necessarily involves ultimate belief revision in the direction of one's disputant that one will worry that accepting the no undefeated defeater view in cases like case 1 requires agents with

⁶ In these cases I employ the notion of all or nothing belief as a simplifying device. With suitable modification the same kind of account could be provided for graded beliefs, that is, degrees of credence in a proposition that are represented as a real number between 0 and 1. For discussion of the use of credences in the epistemology of disagreement see Kelly, "Peer Disagreement," 117-18.

correct beliefs to revise their beliefs in the direction of epistemically inferior agents who are wrong in response to disagreements with them.

We have seen that it is possible for one's belief to survive the challenge presented by reconsideration in response to disagreement. One might still worry, however, that in a case like case 1 it is possible for A to reconsider p and erroneously conclude that $\sim p$, thereby replacing a true belief with a false one. Certainly this is possible, think of a student who double checks his answers on a math test and erroneously changes a correct answer to an incorrect one. Though this is possible, we have good reasons to believe that it is generally unlikely.

The only way that reconsideration could lead one to replace a true belief with a false belief more often than not would be if agents are generally more reliable when they first evaluate a body of evidence as opposed to when they evaluate the same body of evidence again later.⁷ This amounts to the claim that agents generally enjoy 'beginners luck' when conducting their belief formation processes. This claim is not plausible given the ways that agents tend to develop greater powers of evaluation over time, or at least not lose them. All else being equal we tend to think that from the standpoint of having a reliable opinion one is more reliable the more he has reflected on the claim and the body of evidence associated with it, not less. If our intuitions were otherwise we would privilege the outcomes of *initial* considerations of evidence in every domain, and defer in our judgments to the opinions of beginners in those domains. We would also have to discourage such common practices as double-checking. Obviously we do not discourage such practices and with good reason. There is nothing about an initial instance of evidence evaluation that makes it more reliable than a second or third. This would only be so on the implausible assumption that agents are better evaluators the first time they consider a claim. While this may be true of an individual in special circumstances, perhaps the agent is undergoing cognitive decay, it is false as a general claim about all agents, and therefore it is false that in

⁷ It is possible that one acquires additional evidence in between an initial evaluation and a later reevaluation of a proposition on which the evidence bears. Bergmann discusses the notion of 'full-disclosure' in which the agents involved in a disagreement share all of their reasons with each other upon becoming aware of their disagreement (See Michael Bergmann, "Rational Disagreement After Full Disclosure," *Episteme* 6, 3 (2009): 336-353.) Importantly there is no reason to suppose that one will be less reliable as an evaluator once one has acquired some additional evidence to evaluate. Even though reconsideration sometimes involves a somewhat different base of evidence than the evidence that was initially evaluated the point holds good that one should not become skeptical of their ability to evaluate that evidence just because they are doing it later in time than when they first evaluated the initial base of evidence.

general reconsidering a claim has the likely outcome of replacing a true belief with a false one.

So far I have argued that engaging in belief reconsideration in response to the disagreement of an epistemic inferior who is in fact wrong does not usually lead one to replace a true belief with a false one. Now I will argue that in other sorts of cases the acceptance of the positive reasons view over the no undefeated defeater view ensures that a false belief will not be replaced by a true one. Consider case 2: an agent A believes that p , and encounters an agent B who believes that $\sim p$. A does not possess any relevant background information about B, either in the form of positive reasons to believe he is a peer, or undefeated defeaters for the belief that he is a peer. Additionally it is the case that B is in fact a peer and $\sim p$ is true. According to the no undefeated defeater view A is required to reconsider his belief that p in response to the disagreement because in the absence of undefeated defeaters A is justified in regarding B as a peer. According to the positive reasons view, however, no belief reconsideration is required since A is not justified in regarding B as a peer in the absence of positive reasons for believing that he is.

In case 2 it is clear that holding the no undefeated defeater view is likelier to leave A with a true belief than holding the positive reasons view. Since A is not advised to reconsider in case 2 on the positive reasons view, A never gets an opportunity to detect the error in his original evaluation of the evidence and revise his belief accordingly. Though there is no guarantee that belief revision in the direction of B would be the outcome of A's reconsideration, it is at least a possibility, a possibility that is foreclosed by the procedure recommended by the positive reasons view, namely, don't reconsider. So in cases like case 2 agents like A would be well served by holding the no undefeated defeater view; unlike the positive reasons view it provides one the opportunity to reconsider a false belief and perhaps replace it with a true belief.

There are four general sorts of disagreement situations one can find oneself in in which one has no background information about one's disputant, so far we have looked at two. These were the case in which one has no background information about one's disputant where the disputant is not a peer and is wrong (case 1), and the case in which one has no background information about one's disputant where the disputant is a peer and is right (case 2). Briefly we will consider the other two, the case in which one has no background information about one's disputant where the disputant is a peer and is wrong, and the case in which one has no background information about one's disputant where the disputant is not a peer and is right. Let us call these cases case 3 and case 4

respectively. Case 3 falls under the same sort of analysis as case 1, the only difference is that in case 3 the disputant is a peer and in case 1 he is not. Either way one won't necessarily adopt the belief of the disputant who is wrong merely in virtue of reconsidering one's own, correct, belief. Case 4 falls under the same sort of analysis as case 2, the only difference is that in case 4 the disputant is not a peer and in case 2 he is. Either way an agent benefits from an opportunity to reconsider a false belief, whether the occasion for reconsideration was instigated by the disagreement of an actual peer or an actual non-peer.

We have now exhaustively described the cases in which an agent can have a disagreement with an individual that he has no background information about. In all of these cases the no undefeated defeater view advises belief reconsideration, and the positive reasons view does not. By urging belief reconsideration in all of the cases the no undefeated defeater view has the advantage of providing agents with additional opportunities to reconsider false beliefs when the disputant is right, and does not suffer from the worry that reconsidering one's own belief when one is correct to begin with will likely lead one to replace a true belief with a false one. The positive reasons view, on the other hand, by not recommending belief reconsideration in any of the cases has the consequence that agents will not have opportunities to correct false beliefs in response to the disagreement of strangers who are right. One might think that this loss of opportunity is compensated for by failures to reconsider true beliefs in response to disagreements with strangers who are wrong. But we have seen that in cases like case 1 and case 3 reconsideration of a true belief does not necessarily imply ultimate belief revision away from one's original, correct, belief. In order for the positive reasons view to be the more truth conducive procedure in contexts of disagreement with strangers it would have to be the case that reconsideration in general either leaves false beliefs unchanged or converts true beliefs to false ones more often than reconsideration preserved true beliefs or converted false beliefs to true ones. Only such skepticism about reconsideration in general could justify the notion that one will have a larger proportion of true beliefs by failing to reconsider beliefs that are challenged by the disagreement of strangers than one would have if one did reconsider his beliefs in the same situations. Unless reconsideration generally tends to replace true beliefs with false ones or leave false beliefs unchanged we have good reasons to be confident that reconsideration in contexts of disagreements with strangers will help more than it will hurt. If this were not the case then it is hard to see what value there would be in reconsidering anything for any reason, even reconsidering a belief in response to the disagreement of an individual who one *does* have positive reasons to believe is a peer, for if one did,

presumably he would be likelier than not to end up with a false belief regardless of whether he started off with one before reconsidering or not.

So far I have argued that, unless reconsideration is not generally truth conducive, the no undefeated defeater view is better at promoting the goal of having true beliefs than the positive reasons view is. This is because there are two possibilities when one is involved in a disagreement with a stranger, either the stranger is right or the stranger is wrong. If the stranger is right and one neglects to reconsider, then one can do no worse, but if one does reconsider then one can do better, possibly one can detect his error and replace a false belief with a true one. If the stranger is wrong then one might do worse but won't necessarily, after all one might conclude on reconsideration that one was right all along. So failing to reconsider when one is wrong guarantees that a false belief is retained, but opting to reconsider when one is right does not guarantee that a true belief is replaced with a false one. Given these observations and the assumption that reconsideration is not generally unreliable, we find that the agent who accepts the no undefeated defeater view will have a greater share of true beliefs than he would if he accepted the positive reasons view in the same situations.

Of course for some agents in some situations holding true beliefs may not be as valuable as other goals, such as having a stable set of beliefs over time, or saving the time that it would take to engage in reconsideration in response to the disagreement of strangers. If Joe has three minutes to defuse a bomb and a minute into defusing it a stranger reports to him the negation of one of his beliefs, nobody would fault him for neglecting to follow the requirement of the no undefeated defeater view and engage in belief reconsideration. In such a case the truth of the challenged belief is not as important to the agent as uninterrupted attention to other tasks is. In light of this we say that *to the extent* that one is interested in promoting the goal of having true beliefs, one ought to operate according to the requirements of the no undefeated defeater view.

4. Defeaters and Defeater Defeaters for Peer-Hood Beliefs

If one possesses an undefeated defeater for the belief that an agent is a peer and then has a disagreement with that agent, then one is not required by the no undefeated defeater view to reconsider the contested belief in response to the disagreement. It remains, then, to provide an account of the sort of propositions that serve as defeaters for peer-hood beliefs. To this task I now turn.

When two individuals are rightly considered epistemic peers in some domain it is because neither party has an advantage over the other in terms of the likelihood of being correct in the event of a disagreement between them regarding

some claim within the domain. The factors that determine how likely an agent is to be correct regarding some claim within the domain are the quality of the agent's evidence and his ability to evaluate it.⁸ So to possess an undefeated defeater for the belief that an agent with whom one is disagreeing is a peer is to possess an undefeated defeater either for the belief that the agent has equally good evidence, or for the belief that the agent is equally good at evaluating it or both.

There are a variety of ways in which one can acquire a defeater for the belief that some agent has evidence equally as good as one's own. One way of acquiring such a defeater is to acquire the belief that one's disputant has no evidence at all. If I have formed the belief that p in response to a body of evidence E , and then discover that you believe that $\sim p$ on the basis of pure guesswork, I certainly have a defeater for the belief that our evidence is equally good, and so the disagreement is not one for which I ought to reconsider whether p . In other cases I will believe that you have some evidence but believe it to be inferior to mine for some reason. Maybe your evidence is less direct, so that the truth of all your evidentiary beliefs is compatible with the truth of a wider range of propositions than mine is, in this way I might think that my evidence is better because it has more bearing on our contested claim. Another possibility is that I believe that all of your evidence is a proper subset of mine. In such a case I will believe that my evidence is better simply because I have more of it to go on. In any of these cases one will possess a defeater for the belief that a disputant has evidence equally as good as one's own. Whether these defeaters will remain undefeated depends on whether one will subsequently form beliefs that cause one to doubt their truth, or that undermine the connection between them and the claim that they are meant to defeat.

Defeaters for the belief that a disputant is an equally good evaluator of evidence can also take a variety of forms. One can acquire a defeater of this sort by coming to believe that one's disputant was biased in evaluating the evidence. When an individual involved in a disagreement is biased in favor of his opinion this means that he is disposed to see his evidence as verifying his opinion,

⁸ Here I loosely follow the characterization of peer-hood one finds in Kelly -"The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement" in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology: Vol I*, eds. John Hawthorne and Tamar Szabó-Gendler, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 174-75. There he says that two individuals are epistemic peers if :

"(i) they are equals with respect to their familiarity with the evidence and arguments which bear on that question, and
(ii) they are equals with respect to general epistemic virtues such as intelligence, thoughtfulness, and freedom from bias"

regardless of whether the evidence in fact does this. As such, an individual who is involved in a disagreement with a biased person is justified in believing that the biased person is not as sensitive to the connection between the evidence and the contested claim as he is. This just means that an agent who believes his disputant is biased in a way that he is not possesses a defeater for the belief that the disputant is equally reliable in evaluating the evidence that bears on that claim.

Another sort of defeater for the belief that one's disputant is equally reliable in the evaluation of a relevant body of evidence is the belief that one's disputant is suffering from a cognitive impairment. For example, if I am involved in a disagreement with an individual who I believe to be very drunk, I have reasons to believe that his powers of evaluation are more susceptible to error than my own (provided that I am not similarly drunk), and therefore I have a defeater for the belief that we are equally reliable in evaluating our evidence and forming our opinions.

It is also possible for one to acquire a defeater for the belief that a disputant is an equally reliable evaluator by coming to believe that one's disputant spent significantly less time evaluating the evidence. For example if I am involved in a disagreement with an individual who I believe has spent a fraction of the time that I have evaluating the evidence, then I have reasons to doubt that our instances of evidence evaluation were conducted equally reliably. In general snap judgments are less reliable than carefully formed opinions, and someone who has done the latter is justified in regarding someone who has done the former as a less reliable evaluator than himself in the event of a disagreement.

It should be noted that these sources of defeating beliefs; asymmetries in bias, cognitive function, time spent evaluating, or quality of evidence should not be thought of as a conceptual analysis of peer-hood. Equality along these dimensions cannot be thought of as necessary for two individuals to be peers. This is because two people are epistemic peers insofar as neither party has an advantage over the other in terms of being likelier to be right in the event of a disagreement. This condition can be met even if some or all of the asymmetries are present. For example, you and I might be equally likely to be correct in the event of a disagreement, but only because my comparatively poor evidence is compensated for by my superior powers of evaluation.⁹ When an agent has evidence for one

⁹ Nathan King noted the possibility of equal reliability for two subjects who have compensating epistemic virtues: "Another way subjects can be equally reliable is for them to rate disparately along different dimensions, but in such a way that these differences cancel out." (Nathan King,

asymmetry and no others he possesses an undefeated defeater for the belief that he is disagreeing with a peer, but if the agent has evidence for two asymmetries, one compensating for the other, then the agent has two defeaters, one of which defeats the other, and is therefore justified in regarding his disputant as a peer. This kind of defeater-defeater is what is known as an undercutting defeater-defeater, rather than a rebutting defeater-defeater. A rebutting defeater-defeater is a belief that makes one doubt the truth of the original defeater. An undercutting defeater-defeater is a belief that undermines the connection between the first defeater and the belief it was meant to defeat. To see the distinction consider a subject who acquires a defeater for the belief that his disputant has equally good evidence, but then subsequently comes to believe that this is compensated for by advantages that the disputant has regarding some cognitive impairment. In such a case the belief that one is suffering from a disadvantageous cognitive impairment does not give one reasons to doubt the original defeater, namely, 'the disputant has worse evidence,' rather, the second defeater undermines the connection between the first defeater and the belief it was meant to defeat, namely, 'the disputant is my peer.' Given that I am suffering from a cognitive impairment it no longer follows from the fact that my disputant has worse evidence than me that he is not my peer. In this context we say that the second defeater is an undercutting, not a rebutting defeater. Either sort of defeater is possible to obtain regarding judgments of epistemic peer-hood.¹⁰

"Disagreement: What's the Problem? Or A Good Peer is Hard To Find," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, forthcoming, 13).

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