

PART II

Virtue Critiques: Evidence and Inquiry

Evidentialism appears to be a normative theory. It says what one ought to believe. In *Evidentialism* Conee and Feldman say ‘We hold the general view that one epistemically ought to have the doxastic attitudes that fit one’s evidence. We think that being epistemically obligatory is equivalent to being epistemically justified. There are in the literature two other sorts of view about epistemic obligations’ (2004: 88). Feldman has written a number of things concerning this—including ‘The Ethics of Belief’, reprinted in *Evidentialism*:

- Feldman, Richard. 1988. ‘Epistemic Obligations,’ in James Tomberlin (ed.) *Philosophical Perspectives 2, Epistemology*. Ridgeview Publishing Co., pp. 235–56.
- ——. 1988. ‘Subjective and Objective Justification in Ethics and Epistemology,’ *The Monist* 71: 405–19.
- ——. 1998. ‘Epistemology and Ethics,’ *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Peter Klein and Richard Foley. Routledge.
- ——. 2001. ‘Voluntary Belief and Epistemic Evaluation,’ in Matthias Steup (ed.) *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty: Essays on Epistemic Justification, Responsibility, and Virtue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 77–92.
- ——. 2002. ‘Epistemological Duties,’ in Paul Moser (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 361–84.
- ——. 2008. ‘Modest Deontologism in Epistemology,’ *Synthese*, 161: 339–55.

Evidentialism was in fact intended largely as a response to denials of evidentialism which stemmed from normative theories concerned with human limitations. Conee and Feldman think that practical concerns should be kept separate from epistemic concerns.

Guy Axtell also offers a forceful call to unite theory and practice. He clearly thinks epistemic normativity should be tied to the process of inquiry. He also thinks evidentialist views are too narrow in a number of ways related to this. First, he argues that an adequate notion of epistemic normativity should be diachronic, not synchronic.

Second, he claims that evidentialists are committed to a form of epistemic value monism called veritism: that the only epistemic value is avoiding believing falsehoods. Finally, Axtell is writing from firmly within the Pragmatist camp, so he thinks that the social consequences of a theory pertain to its acceptability. He clearly thinks that evidentialism has bad consequences for democracy.

Jason Baehr revives concerns with this aspect of evidentialism's normative component. He offers cases which purport to show that though some proposition p fits one's evidence, one shouldn't believe p . These cases all involve some kind of vice displayed in the subject whether that be because of lazy investigation or actual malicious intent. He suggests that evidentialists add a virtue component to their view in order to accommodate such cases. He worries that if they don't, they risk focusing on a property that lacks any real value.

Keith DeRose's essay at the beginning of Part IV also raises concerns concerning inquiry which are part of what motivate his skepticism about evidentialism. Thus it is an honorary member of this section.

4

From Internalist Evidentialism to Virtue Responsibilism

Guy Axtell

The question has not yet been generally accepted in the Academy—let alone any answer agreed upon—whether the twin concepts of ‘rationality’ and ‘reasonableness’ are not interdependent ideas, of comparable authority and philosophical interest. Indeed, it is not always recognized that the two ideas can be distinguished.

Stephen Toulmin, *Return to Reason* (2001, 2)

4.1 Introduction

Evidentialism as Earl Conee and Richard Feldman present it is a philosophy with distinct aspects or sides: Evidentialism as a conceptual analysis of epistemic justification, and as a prescriptive ethics of belief—an account of what one ‘ought to believe’ under different epistemic circumstances. This chapter will focus especially on the evidentialist ethics of belief and an associated set of views in a growing literature usually dubbed the epistemology of disagreement. I find myself a discontent with evidentialism in *both* of its main senses however, and will begin with an undercutting critique of evidentialism in its first and primary sense. Effectively rebutting their evidentialist account of epistemic responsibility would serve to undercut Conee and Feldman’s ethics of belief because they are explicit in endorsing only *cognitive* and not also *moral* evidentialism; the two sides of the evidentialist research program are asymmetrically related, their epistemological account of what it means to be a successful *epistemic* agent being the whole of the philosophic underpinning they provide for the extension of evidentialism into an ethics of belief. It is cognitive evidentialism that the undercutting criticism of Part II is primarily concerned with.

It is perhaps too usual a practice in epistemology today for writers to concern themselves directly *only* with matters such as these—only, that is, with the purported theoretical pedigree of an account—and to accept on that basis whatever consequences for actual practice it may turn out to have. Yet any proposed ethics of belief, I begin by noting, can have quite profound consequences on how we perceive and treat others

whose beliefs and/or attitudes differ from our own. Views about the ethics of belief affect our judgment of the reasonableness and even the sanity of people who differ from us in their beliefs and attitudes. Such judgments in turn have a sometimes deep impact on the great cultural debates of one's day and age. Any philosophical ethic of belief, let us therefore say, proposes a kind of 'accommodation' between the individual and the community of inquirers, an accommodation that can and should be evaluated pragmatically.

Adherence to the *evidentialist accommodation* is considered by many to be the very meaning of the Enlightenment Challenge to pre-modern modes of thinking. Yet as Feldman concedes with some reluctance in recent papers, his account renders reasonable disagreement among public evidence-sharing epistemic peers impossible, or nearly so. As Feldman puts it in 'Reasonable Religious Disagreements', 'open and honest discussions seem to have the puzzling effect of making reasonable disagreement impossible' (2007: 202). My discontent derives in part from the 'Victorian' austerity of the evidentialist ethic of belief, but also and more pertinently for this paper, from concern that Feldman's puzzlement at what he concedes is an 'unfortunate' implication of his approach far understates the deleterious practical consequences of his claim.

Essentially then, the critical claims of this chapter are that Conee and Feldman's evidentialist philosophy has both 'weak roots' (Section 4.2) and 'sour fruits' (Section 4.3). A concern with pragmatic consequences will at points lead us away from epistemology proper and into a broader discussion of the importance of a sound ethic of belief as a philosopher's tool of mediation in our ongoing and often volatile 'culture wars' over reason and faith, science and religion, etc. Thinkers can mean different things by 'peer' and 'public-evidence sharing' of course, and this may well be an area where Conee and Feldman are not in as close agreement as they are on the more general contours of the two sides or aspects of evidentialism (Conee 2010). In offering a critique of the practical consequences of the *evidentialist accommodation* in Section 4.3, I will focus primarily on Feldman's recent papers (2006, 2007) which directly contest the possibility of reasonable disagreement.

In the quote at the start of this chapter, Stephen Toulmin asks fellow philosophers if they should not be concerned to delineate the different extensions and normative meanings of 'rationality' and 'reasonableness'. In his sweeping critique of intellectualism, *Return to Reason*, from which this passage is drawn, he calls upon us to correct 'a current imbalance between our ideas of "rationality" and "reasonableness"' (2001: 12). The evidentialist approach not only doesn't allow for this distinction, it indeed *drives* the reduction of the latter concept to an idiosyncratically internalist construal of the former. But with a different epistemological approach we are also likely to arrive at an ethics of belief with a substantially different character; with a different *enough* approach we may advantage ourselves to 'recover reasonableness' and 'return to reason'. In order to answer this call, the concluding section (4.4) will briefly suggest why what seems profoundly dissatisfying in the evidentialist epistemology and ethics of belief is avoidable when we begin instead from a virtue epistemology. What I propose

as an alternative *responsibilist accommodation* conceives the standards of intellectual responsibility or reasonableness pertinent to the ethics of belief to primarily derive from evaluation of intellectually virtuous/vicious motivations and habits of inquiry—diachronic or longitudinal ‘reasonableness’—rather than deriving from the narrow, technical sort of epistemic significance they call ‘synchronic rationality’. In this way we recover the senses of reasonableness and responsibility that naturally befit philosophic concern with a sound and civic ethic of belief, from the evidentialists’ reduction of intellectual reasonableness to that obviously responsibility-eschewing sense of it that ‘synchronic rationality’ (or evidential fit) denotes.

4.2 Weak roots

Internalist evidentialism, this section will argue, is highly *incomplete* as an account of epistemic responsibility: it offers too narrow a conception of the epistemic, of the epistemic goal, and of what it means to maximize epistemic value or to be a successful epistemic agent. The critique of internalist evidentialism in this section will be less severe than John Greco’s (2005) claim that internalism is false as a thesis about *any* interesting or important sort of epistemic valuation and *any* corresponding sort of epistemic normativity, yet substantially more robust than Jason Baehr’s claim that internalist evidentialism only needs mending with a ‘virtue patch’ (this volume).

If internalism was ever a consensus view about epistemic justification, this is no longer true in contemporary epistemology, and the centrality of doxastic justification in non-internalist epistemologies, and in virtue epistemologies in particular, makes necessary a thorough reconceptualization of the relationship between doxastic justification (concerned with belief and knowledge), and personal justification (concerned with agency and responsibility). There does seem to be a near consensus view *among* internalists, however, first conceding the need to take account of doxastic justification in an analysis of knowledge, and secondly asserting the adequacy of addressing this need by describing the agent as doxastically justified whenever they possess normal evidential or propositional justification that *p*, and ‘base’ their belief that *p* on the evidence which propositionally justifies it.

This way of bringing the basing relationship into the analysis of knowing through a back door will not do for the non-internalist, however, who may allow internalism about evidential justification, but will not equate evidential justification with epistemic justification, nor accept any general internalist condition on knowing. The internalist still fails to give the importance of the etiology of belief its due, conceiving a *justifiable* belief and a *belief* in fact justified for an agent, as separated only by a synchronic, time-slice act of ‘believing on the basis’. But virtue epistemologists like John Turri object, arguing that ‘doxastic justification cannot be understood simply as propositional justification *plus* basing’ (2010: 13).

Doxastic norms (norms concerning practices of belief-formation and maintenance) can be diachronic or synchronic; that the diachronic norms arise from cross-temporal

or longitudinal evaluations does not of itself undermine their status as genuinely epistemic. Indeed, if the relationship between knowledge-possession and the etiology of belief runs deeper than the internalist analysis allows for, then either propositional and doxastic justification are independent sources of epistemic value (see Axtell and Olson 2009), or ‘we should explain propositional justification in terms of doxastic justification’ (Turri 2010, 1; compare Greco 2005). In either case the internalist fails to acknowledge what I want to insist is a robust inter-relationship between epistemic responsibility of the sort that results in doxastic justification, and the etiology of belief. Epistemic rationality or personal justification has two aspects, diachronic and synchronic, and while neither is directly truth-linked it is arguably the former that is the more salient prefiguring cause of doxastic justification and of knowledge in most cases. A proper understanding of epistemic responsibility therefore shows it to integrally involve knowledge-attributors in considerations of the etiology of an agent’s target belief (Greco 2005). ‘Poor utilization of even the best reasons for believing p will prevent you from justifiably believing or knowing that p The way in which the subject performs, the manner in which she makes use of her reasons fundamentally determines whether her belief is doxastically justified’ (Turri 2010: 10).

So what happens when we don’t accept the internalist account of epistemic justification *qua* evidential justification in the first place? What if we think with Michael Williams that the account presupposes a ‘Prior Grounding Model’ of justification that is skepticism-inviting, and further that as Williams writes in ‘Responsibility and Reliability’ (2008), the debate over internalist and externalist views of justification lingers on after it has ceased to be useful owing largely to a tendency on the one side, ‘to adopt an overly demanding, hyper-intellectualized conception of what epistemic responsibility demands’ (2008: 1)? In that case I think we’ll see the externalist turn in epistemology as undercutting or at least problematizing claims that function to privilege propositional justification as conceptually more basic than doxastic justification, and as the only *epistemic* good that diachronic responsibility—responsibility in inquiry—is good *for*. We will challenge and I think reject what I call the *Well-foundedness Formula*, that doxastic justification is just synchronic propositional justification ‘*plus basing*’. Conee and Feldman help justify the claim that only *synchronic epistemic rationality*—one’s present time-slice response to evidence—matters in epistemic evaluation of agent rationality and justification, in part by insisting that across-time responsibility or irresponsibility in inquiry raises ‘moral or prudential questions rather than epistemic questions’ (2004: 178). The ‘too narrow objection’ to this view of the epistemic has previously been made by Alvin Plantinga, and Feldman’s reply toes a Chisholmian line, where anything except raw synchronic rationality, the rationality of evidential fit, is ‘irrelevant to the central notion of epistemic justification’ (1988: 249). Also irrelevant to this judgment are said to be the long-term epistemic consequences of adopting the belief, as well as any consideration of how the agent came to hold what they consider the evidence bearing on that target proposition, ‘whether by conscientious enquiry or by avoiding potentially

troublesome information' (2004: 189–90). Evaluation of the agent's inquiry-directed motivations and conduct across time is possible, but is irrelevant to what one ought to believe at any given moment; synchronic evaluation is the only genuinely epistemological concern, or the only one they allow to factor into their calculation of epistemic value maximization.

I suggest that the claim that Conee and Feldman repeatedly make, that evidentialism provides no guidance about what an agent should *do* (2004: 189), but only what she should *believe* at any moment about any given proposition, sets up a classic false dichotomy, and that this teaches us more about the shortcomings of internalist evidentialism than about the irrelevance of inquiry-directed habits and activities to epistemic responsibility and epistemic justification. Dichotomizing as the evidentialist wants to between the synchronic and diachronic rationality, in order to define only the former as arising from a general intellectual requirement and the latter as always having a non-epistemological source out of moral or prudential considerations, reflects a doubtful strategy. The virtue-theoretic response to this Chisholmian deontology, for the obvious reason it takes intellectually virtuous habits and abilities/competencies to determine doxastic justification, provides what I think is strong support for the force of the 'too narrow' objection to Conee and Feldman's account of what epistemic obligation and success consist in.

In a 'salience contextualist' or 'inquiry pragmatist' version of virtue responsibilism, as one alternative, judgments about what constitutes an agent's total evidence in respect of comprehensive religious, philosophic, and political beliefs are viewed as 'entangled' with qualitative or value-laden judgments about prudential, and even at times moral factors that affect the agent's efforts at inquiry. 'Intellectual responsibility' should accordingly be acknowledged as the 'thick' concept common language takes it to be. In lieu of a cogent reduction plan, we should not assume that the sense or senses of responsibility that inform our ethics of belief are of a nature radically different than this. If there is a valid philosophical interest in synchronic epistemic justification—and I have not denied that this is the case—it is not in a direct sense the interest in what epistemic justification is, nor is it the interest in the sense or senses of responsibility that bear most directly on the ethics of belief. Especially when we attend to what we actually have meta-cognitive control over, our most fundamental doxastic responsibilities are diachronic; synchronic rationality is underwritten by responsibility in cultivating and exercising virtuous doxastic habits.

Admittedly I offer no direct argument here for salience contextualism and for the entangled view—pragmatic/diachronic encroachment upon what the evidentialist understands as the purely epistemic (see Axtell 2010 for such a view). But the burden of proof does seem to me largely to fall on those whose claim it is that the reduction is *possible*: that we can always clearly factor out the purely epistemic considerations of 'fit' (as a descriptive state of affairs) in attributions of knowledge, from agent/attributor interests and from evaluation of the agent's own selected investigative methods and strategies. Perhaps when readers receive from Feldman his long-anticipated *theory of*

evidence we will see just how this reduction is supposed to proceed in application to cases like the theism/non-theism debate. But at present I would characterize Feldman's account of these issues in the 'Ethics of Belief' chapter of *Evidentialism* and in essays like 'Epistemic Obligations' (1988) and 'Epistemic Duties' (2002) to be carried largely by unargued assumption of a fact/value dichotomy, together with *persuasive definition* of key concepts like 'epistemic responsibility' and 'reasonable belief', persuasive definition that would have us relocate these concepts quite a distance from their broader everyday connotations.

But to go further into the substance of the matter, our 'too narrow' objection to their proposed restriction of epistemic value to maximizing synchronically rational belief can be framed as a challenge to the conception of epistemological axiology with which the evidentialists would have us begin. Conee and Feldman restrict the epistemic to the relation of beliefs to evidence. For them 'the fundamental epistemic goal is just to have reasonable beliefs', and taking this to be the case they further posit that 'nothing about evidence gathering or the like follows as a means to that goal' (2004: 188). This approach to justification has deep roots in a Chisholmian conception of the tasks of epistemology. But virtue epistemologies contest that conception, routed in single-source epistemic value monism. They often posit that *understanding*, and not just the veritistic goals of true belief and knowledge or the internalist goal of maximizing synchronically rational beliefs, ranks highly in our epistemological axiology. If this rebuttal is sound, this has direct bearing on the cogency of Feldman's claim that evaluation of the conduct of inquiry is a topic for a theory of practical reasoning but 'irrelevant' to a theory of epistemic justification. In any conception of epistemological axiology that recognizes a more diverse range of epistemic goods, or that simply gives pride of place to *understanding* rather than to propositional knowledge within our cognitive economy, epistemic value will not be measured by synchronic rationality alone. Although we have here been largely limited to a critique of Feldman's evidentialist epistemology, I have argued elsewhere more constructively for the genuine contributions to epistemic value of the intellectual virtues, illustrating how the virtues, as diachronic traits that bear upon the quality of our motivations and efforts at inquiry, prefigure doxastic justification, and why they remain central to appraisals of agents that matter most to us, philosophically and scientifically (Axtell and Olson 2009).

Arguments from the paucity of the evidentialist's conception of epistemic axiology and from the positive contributions of diachronic rationality to epistemic value will also bear on Feldman's and other philosophers' endorsement of the Rational Uniqueness Thesis (hereafter RUT). This is the claim that given a body of evidence, there is only one reasonable doxastic attitude to take towards any proposition, where possible doxastic attitudes include believing, disbelieving, and suspending judgment. Once both degrees-of-belief and commitment-qualification through epistemic humility are set aside, RUT becomes almost a foregone conclusion. In terms of fit or doxastic attitude, there will *always* be one porridge that is too cold, another too hot, and a third that is *just right*.

With RUT and the role it has recently played in assertion of the impossibility of reasonable disagreement, we have to be cognizant of how its application already presupposes cognitive evidentialism. Thus the explicit defense of RUT in *Evidentialism* derives from thesis O2: that an agent ought always to have just exactly that attitude towards a proposition supported by his/her evidence at that particular moment. This in turn is best supported by V3: that being synchronically rational at every moment is uniformly what it is to constitute epistemic success and to maximize epistemic value (2004: 185, 258). But we have already given sufficient reason to doubt V3, namely its dependence upon orthodox Chisholmian epistemic value monism. So to the extent that we adopt the richer conception of epistemological axiology that I argue elsewhere is a key lesson of recent work on the ‘value problem’ and value-driven epistemology (see Axtell 2008), then V3 can be counted false and no longer provides the needed support for O2. Thus RUT in turn, simply lacks the cogency with which much on the recent literature on epistemic disagreement invests it. This would be a good thing, as I’ll elaborate in Section 4.3.

So from the present perspective it can be concluded that at two levels—that of how to maximize epistemic value when adopting an attitude towards a proposition, and that of how the ethics of belief is claimed to be governed only by consideration of the *synchronic* rationality of the agent’s doxastic attitudes—the evidentialist account looks quite doubtful. If this is the case then as we began by saying, it can’t provide the philosophic support that cognitive evidentialists rely upon it to provide in order to motivate evidentialism in its other main aspect—as a normative ethics of belief and/or a normative account of proper responses to peer disagreement/diversity.

4.3 Sour fruits

Thus far I have followed an approach of undercutting evidentialism as an ethics of belief by criticizing its roots in the internalist evidentialist account of epistemic justification. In this section we’ll ask whether the ethic of belief Feldman defends in ‘Reasonable Religious Disagreements’ and other recent papers is likely to be of value or disvalue as a tool of mediation in our present-day culture wars, including especially clashes of religious and secular culture.

In the paper we are focusing on, Feldman reflects upon a course he recently taught in philosophy of religion, and attempts to show the falsity of ‘the tolerant and supportive view’ (hereafter TSV) he says a good many of his students had, both towards disagreement between *believers and skeptics*, and between (presumably moderate) adherents of *different world faith traditions*. He frames his argument around two questions:

Q1 Can epistemic peers who have shared their evidence have reasonable disagreements?

Q2 Can epistemic peers who have shared their evidence reasonably maintain their own belief yet also think that the other party to the disagreement is also reasonable? (2007: 201).

The burden Feldman places on his students to support TSV is not to argue just that religious beliefs can be held by ‘generally reasonable folks’ but that people are ‘epistemically reasonable with respect to their specific beliefs’. He argues that while reasonable disagreement (Q1), even with mutual acknowledgment (Q2), may appear *initially* plausible, we must ultimately come to negative answers to both questions. Epistemic peers who have shared their evidence cannot reasonably come to different conclusions: That is, ‘there cannot be reasonable disagreements of the sort I was investigating’, and ‘I cannot make good sense of the supportive and tolerant attitude my students displayed’ (2007: 213).

I want to defend the students’ intuitions, while also exploring the possibility of turning Feldman’s or other RUT-defenders’ ‘unfortunate’ dismissal of reasonable disagreement back into a pragmatic test of the value or disvalue of his ethics of belief for mediating our most serious cultural debates. An old adage going back to Hume is that errors in *religion* are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous. I’ll suggest that this is *not* so in the present case of using cognitive evidentialism plus RUT to undermine reasonable disagreement among evidence-sharing epistemic peers!

My critique of the practical implications of accepting the position Feldman defends begins with William James’ characterization of ‘faith-tendencies as extremely active psychological forces constantly outstripping evidence’ (1979b [1911]: 112). The ‘faith-ladder’, thought James, was no logical chain of inferences, but neither is it usefully judged by the intellectualist standards of skeptical rationalism, that both demands establishing a threshold of sufficient evidence for reasonable belief, and denies that that posited threshold is ever met. Moral evidentialists like William Clifford (1999 [1877]) are discontents as well, not of the *evidentialist accommodation* but of what Richard Rorty calls the *Jeffersonian Compromise*: mutual acquiescence to viewing religious beliefs as private in a sense of having little direct bearing on social/political order, but as still relevant to, and possibly essential for, individual perfection. Jefferson ‘set the tone for American liberal politics’ when he wrote in *Notes on Virginia* that ‘It does me no injury for my neighbor to say that there are twenty Gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.’ Citizens of Jeffersonian democracy, the compromise holds, ‘can be as religious or irreligious as they please so long as they are not “fanatical”’ (Rorty 1991: 175).

The problem is that making this important qualification—‘so long as’—involves noticing the differences between radical and moderate forms of religious fideism in terms of the faith ventures they respectively authorize. Yet a cognitive evidentialist like Feldman can no more acknowledge a difference between the epistemic responsibility of moderate and radical fideists than can he acknowledge a difference between reasonable and synchronically rational belief. There is no more principled basis in his philosophy for the one distinction than for the other.

It is a practical and oftentimes a political decision explicitly to reject the Jeffersonian compromise, whether in the direction of hegemony of the ‘home religion’ or in that of an aggressive campaign of secularization or atheism. Conee and Feldman present themselves as holding the view ‘suggested by the words of Locke and Clifford that our epistemological duty is to believe as the evidence we have dictates’ (Feldman 2002: 364). But Locke and Clifford on closer examination are not nearly so closely aligned as this suggests. Clifford’s argument was basically that ‘Belief, that sacred faculty which prompts the decisions of our will, and knits into harmonious working all the compacted energies of our being, is ours not for ourselves, but for humanity’ (Clifford 1999: 74). Quite incompatibly with this claim, Locke’s conceptual pluralism is exemplified in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1997 [1686]), where he writes that, ‘Since . . . it is unavoidable to the greatest part of men, if not all, to have several opinions, without certain and indubitable proofs of their truths, it would, methinks, become all men to maintain peace and the common offices of humanity and friendship in the diversity of opinions.’

There are quite difficult issues that the epistemology of disagreement/diversity raises, and it is to Conee and Feldman’s credit that they helped bring these issues to center-stage in epistemology in recent years. But it is an ironic outcome if an approach Feldman describes as in part motivated by Locke’s philosophy should come around to problematize central values of Lockean *reciprocal amity*—the affirmation of ‘common offices of humanity and friendship in the diversity of opinions’.

Let us investigate further whether this might indeed be the case, by focusing more closely on Feldman’s denial of reasonable disagreement. The unfortunate fruits of Feldman’s evidentialist account of the epistemology of disagreement might be pointed out by noting certain literatures that RUT and its associated conception of reasonable disagreement appear to have negative implications for. I will survey these literatures briefly first, and then focus my strongest arguments around the third.

The first literature that evidentialism compromises is the work of philosophical and religious pluralists who explicitly base pluralism upon the *ambiguity of total public evidence* supporting religious and naturalistic ‘hypotheses’ (viewable as the ‘hard cores’ of very large scale alternative research programs). This includes leading proponents of religious pluralism (Basinger 2002; Bishop 2007), as well as philosophic pluralists who draw upon the same assumption (McKim 2001; Bernstein 2003). *Religious* pluralism is a theistic account, and I am not saying the evidentialist needs to accept its premises, but it is certainly a perspective that might be informing the perspective of some of Feldman’s students. For example, it is often possible to counter a leaning of intolerance or disrespect by a ‘moral case’ against salvific exclusivism. ‘The idea that the most devout and ethical persons of non-Christian faiths might find themselves in hell simply because they do not believe one of the essential tenets of Christianity seems difficult to reconcile with God’s moral perfection’, and motivates inclusivist and pluralist sympathies (Himma 2002: 1). Now if we are epistemically tied to RUT, what Kenneth Himma calls this ‘moral high ground case for salvific pluralism’ appears to be undercut, the former working *against* the latter. The constructive work that recognition of an epistemic situation of ‘religious ambiguity’ is supposed to serve in a pluralist conception

of religious truth and/or salvation falters, for the reason that the only entitled attitude to hold towards a proposition one acknowledges isn't unambiguous in evidence is, according to Feldman, the attitude of strict suspension (as we'll see more fully below).

The second literature potentially problematized by Feldman's position in the epistemology of disagreement is the theory of deliberative democracy, by which I mean a whole family of contemporary democratic theories that make central use of the Rawlsian thesis of *reasonable pluralism* among people with respect to their comprehensive religious, philosophical, moral, and political doctrines. Rawls describes reasonable pluralism not only as a 'fact' about a democratic polity but also as the 'long-run outcome of the work of human reason under enduring free institutions' (Rawls 1996: 129). This Rawlsian position called reasonable pluralism is a modern extension of Lockean *reciprocal amity*. That the burdens of judgment arguments are ones Rawls describes as epistemologically-driven indicates that deliberative democratists *do* make demands upon the epistemology of disagreement/diversity and the ethics of belief. So there is *at least* a deep tension here, one that Alan Hazlett (2009) puts in a quite useful way by defining 'Epistemic Liberalism' (closely akin to the TSV claim of Feldman's students) as a contrary to RUT, and then simply asking whether post-Rawlsian theories of political liberalism depend upon there being a *connection* between their political theories and Epistemic Liberalism. If so, then it appears no self-respecting deliberative democratist can be an evidentialist.

One might object that while there is tension, there is no genuine contradiction here: Our commitments to toleration, as *civil* or *political* commitments are of a different order, and are not impugned even if the *epistemological* underpinnings Rawls thinks it important to give to reasonable pluralism turn out to be unsound. But for the sake of argument, Jean Jacques Rousseau considered our problem and wrote, 'Those who distinguish civil from theological intolerance are, to my mind, mistaken. The two forms are inseparable. . . . Wherever theological intolerance is admitted, it must inevitably have some civil effect' (1987 [1762]: 134). Evidentialists should not be flippant about the impact of accidentally undermining epistemological arguments that much modern deliberative democracy appears to lean upon. The tension, as I think attention to our third literature shows, exists not just between RUT and these Rawlsian *arguments*, but between RUT and proper recognition of *deliberative virtues* such as 'reciprocity', 'magnanimity', 'openness', themselves. But these are difficult questions that bear further study, as does the epistemology of liberal democracy more generally.

The final literature and the one I want to argue Feldman's epistemology of disagreement/diversity most *clearly* compromises, is a literature focused around 'friendly theism/atheism', and religious toleration though epistemic humility (see Greco 2008; Kraft and Basinger 2008). These authors argue in favor of 'friendly theism' and 'friendly atheism' supported through epistemic humility, against the non-reciprocating 'unfriendly' versions of each that tend to predominate in the polemical discourse of our present-day 'culture wars' over reason and faith, science and religion. This is more straightforwardly a matter of prescribed *attitude towards disagreement among peers*, and is not

complicated by the distance between one's epistemology and one's political life. The clearest support I could give to my claim that Feldman's ethics of belief is of disvalue in mediating these culture wars would be reasons to think that the combination of cognitive evidentialism and RUT in fact destabilizes the 'friendly' versions of both theism and atheism while empowering the alternate, 'unfriendly' versions of each. To show this let's now return to look more directly at the *reasons* behind the negative answers Feldman provides to his own Q1 and Q2.

The argument that Feldman gives for his skepticism about reasonable disagreement refers us directly back to RUT, and to that internalist account of epistemic justification and value which we directly sought to undercut in the previous section. The crucial claim Feldman derives from it is that there are 'really only two' potentially philosophically respectable responses to serious peer disagreement, those which he terms the *Hard Line* model (hereafter HL), and the *Modest Skeptical* model (hereafter MS). Let's consider these two evidentialist-approved 'responses' to peer disagreement, and the forced option Feldman alleges between them.

HL: The Hard Line view

The first view or model that Feldman says may be the distinctly rational one to take towards your disagreement with another individual is the model that sanctions the response of, 'I'm reasonable; you're not'. Disagreement under conditions of shared public evidence indicates not just error, but indeed the epistemic irrationality or unreasonableness of one of the disputants. 'The hard line says that the evidence they share really must support one view or the other, and the one whose belief fits the evidence is the rational one'; hence 'Either the theists or the atheists are rational, but not both. There can be no reasonable disagreements' (2007: 211).

The HL model is quintessential evidentialism, and while Feldman might not approve (Feldman describes himself as a 'complacent atheist', not an 'aggressive' one), a prominent example of the HL model put to work in popular culture wars is Sam Harris's *Letter to a Christian Nation*, where at the outset he sets aside all Christian liberalism (as inconsistent non-sense), in order to pick out as his target audience just such people as really *know* what Christianity is:

We agree, for instance, that if one of us is right, the other is wrong. The Bible is either the word of God, or it isn't. Either Jesus offers humanity the one, true path to salvation, or he does not. We agree that to be a true Christian is to believe that all other faiths are mistaken, and profoundly so. (Harris 2006: 3).

Briefly, the main problem with HL that we'll return to is the one Peter van Inwagen (2010) worries over in 'We're Right; They're Wrong', that sanctioning this model/attitude towards disagreement as the default view and as a kind of *dictate* of reason may sound good in theory, but in practice lends itself to rationalizing dismissals of the reasonableness of those we disagree with (and all the better with moderates summarily dismissed). With the sanction of the HL attitude behind us, do we not often come to

expect more intellectual virtue of others than we do of ourselves? Another worry is that Harris' employment of an HL rhetorical strategy arguably *encourages* its *Christian evidentialist* mirror image, characterized by equally aggressive intelligent design theory and other examples of overt religious rationalism such as that by disinterested fact-weighting it is 'overwhelmingly probable' that Jesus was God incarnate (Swinburne 2003). Moreover, is it even possible to define concepts like religious 'fundamentalism' and religious 'exclusivism' cross-culturally—that is in terms of a shared manner or *form* of belief despite divergent belief *content*—without reference to an assumed HL attitude towards disagreement and towards outsiders to the home religion?

MS: The Moderate Skeptical view

While Feldman allows no principled distinction between strictly empirical debates and those over comprehensive doctrines, he does to his credit take note of his TSV students' objections that the 'fit' of the HL model will be harder to defend in cases in which people on both sides of a debate have been reflective and have openly discussed (shared) their reasoning and experiences. *Perhaps*, then, 'In these moral, political, scientific, and religious disputes, it is implausible to think that one side is simply unreasonable' (2007: 211). Feldman is not here conceding that he has personally become convinced to move off of his HL atheism, but in the event that he *were* to be convinced of it, the move is not first towards a 'friendly' atheism though epistemic humility. Rather, he now claims, the Moderate Skeptical view becomes the singularly intellectually responsible and hence obligatory response to adopt.

This second of the two evidentialist-approved ways of responding to peer disagreement is the one a person is intellectually obliged to conform to whenever there is recognition or even serious suspicion of vagueness or ambiguity of total public evidence on the claim in question. Since RUT tells us it is epistemically wrong to believe a proposition when one's total evidence fails to decisively support that proposition, 'the right thing for both of us to do is to suspend judgment' (2007: 212). Because 'the right thing' here is presented as singular and obligatory, MS runs directly in conflict with literatures one and two in the philosophy of religion, noted above (while HL appears to conflict with all three). Suspending judgments we are given to believe is the only way to be epistemically 'successful' in the moment, where evidential ambiguity presents itself.

So if 'there are really only two' options, HL and MS, because reasonable belief is just evidentially justified belief and there always either is or isn't 'sufficient' shared evidence for evidentially justified acceptance of whatever proposition is in question, then surely we have to answer 'No' to Q2, and then to Q1 as well. It *may* be that MS and not HL holds in the case of comprehensive doctrines, but TSV, the tolerant and supportive view, is nevertheless now exposed as a confused attempt to place sentiment and political correctness above plain reason.

I want to suggest that we 'return to reason' not when we deny this logic, but when we actually stand it on its head: Rather than accepting the forced option he presents to his students between the HL and MS responses to deliberative disagreement, we should

straightforwardly re-describe this ‘forced option’ as *the horns of a dilemma that Feldman and other cognitive evidentialists impale themselves upon when they try to apply their epistemic principles to the real world of comprehensive philosophical, moral and religious doctrines*. The Feldmanian over-extension of the RUT thesis places the evidentialist (and would if we allow, place all of us) in just those states of affairs often found precursory to war, when ‘Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold’; his ethic of belief evokes such circumstances where, as the poet W. B. Yeats bemusedly put it, ‘The best lack all conviction [MS], while the worst are full of passionate intensity’ [HL].

This *Rational Uniqueness Dilemma*, as we can term it, depicts the defenders of RUT and its close cousins as displaying a self-defeating intellectualism, one in which they find themselves needing to embrace one or the other of two quite unwelcome consequences: (a) submitting to what seems the intellectual *thanatos* of applying the Hard Line’s *logic of exclusivism* across the board to disagreements over religious, philosophical, political, and moral ‘comprehensive’ doctrines (to the destabilization of Lockean *reciprocal amity* and ‘friendly’ theism/atheism) or (b) submitting themselves to the ‘spinelessness’ of strict suspension in all cases where evidential ambiguity or conceptual vagueness is apparent (as well as disappointing the Rawlsian expectation that a kind of *conceptual pluralism* is the natural outcome of an advancing liberal society).

Consider more closely what it means to grab the first horn. The unwelcome consequence here is essentially the same that McKim articulates when he writes that, ‘Advocates of large-scale systems of beliefs that include discrediting mechanisms are not in a position to appreciate the appeal to systems of belief they think to be discredited. They are not likely to be able to give them a fair or sympathetic hearing’ (2001: 152). The HL’s logic of exclusivism is one that liberalism’s discontents know well, one that allows easy discrediting of non-true-believers. Gutmann and Thompson argue in *Why Deliberative Democracy* that ‘Deliberation cannot make incompatible values compatible, but it can help participants recognize the moral merit in the opponent’s claims when those claims have merit’ (2004: 11). By contrast, prescribing HL as the proper response for disputants to take in disagreement among comprehensive doctrines just appears to crown as the height of reasonableness such judgments of the *culpable failures* of others that Rawls described as typically the result of ‘prejudice and bias, self and group interest, blindness and willfulness’ (Rawls 1993: 249).

So yes, of course, we can follow the evidentialist’s and religious fundamentalist’s shared logic of exclusivism and just ‘bite the bullet’ of this first horn; the question is whether we can do so without shooting ourselves in the head. But perhaps I am presumptuous in asserting this ‘we’. For the discontents of the *Evidentialist Accommodation* and of the *Jeffersonian Compromise* we are now seeing, are many and varied, and here make strange bedfellows. Part of what they have in common is that many seem not to really *want* the Jeffersonian middle to hold, except perhaps (as one would hope) in the thinnest, civic way, or until conditions ripen for their alternative view of the ‘new order’, whether religious, secularist, or secular humanist. To be a discontent as I intend it, however, is to be repelled by the whole state of our cultural debate over reason and faith dominated by just such

extremes of religious and skeptical rationalism. It is to be dismayed with the aggressive secularizers like Harris as well as with their Christian evidentialist mirror image.

But grabbing the second horn, encompassing not increased epistemic humility about our belief but a change from full belief to suspension, is arguably even less appealing if it is indeed psychologically plausible to begin with (extricable from strong voluntarist assumptions). ‘Do you have any convictions on controversial political, philosophical, or scientific matters? The equal weight view seems to say: kiss them goodbye’ (Elga 2007: 484). There are different forms of skepticism, and this one appears risk-averse in such a radical way as to be open to the charge of being unlivable. Instead of describing this ‘equal weight’ model as ‘moderate’, as Feldman does, its critics seem to me more apt in their description of it as demanding ‘dispiriting spinelessness’ (Sosa 2008) and/or ‘lack of self-trust’. ‘It is implausible that rationality requires such spinelessness’ (Elga 2007: 484).

I think this *equal weight view* in the epistemology of disagreement results from disregard for the role of doubt in the history of social philosophy, *especially* in the early-modern period of Erasmus, Montaigne, and Locke where the theory of toleration was re-born. The *nouveau Pyrrhonisme* of Montaigne and Erasmus, Toulmin reminds us in *Cosmopolis*, ‘was no “negative dogmatism” which systematically refuses to accept everyone’s right to opinions arrived at by honest reflection on first-hand experience’ (1992: 50). Doubt *had* to be a multi-edged sword for those who lived through the roughest centuries of intra-Christian warfare, serving the pragmatic aims of moderation and mediation against extremes on *all* sides.

Feldman’s students or other supporters of TSV, I conclude, have plenty of resources to defend reasonable disagreement. In making our argument we have not impugned the importance of intellectual responsibility with respect to evidence. *We have* however applied our earlier critique of the internalist evidentialism’s claim to provide an adequate *account* of intellectual responsibility. If his students aren’t convinced of internalist evidentialism as an account of epistemic responsibility, they won’t accept his account of epistemic obligation and the forced option he presents it as issuing in. They won’t equate reasonable belief with synchronically rational beliefs, the diachronic activities of the agent set aside or bracketed. While they needn’t assume any kind of relativism or deny genuine disagreement, they will reject all attempts to apply RUT unqualifiedly to debates like those between theists, atheists, and agnostics. Accordingly they will neither conceive of the Hard Line view over such issues as the *sin qua non* of rationality, nor accept the claim that universal suspension of belief is the *only* reasonable response to the acknowledged ambiguity of total public evidence.

4.4 Conclusion: towards a responsibility accommodation

I have argued that the best-known version of evidentialism as an ethics of belief and position in the epistemology of disagreement/diversity has both weak roots and sour

fruits. The pragmatic critique of Section 4.3 was intended only to supplement the epistemological objections of Section 4.2. The dilemma just presented to Feldman is meant to illustrate just how far his evidentialist philosophy, purportedly initially motivated by important insights of John Locke, has come back around to problematize two key themes of Locke's social philosophy: his conceptual pluralism and his defense of toleration (*reciprocal amity*) as a value and a virtue.

The lack of any genuine positive epistemic invitations or entitlements to believe that are not merely *obligations* to believe, disbelieve, or suspend, has been another source of my own discontent with the *evidentialist* accommodation: its lack of recognition of what I think of as our need of and intellectual right to various 'doxastic ventures', philosophic, religious, or political; its evident lack of that 'spirit of *inner* tolerance' for another's mental freedom, without which William James warned that our *outer* (social, political) tolerance is likely to be or to become unstable.

Should the *evidentialist accommodation* between private persons and the collective community of inquiry also appear overly restrictive or 'Victorian' on *this* score, the resources of virtue theory and the prospects of an alternative *responsibilist accommodation* remain available to explore. On this alternative accommodation as I propose it, it is *diachronic* rather than *synchronic* evaluation of agents that most directly informs a sound and civic ethics of belief. Diachronic rationality's contribution to epistemic value was the upshot of our epistemological critique, but has quite direct implications for our understanding of the ethics of belief as well. It implies that there may well be invitations of sorts—simply put, things an intellectually virtuous believer *might* believe, that are things not *all* virtuous believers in this self-same evidential situation necessarily *would* believe. But any right to be choosers of our risk is not on the virtue-theoretic view pre-critically given to us. We must *earn* our intellectual right to vary from the evidentialist norm of belief, though it comes far more readily in respect to *weltanschaulich* questions and beliefs as they arise in fields like politics, philosophy, and religion. We earn this right to maintain old or initiate new doxastic ventures—what Mill and James called our various 'experiments in living'—through *intellectually conscientious efforts at inquiry*, and through an habituated sensitivity to potential defeaters, defeaters that enliven an agent to the kind or level of confidence that they have in their belief, and to diachronic responsibilities to extend, revisit, or update the reflectively good reasons they could muster to support that confidence.

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