

Worldview Disagreement and Subjective Epistemic Obligations

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1. Introduction

When faced with a disagreement, an important question we may consider is, ‘how should the disputants revise their beliefs toward the disputed proposition?’ Much of the discussion in contemporary epistemology has focused on this question, with epistemologists proposing various arguments and considerations for disputants to either stick to their belief, suspend their belief, or revise their belief in the disputed proposition (e.g., Van Inwagen 1996, Christensen 2007, Elga 2007, Lackey 2010). This paper focuses on a related but different question: ‘how should the disputants revise other beliefs in their worldview which are connected to the disputed proposition?’ In this paper, I will use the term *objective* epistemic obligations to refer to responses to the former question; and the term *subjective* epistemic obligations to refer to responses to the latter question. Faced with a disagreement, disputants would possess both kinds of epistemic obligations: an obligation (e.g., to remain steadfast or conciliate) toward the disputed proposition (objective epistemic obligations), and an obligation to (potentially) revise other beliefs in her worldview that are related to the disputed proposition.

Let me provide an illustration to clarify the notion of subjective epistemic obligations. Suppose John possesses three beliefs (beliefs p , q , and r), and all three beliefs stand in a justificatory relation to at least one other belief: belief p justifies belief q , belief q justifies belief r . Suppose John disagrees with Mary about belief q . John argues q and Mary argues $\neg q$. Assume that John and Mary are epistemic peers: roughly, they have access to the same evidence and they possess the same expertise, motivation and reasoning skills in relation to the issue under dispute

($q/-q$).¹ In finding out that Mary disagrees with him, John possesses an *objective epistemic obligation* to either reconsider his belief or remain steadfast in his belief in q . Following this, John still possesses *subjective epistemic obligations*. Because q justifies r in John's worldview, and let us assume that John has no other justification for r apart from q , John has some obligation in relation to r (I will spell out what this obligation is more clearly later). Interestingly, we might also consider whether John has some obligation in relation to p as well.

In this paper, I develop an account of subjective epistemic obligations through the context of 'Worldview disagreements'. I contend that clarifying the way that individual beliefs stand in various justificatory relations with other beliefs in one's worldview provides not only a more accurate understanding of 'Worldview disagreements', but also a clearer understanding of how subjective epistemic obligations function.

In this paper, I distinguish four types of worldview disagreements: fundamental disagreements, crucial disagreements, incidental disagreements and complex disagreements. This, in turn, will make evident the subjective epistemic obligations that disputants possess in the face of worldview disagreements. Part of the upshot of this analysis is its articulation of possible ways that disagreements over fundamental beliefs might lead to rational persuasion and belief change. While recent work has cast doubt on the possibility of rational persuasion over disagreement about fundamental beliefs, the analysis in this paper paints a more optimistic picture – it suggests ways in which rational persuasion is possible. Importantly, I rely on a modification of Loughheed's Different Disagreements Argument to consider whether the subjective epistemic obligations across worldview disagreements are of a similar or different kind. Finally, I discuss three implications of this study. First, I clarify the nature of defeaters and their relation to subjective epistemic obligations in the context of disagreements. Second, I argue that the analysis has implications for discussions on 'evidential peers' and 'reliability peers'. Finally, I suggest that understanding how beliefs are related (and unrelated) to each other opens up an additional domain of consideration for epistemic injustice, what I call 'doxastic prejudices'. Consideration of these implications will

¹ There have been various proposals about how best to understand peerhood. A recent distinction that has gained some traction in the literature is between evidential peers and reliability peers. While, for the rest of this paper, I adopt a working conception of peerhood, much of what is said here may also be applied to other notions of peerhood – nothing in my argument really turns on this. In Section 6, I explain the implications that this paper has for conceptions of evidential and reliability peers.

highlight how my analysis makes valuable contributions to the existing literature by addressing several related problems in contemporary epistemology.

2. Classes of Beliefs in a Worldview

In recent work on the epistemology of disagreement, discussions about ‘worldviews’ have played an increasingly significant role (e.g., Ranalli 2020, Loughheed 2020, Loughheed 2021). Throughout the history of philosophy, there have been various articulations of the concept of worldviews.² One common feature of these different conceptions of worldviews is the notion that individual propositions within worldviews are *connected* to other propositions. Consequently, when the truth-value or credibility of a proposition is modified, we would expect other related propositions to be affected as well. In this section, I focus on identifying different classes of beliefs that can be found within a worldview, based on the justificatory role they play in relation to other beliefs in the worldview. In the next two sections, I explain how understanding these different classes of beliefs provides a clearer understanding of different kinds of disagreements we face; and relatedly, the different subjective epistemic obligations which accompany each kind of disagreement.

Importantly, every worldview possesses at least three classes of belief: fundamental beliefs, crucial beliefs and incidental beliefs. This section thus contributes to the literature on worldview epistemology by articulating the various justificatory functions of propositions (or beliefs) within the structure of a worldview. It is worth noting that the kind of worldviews I’m concerned with are personal worldviews, and are therefore person-specific.³ In this regard, a belief which is

² To name a few, consider Wittgenstein’s ‘Form of Life’ (discussed in Fogelin 1985), Kuhn’s ‘Paradigms’ (Kuhn 1962), Quine’s ‘Web of Beliefs’ (Quine and Ullian 1970), Goldman’s E-systems and E-Norms (Goldman 2010) etc.

³ Much of what is said about personal worldviews also describe organised worldviews (Van der Kooij, De Ruyter, and Miedema 2013). Following the distinctions I will introduce in the rest of this section, we may note that organized worldviews, such as religions or ‘isms’ are also in-built with these three classes of beliefs. For instance, Christians tend to possess fundamental beliefs such as ‘the Bible is epistemically reliable’, crucial beliefs such as ‘the church community is an important aspect of the religious life’ and incidental beliefs such as ‘drums are an appropriate instrument to worship with’. Or, philosophical Confucians may possess fundamental beliefs such as ‘the Sages are epistemically reliable’, crucial beliefs such as ‘one should mourn for a significant period of time when one’s parents pass away’, and incidental beliefs such as ‘this disciple is stupid’. My focus in this paper is on personal worldviews.

fundamental for me might not be fundamental for you – the same belief may play different kinds of justificatory roles in each of our worldviews.

The first class of beliefs can be described as **fundamental beliefs**.⁴ Fundamental beliefs are beliefs that are essential to one's worldview. They need not be justified by other beliefs, though they could be. They provide justification for many other beliefs, and any reconsideration or suspension of any fundamental belief will have significant impact on the rest of one's beliefs. Given that many beliefs in one's worldview depend, in some meaningful way, on fundamental beliefs for their justification, any reconsideration or suspension of a fundamental belief will greatly affect the justification of a host of other beliefs in one's worldview. Consequently, reconsideration or suspension of any fundamental belief can be said to result in a worldview crisis. To have a clearer understanding of fundamental beliefs, let us consider in greater detail two properties unique to fundamental beliefs.

First, a belief is fundamental if and only if it provides important justificatory support for a host of other beliefs in one's worldview, such that any reconsideration or suspension of said belief would lead to a worldview crisis. I do not attempt to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for what constitutes a worldview crisis. Suffice it to say that a worldview crisis occurs in the case that, when an individual is required to either reconsider or suspend a fundamental belief, they normally and legitimately respond with phrases such as 'I don't know what to believe anymore' or 'I don't know how to make sense of so many of my beliefs.' Subsequently, the individual would proceed to reconsider or suspend other beliefs that have high justificatory dependence on the fundamental belief. For instance, suppose Sally one day comes to believe that some of her senses, which she once thought to be reliable are, in fact, extremely unreliable. Following this, she would likely rethink other beliefs she possesses that depend on the reliability of those senses. Or, suppose Rebecca finds out that her husband, Neal, has not been who he says he is, and has been lying to her ever since they met, she would then reconsider all beliefs built on the initial belief that 'Neal is reliable'. Notice again that fundamental beliefs tend to be person-specific – the belief that 'Neal

⁴ As will become evident, various terminologies have been employed in the literature to discuss the kind of beliefs that I am here concerned about. In this regard, it will be useful to treat 'fundamental', 'crucial' and 'incidental' to be terms of art – their primary meaning understood according to the ways they are defined in this paper.

is reliable' may be a fundamental belief for Rebecca, but it may not be for Sally (who may not even know Neal).

A second feature of fundamental beliefs is that they *tend* to be the kind of beliefs that do not necessarily require prior justification (though this is not always the case). Some fundamental beliefs might be justified by other beliefs, but this is not necessary.⁵

In this regard, it is worth considering a recent discussion in epistemology that is particularly relevant: the notion of hinge epistemology, motivated by Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty*. From the outset, let me be clear: depending on the conception of 'hinge commitments' we adopt, some 'hinge commitments' are fundamental beliefs, while others are not. The key aspect of the analogy here is that fundamental beliefs are fundamental precisely because many beliefs in one's worldview 'hinge' on them. Hinge epistemologists often argue that 'hinge commitments' cannot be justified by other beliefs. It is worth distinguishing between two ways of understanding this claim.

Some hinge epistemologists think that hinge commitments cannot be justified by other beliefs because they are not the kind of mental states that can be subject to rational evaluation (e.g., Moyal-Sharrock 2016, Pritchard 2016, Ranalli 2018a, Ranalli 2018b). On this view, hinge commitments are non-rational presuppositions which make other beliefs in our worldview intelligible. Call this the non-epistemic account of fundamental belief $F_{(NE)}$. According to Ranalli's characterization of $F_{(NE)}$, "For any hinge commitment H , necessarily, it's not the case that there is any epistemically rational attitude that one ought to take to H . That is, you are neither justified nor unjustified in taking any doxastic attitude towards H " (Ranalli 2018b, 4981). According to this view of hinge commitments, then, fundamental beliefs do not require prior justification because they cannot require prior justification – they are not the kind of mental states that admit of justificatory relations.

Other hinge epistemologists argue that hinge commitments *are* exactly the sort of things that can be justified by other beliefs; they may be subject to rational evaluation (e.g., Wright 2004, Wright 2014). However, they think that hinge commitments cannot be justified by other beliefs

⁵ The account of fundamental beliefs I am developing here is broad enough to be compatible with common coherentist and foundationalist accounts.

because they are precisely the beliefs that all other beliefs in one's worldview 'hinge' upon. They are the beliefs we must presuppose in order for us to begin any rational inquiry. Call this the epistemic account of fundamental belief $F_{(E)}$. On this view, fundamental beliefs do not require prior justification, but they provide justification for other beliefs in one's worldview.

The account of fundamental beliefs that I am concerned with in this paper remains broad enough to allow for both the epistemic and non-epistemic views of hinge commitments described above. What is significant is that on both accounts, hinge commitments do not possess prior justification, and that they are the beliefs or commitments upon which many other beliefs in one's worldview 'hinge'.⁶ This distinction is an important one and has implications for our understanding of the subjective epistemic obligations that accompany disagreements about fundamental beliefs – I will return to this discussion in S4.

A second class of beliefs are **crucial beliefs**. These beliefs are distinct from fundamental beliefs in that suspension or reconsideration of these beliefs would not lead to a worldview crisis. Often, crucial beliefs receive much of their justification from fundamental beliefs. However, they are crucial to one's belief system in the sense that at least one other belief in one's worldview is dependent on them. Consequently, any reconsideration or suspension of a crucial belief will affect the justification of at least one other belief. In this sense, beliefs can be said to be more or less crucial, depending on the quantity and quality of beliefs they support.

A third class of beliefs are **incidental beliefs**. These are beliefs that often depend on either a crucial or fundamental belief for their justification, and the suspension or reconsideration of these beliefs would not lead to a worldview crisis. However, unlike crucial beliefs, they do not play a dependency role in one's belief system, in the sense that no other belief in one's system currently depends on them. One might be worried that such beliefs do not exist – surely, when one believes a claim, she also believes the implications and counterfactuals supposed by that claim. However, while one might be *committed* to the implications and counterfactuals (implicit beliefs), I am here concerned with beliefs that one has actually *considered* (explicit beliefs). That is, while believing in X may *commit* me to believing in X_1 , if I've never actually *considered* X_1 , I do not believe X_1

⁶ In this regard, hinge commitments which are so ingrained in one's worldview such that the reconsideration or suspension of said belief would lead to a worldview crisis would be fundamental beliefs to one's worldview.

in this relevant sense. Thus, incidental beliefs are beliefs that no other *considered* belief in one's worldview depend on.

Importantly, within one's worldview, individual beliefs can logically, and chronologically, change in their kind. That is, a belief that is at one point incidental to one's worldview (no other considered beliefs depend on it) can become a crucial belief at the point when another belief becomes dependent on it. Similarly, a belief that is at one point crucial because one other belief depends on it for its justification can become an incidental belief the moment it fails to provide justificatory dependency for the other belief.

A crucial belief can also become a fundamental belief the moment sufficient important beliefs are dependent on it, such that its reconsideration or suspension would result in a worldview crisis. For instance, I may acquire the belief that Epistemic Faculty A is reliable. However, given that I've lived a sufficiently long life, many of my current beliefs do not depend on Epistemic Faculty A. At this point, belief in the reliability of Epistemic Faculty A constitutes a crucial belief for me. Over time, however, due to my belief in the reliability of Epistemic Faculty A, more beliefs (either existing beliefs, or subsequently acquired ones) become dependent on Epistemic Faculty A. Consequently, when enough beliefs depend on belief in the reliability of Epistemic Faculty A to the point that the reconsideration or suspension of a belief in the reliability of Epistemic Faculty A leads to a worldview crisis, belief in the reliability of Epistemic Faculty A has become a fundamental belief for me.

3. Most Disagreements are Worldview Disagreements

The distinctions above indicate that most (if not all) disagreements are essentially worldview disagreements. I distinguish between propositional disagreement and worldview disagreement. A propositional disagreement occurs when disputants think that their disagreements are merely over an *individual* proposition. A worldview disagreement occurs when the disputants' disagreement over individual propositions reveal that their disagreement involves other related beliefs in each disputant's worldview. Let us begin by considering two different cases, Christensen's (2007) The Restaurant Check Case and Ranalli's (2020) Creationism/Naturalism:

The Restaurant Check Case. Suppose that five of us go out to dinner. It's time to pay the check, so the question we're interested in is how much we each owe. We can all see the bill total clearly, we all agree to give a 20 percent tip, and we further agree to split the whole cost evenly, not worrying over who asked for imported water, or skipped [dessert], or drank more of the wine. I do the math in my head and become highly confident that our shares are \$43 each. Meanwhile, my friend does the math in her head and becomes highly confident that our shares are \$45 each. (Christensen 2007, 193).

Creationism/Naturalism. Mia is a Christian creationist. She believes that all life on Earth, and the Earth itself, was created by God as described by Genesis (that the first human beings were Adam and Eve, and so on). She also believes the doctrines espoused by the New Testament literally and in its entirety. Pia is an atheistic naturalist. She denies everything that [Mia] believes in this regard. She believes that there is a natural, purely non-intentional explanation of life on Earth; that the Earth originated 4 billion years ago by the accumulation of particles orbiting around a protostar, colliding to form larger bodies; that God does not exist; that Jesus never rose from the dead; that the Bible carries no epistemic authority over and above historical and anthropological matters; and so on. In turn, Mia and Pia reject each other's various fundamental metaphysical and epistemological commitments, the ones constitutive of their creationist and naturalist worldviews, respectively. When they exchange reasons for their views, they reject each other's reasons, arguing that their reasons presuppose commitments they reject. (Ranalli 2020, 1-2).

When Mia and Pia disagree about any proposition, for instance, 'whether Jesus rose from the dead', their disagreement is not only about an individual proposition, but a whole host of other propositions relating to it (Ranalli 2020, 1-2).⁷ One might object to the view that most disagreements are worldview disagreements by arguing that in The Restaurant Check Case, the disagreement was clearly about an individual proposition and did not involve a host of other propositions. After all, there is nothing to the disagreement apart from the proposition of 'our shares are \$43 each' and 'our shares are \$45 each'. Notice, however, that these propositions are *dependent* on other beliefs in the disputants' worldview, such as 'my calculation is accurate'. Notice further that motivations to either conciliate or remain steadfast are dependent on other beliefs in the disputants' worldview, such as the belief that 'the other party is an epistemic peer', and 'this is how I should respond to peer disagreement'. Finally, notice that the decision to recalculate, perhaps with a calculator, depends on the belief that 'calculators are reliable tools' and

⁷ Similar discussions and examples can be found in (Fogelin 1985, 8-9) and (Simard Smith and Lynch 2020, 978-980).

‘calculators are more reliable than my own mental sums’. Clearly, we can imagine variations of The Restaurant Check Case where these sets of beliefs are not shared by the disputing peers. However, even if we assume that both parties share these sets of beliefs, and the only thing they really disagree about is the cost of each individual’s share, the dispute might be said to be a worldview disagreement because both parties are disagreeing about their incidental beliefs. Given that each incidental belief is dependent in some justificatory way on other beliefs, it might be said to be a worldview disagreement.

Practically, most disagreements are not like The Restaurant Check Case (in the version of the case where disputants agree about *all* related propositions to the disputed belief). Often, in practice, what *appears* to be a disagreement *merely* about an individual proposition turns out, upon further discussion, to be a disagreement about other related propositions. Take the following case as an example:

Historical Fact Case: Joe and Amelia are two well regarded historians. They are both known to be experts in their field, they have access to exactly the same evidence and experience the same environmental conditions for their work. Over a cup of coffee one day, Joe and Amelia disagree about a historical fact. Upon further discussion, they realise that their disagreement about the historical fact is due to disagreements about other beliefs – such as the reliability of individual sources that concern the fact.

Historical Fact Case is, I submit, representative of the majority of disagreements in practice. If this is correct, what appears to be disagreements about individual beliefs are often disagreements about other related (crucial and fundamental) beliefs. Loughheed (2020) distinguishes between Simple and Complex cases of disagreement. According to the argument developed, most Simple cases of disagreement are really Complex cases.

If most (if not all) cases of disagreements are worldview disagreements, and worldview disagreements involve disagreement about other related beliefs in each disputant’s worldview, it suggests that in most cases of disagreements, all parties will possess subjective epistemic

obligations. Consequently, understanding the subjective epistemic obligations that accompany worldview disagreements is a highly practical task.⁸

4. Four types of Worldview Disagreement

In his very helpful analysis, Kirk Lougheed (2020) argues that epistemologists such as Christensen (2007) and Matheson (2009) think that cases of disagreements are generally alike. Lougheed cites Christensen, for instance, who writes,

The restaurant case is designed to be simple in two ways: in the evidential situation and in the evaluation of the general capacities my friend and I exercise in reacting to that sort of evidential situation. This makes our intuitions about the case particularly clear. *But the same lessons emerge, I think, from cases involving a bit more complexity.* (Christensen 2007, 193; emphasis Lougheed's).

However, Lougheed argues against this view by defending the Different Disagreements Argument. In its simplest form, the basic argument can be stated thus:

- (1) If there are epistemically relevant differences between cases of disagreement, then lessons from one type of disagreement do not straightforwardly apply to *all* cases of disagreement.⁹
- (2) There are epistemically relevant differences between cases of disagreement.

⁸ There is a related question that is interesting but beyond the scope of this paper. If, ultimately, all disagreements are about propositions which receive some justificatory support from the fundamental beliefs of each disputant, we might wonder whether all disagreements turn out, in this way, to be Disagreement about Fundamental Beliefs (See Lynch 2012).

⁹ I slightly modify Lougheed's phrasing here. Some epistemologists (such as Simard Smith and Lynch 2020) have proposed ways in which, at least in the context of different kinds of deep disagreement, there may be similar approaches. But Simard Smith and Lynch remain modest in their suggestion, noting that their suggestion is "speculative" and sound "a cautionary note" (Simard Smith and Lynch 2020, 981). In another articulation of this premise, Lougheed says, "Lessons about one type of disagreement do not apply seamlessly across the different cases of disagreement" (Lougheed 2020, 34) which is closer to my presentation of this premise. The idea is that lessons and approaches *may* be similar across disagreements, but this is not necessarily so. If there are relevant epistemic differences between kinds of disagreements, it would appear, at least *prima facie*, that there would be some relevant differences in how we view and approach the different kinds of disagreements. Of course, much then depends on what it means to 'straightforwardly apply' across cases. The relevant point to be made here is that if cases differ in some meaningful way, then approaches to those cases would differ in some meaningful way. The exact way they differ would depend on the 'relevant epistemic differences' between cases – and this can be cashed out in various ways, depending on how we distinguish cases. The burden of proof, I think, remains with epistemologists who deny this claim.

- (3) Therefore, lessons (e.g., conciliationism) from one type of disagreement (e.g., simple cases) do not straightforwardly apply to all cases of disagreement (e.g. complex cases).

Lougheed provides an argument in support of premise 2, arguing that there are epistemically relevant differences between cases of disagreement, namely, between what he calls simple and complex cases. According to Lougheed, simple cases tend to involve something like disagreement over simple perceptual beliefs, while complex cases tend to involve something like disagreement over a web of beliefs. In support of premise 2, Ranalli has also proposed a distinction between deep worldview disagreement, non-deep worldview disagreement, and ordinary disagreement (Ranalli 2020). Further, Simard Smith and Lynch have articulated 3 varieties of deep disagreement: Principle level disagreement, sub-principle disagreement and framework-level disagreement (Simard Smith and Lynch 2020).

In support of Lougheed’s second premise, it is worth observing that there are at least seven ways to construe the differences between cases of disagreement. Disagreements can be said to differ from each other due to:

- (a) The content of the disputed belief,
- (b) How easily the dispute can be resolved,
- (c) The amount of justification each disputant has for the disputed belief,
- (d) The level of confidence each disputant has for the disputed belief,
- (e) The justificatory status of the disputed belief for each of the disputants,
- (f) How entrenched the disputed belief is in each disputant’s worldview, or
- (g) How ‘sticky’ the disputed belief is for each of the disputants.¹⁰

It is worth noting that, crudely, (a) has more object-centered features and therefore, more objective epistemic obligations. However, (b) through (g) have more subject-centered features and therefore, more subjective epistemic obligations. In this paper, I focus primarily on (e) and (f), and develop an account of subjective epistemic obligations in the context of the different belief classes.

¹⁰ According to McGeer and Pettit 2009, “judgement does not come and go as rationality requires; in face of rational demands it proves remarkably sticky.” Without going into the more complex discussions of the relationship between judgment and belief here, I posit that some beliefs might be described as ‘sticky’ as well – they are difficult to change, even in the face of evidence. Further, within one’s worldview, beliefs may differ according to how ‘sticky’ they are.

While my discussion of worldview disagreement is consistent with and bears some overlap with Lougheed's (2021) and Ranalli's (2020) accounts, it is importantly different in focus, as will be evident. If my analysis is correct, at least in demonstrating that there are some epistemically relevant features across cases of disagreement, it acts in support of Lougheed's second premise.

From the three classes of beliefs, we might derive at least four kinds of worldview disagreements (as will be argued, each of these different kinds of disagreement result in different subjective epistemic obligations for the participants involved):¹¹

Disagreement over Fundamental Beliefs: When the disputed belief is a fundamental belief for both disputants.¹²

Disagreement over Crucial Beliefs: When the disputed belief is a crucial belief for both disputants.

Disagreement over Incidental Beliefs: When the disputed belief is an incidental belief for both disputants.

Complex Disagreement: When the disputed belief is a different kind of belief for the disputants (in terms of its justificatory status). For instance, belief *b* is a crucial belief for disputant *p*, but an incidental belief for disputant *q*.

In most circumstances, beliefs play the same kind of justificatory role in the worldview of disputants. For instance, most of the time, fundamental beliefs tend to include second-order beliefs about worldviews (their virtues, for instance), beliefs about epistemic authorities and the like; and these beliefs tend to be fundamental beliefs for disputants. Most other propositions tend to be either crucial beliefs or incidental beliefs, often depending on factors such as when the belief was acquired, the generality of the belief, and even possibly psychological factors such as the attractiveness or vividness of the belief to the disputant etc. Consequently, in most circumstances, disagreements are not Complex Disagreements. However, it will be amiss to ignore the fact that

¹¹ While I also think that these different kinds of disagreement have implications for one's objective epistemic obligations, discussion of that topic exceeds the scope of this paper.

¹² A recent topic of interest in the disagreement literature is about the problem of 'deep disagreement'. While I think that there may be some overlap between deep disagreements and Disagreement over Fundamental Beliefs, I think that there are important differences as well. For instance, not all deep disagreements (in the literature) pertain to disagreement over fundamental beliefs (in the sense that I'm concerned about fundamentality). I discuss this in greater depth in footnote 14. It is, therefore, I think, important to distinguish my discussions about 'Disagreement over Fundamental Beliefs' from general characterisations of 'deep disagreement'.

Complex Disagreements can, and sometimes, do, happen. Consider the following as an example of a Complex Disagreement:

Factory Farmed Meat: Jenny and Jerry find that they disagree about whether eating factory farmed meat is morally wrong. Let us assume that they are epistemic peers about this issue. However, Jenny was convinced of her belief that eating factory farmed meat is morally wrong twenty years ago. During this time, many of the beliefs she possesses are heavily dependent on this belief. For her, this is an important crucial belief. Now, Jerry has always had access to exactly the same evidence as Jenny, but withheld his belief until just now, where he, upon deeper reflection on the relevant arguments, becomes convinced that eating factory farmed meat is not morally wrong. Having just formed this belief, it is an incidental belief for Jerry, since no other belief is dependent on it. Jerry calls Jenny to tell her about his view, and they disagree. This disagreement, being about an incidental belief for Jerry and a crucial belief for Jenny, can be said to be a case of a Complex Disagreement.¹³

Having sketched out the different kinds of worldview disagreements that can occur, I discuss in the next section the subjective epistemic obligations for each disputant in such cases.

5. Disagreement-Relative Obligations

Before considering the subjective epistemic obligations that accompany each kind of disagreement, it seems valuable to discuss a potential concern about epistemic obligations for Disagreement about Fundamental Beliefs.

¹³ According to Lackey's (2014) notion of peerhood, which includes the conditional "A and B have been thinking about the subject matter in question for a sufficiently long time and in significant detail," Jenny and Jerry are not epistemic peers.

Some epistemologists have expressed scepticism about the possibility of rational persuasion over deep disagreements. Presumably, some deep disagreements are Disagreement about Fundamental Beliefs.¹⁴

If this concern is legitimate, it appears to suggest that Disagreement over Fundamental Beliefs might not come with any subjective epistemic obligations, given that rational persuasion cannot occur over fundamental beliefs. Consider a modified ‘Ought Implies Can’ version of a Sceptical Argument Against Rational Persuasion in Disagreements about Fundamental Beliefs:

- (1) If disputants possess the epistemic obligations to be rationally persuaded, it implies that they can be rationally persuaded.
- (2) In cases of Disagreement about Fundamental Beliefs, disputants cannot be rationally persuaded.
- (3) Therefore, in cases of Disagreement about Fundamental Beliefs, disputants do not possess the epistemic obligations to be rationally persuaded.

¹⁴ As I have noted in footnote 12, I want to emphasize that my discussion of Disagreement about Fundamental Beliefs should not simply be equivocated with discussions of ‘deep disagreement’ in the literature. In fact, a clear example of a discussion of ‘deep disagreement’ which is not a Disagreement about Fundamental Beliefs can be found in (Aberdein 2020). Nevertheless, I think it is worth considering some ways they may interact. An important difference between Disagreement about Fundamental Beliefs and some discussions about ‘deep disagreement’ is that the former is only concerned with beliefs in one’s worldview, the modification of which would result in a worldview crisis. Not all deep disagreements are about *these* kind of beliefs (though, admittedly, many are). It is common, in the literature, to identify ‘deep disagreement’ with ‘hinge commitments’ (e.g., Fogelin 1985, Ranalli 2018b, Pritchard 2018, Simard Smith and Lynch 2020). As I have noted earlier in this essay, not all conceptions of ‘hinge commitments’ are equivalent to fundamental beliefs. This is unsurprising since there is no consensus in the literature about what ‘hinge commitments’ are (Ranalli 2018b); and relatedly, what ‘deep disagreements’ are (Simard Smith and Lynch 2020). Still, it is worth considering an important sceptical argument from (Fogelin 1985) about rational persuasion over deep disagreement. For Fogelin, deep disagreement occurs when there are conflicts that are generated by “framework propositions” (Fogelin 1985, 8). In such cases, arguments and evidence on both sides are interpreted through each disputant’s own framework. When this occurs, Fogelin thinks, neither side would be able to produce any more arguments or evidence that would convince the other side, since any new arguments or evidence would simply be interpreted within the other side’s own framework and commitments. Due to this, Fogelin thinks that no rational procedures may be used for resolution (Fogelin 1985, 9). It is interesting to point out that Fogelin also frames his view in weaker terms: he says, “I do not see how” rational adjudication may be possible (Fogelin 1985, 10). In my view, this weaker expression might be a more accurate result of his discussion (that ‘I cannot see how rational persuasion is possible’ does not necessarily entail ‘therefore rational persuasion is impossible’). In my view, the argument developed by Fogelin does not generate the conclusion that there is no possible way for rational resolution, simply that there is no obvious way for rational resolution. It is, as I see it, an invitation for epistemologists to attempt to suggest strategies for rational resolution. It may turn out that no one can think of a strategy that works; but it doesn’t follow that we should not try. (Simard Smith and Lynch 2020)’s discussion is a clear example of a suggestion in which rational navigation may be possible (see also (Ranalli 2018b) and (Pritchard 2018)). It is this aspect of the discussion of deep disagreement that I think is most relevant to my concern in this section, and, where I suggest several strategies may be pursued in favor of the possibility of rational persuasion for $F_{(E)}$ and $F_{(NE)}$.

If the conclusion is true, it might suggest that when one is engaged in a Disagreement about Fundamental Beliefs, she would have no subjective epistemic obligations to modify her beliefs.

Notice that, following our earlier discussion in (S2), Premise (2) might be cashed out as $F_{(NE)}$ or $F_{(E)}$. We may therefore ask whether it is possible for one to be rationally persuaded about either $F_{(NE)}$ or $F_{(E)}$. Let us consider $F_{(E)}$ first. Suppose that fundamental beliefs are beliefs the suspension or reconsideration of which would cause one to fall into a worldview crisis. Suppose also that fundamental beliefs are epistemic and propositional. While they do not necessarily receive prior justification, they provide justification for other beliefs in one's worldview. Given this, would it be possible to be rationally persuaded to modify one's attitude towards one's $F_{(E)}$?¹⁵

Consider Ranalli's Creationist/Naturalist Case as an instance of Disagreement over Fundamental Beliefs. In this case, an important reason why Mia and Pia disagree in many of their beliefs is because they both differ in terms of (what appears to be) a fundamental belief for both parties: whether the Bible carries any epistemic authority. As a source of epistemic knowledge, this belief is likely to function as a fundamental belief in Mia's worldview (the denial of this belief, too, functions as a fundamental belief in Pia's worldview).¹⁶ Given this, fundamental disagreements tend to result in disagreements over a large number of other beliefs. As mentioned above, epistemologists are divided as to the extent to which there can be meaningful dialogue in such disagreements, or the likelihood of each disputant rationally persuading the other. Against the second premise of the Sceptical Argument Against Rational Persuasion in Disagreement about Fundamental Beliefs, I argue that there is nothing within the conception of a worldview that necessitates the conclusion that Disagreement about Fundamental Beliefs can result in neither conversation nor rational persuasion. Theoretically, two people can have disagreements about fundamental beliefs, but still be able to have a meaningful dialogue and possibly rationally persuade each other. That the fundamental beliefs between disputants differ does not necessitate

¹⁵ Variations of the view I'm defending can be found in others such as Lugg 1992 and Feldman 2005.

¹⁶ Notice that these beliefs are fundamental in the sense that we are concerned with. That is, if Mia finds out that the Bible is not true and does not carry any epistemic authority, she will likely fall into a worldview crisis. Similarly, the belief that the Bible is true *could be* (though it need not be) a belief that she has that is not justified on the basis of other beliefs (see for instance, Lynch 2012, 51-59). Similarly, it functions as a fundamental belief for Pia since, assuming Pia has considered and rejected the view that the Bible is true, if Pia one day comes to believe that the Bible is true, it would likely cause her to face a worldview crisis. And while it is possible that Pia has good reasons for thinking the Bible is not true, she may also believe it without prior justification. Thus, both these beliefs are fundamental for the disputants in the sense of fundamentality that we are concerned with.

that they cannot share crucial and incidental beliefs. For instance, consider a Modified Creationism/Naturalism:

Modified Creationism/Naturalism. Bia is a Christian evolutionist. She believes that all life on Earth, and the Earth itself, was created by God according to an interpretation of Genesis that supports theistic evolution. For her, the Bible is a source of epistemic authority – and this is a fundamental belief for her. Dia is an atheistic naturalist. She disagrees with Bia that the Bible is a source of epistemic authority. This denial and a naturalistic belief about reality are fundamental beliefs for Dia. Consequently, Bia and Dia differ substantially in many of their crucial beliefs. When they exchange reasons for their views, they reject each other's reasons, arguing that their reasons presuppose commitments they reject.

According to Modified Creationism/Naturalism, both Bia and Dia disagree about beliefs each of them take to be fundamental. However, it does not follow from this that they cannot agree on *any* crucial or incidental beliefs, or even, crucial and incidental beliefs related to their disagreement. For instance, they may both agree about specific principles of evolution, while disagreeing about the role that God plays in evolution. At the very least, what this suggests is that, given that *other* related beliefs in the disputants' worldview may be similar, we have good reason to think that meaningful conversation can be had. In fact, given that it is highly possible for disputants to share similar related beliefs, they may find sufficient common ground to not only converse, but attempt to rationally persuade each other. Call this the common ground strategy. But, we may ask, how would such attempts to rationally persuade the other be possible; or how would it look like?¹⁷

Let us return to the case of Mia and Pia. Is it true that Mia and Pia would remain at a deadlock and that disagreement about their fundamental beliefs would imply that neither would be able to rationally persuade the other? Similarly, I think the answer is no. To understand why, we must interpret the disagreement with deeper sensitivity to our discussion of the different classes of beliefs. Take Pia for instance. Presumably, Mia believes in fundamental belief *p* which justifies

¹⁷ A similar strategy can be found in (Simard Smith and Lynch 2020). Additionally, see Lynch's discussion of 'practical reasoning' and the 'common point of view' in (Lynch 2010), (Lynch 2012) and (Lynch 2016). In the context of political and policy discourse, a similar approach can be found in Rawls' discussion of 'public reason' and 'social cooperation' (see Rawls 1996).

her crucial beliefs in q and r .¹⁸ Perhaps her belief in q and r further lends support to her belief in p (I'm imagining a coherentist rather than foundationalist kind of belief structure here).¹⁹ In turn, Pia believes in fundamental belief $\neg p$ which justifies her crucial beliefs in $\neg q$ and $\neg r$, which further lends support to her belief in $\neg p$. Suppose that Mia and Pia both believe in a fundamental belief f as well. Mia and Pia both disagree about the truth value of p , q and r . Now, suppose, in a conversation, Mia and Pia find each other at odds over the truth value of belief p . Given that p and $\neg p$ are fundamental beliefs for Mia and Pia respectively, the disagreement present is a Disagreement over Fundamental Beliefs. Is it the case, as some epistemologists have suggested, that there is no way that either of them would be able to rationally persuade the other? As mentioned, I don't think so. Suppose Mia is able to convince Pia that f is more consistent with q than $\neg q$. In this instance, Pia is motivated to reduce her confidence in q in order for her worldview to remain consistent, which then affects her justification for $\neg p$. Notice what is going on here. A Disagreement over Fundamental Beliefs can be resolved if one party is able to show the other that the disputed belief is not consistent with other parts of their worldview.²⁰ The reason for this is that it is often the case that many people, even very intelligent people, have inconsistencies within their worldview (even if they do not think they do).²¹ Consequently, because there tends to be inconsistencies within worldviews, it follows that in cases of Disagreement over Fundamental Beliefs, communication and rational persuasion are possible if one is able to demonstrate how the disputed fundamental belief is inconsistent with other related belief(s) which are equally or more

¹⁸ For Mia, we might suppose: fundamental belief p = (The Bible is true, according to a certain kind of interpretation that Mia subscribes to); crucial belief q = (The Genesis account (according to Mia's interpretation) is true); crucial belief r = (The New Testament (according to Mia's interpretation) is true). For Pia, we may suppose: fundamental belief $\neg p$ (The Bible is not true, according to a certain kind of interpretation that Mia subscribes to); crucial belief $\neg q$ = (The Genesis account (according to Mia's interpretation) is not true); crucial belief $\neg r$ = (The New Testament (according to Mia's interpretation) is not true). Throughout the paper, I use lowercase letters (p , q , r) to represent propositions towards which one can adopt doxastic attitudes.

¹⁹ Foundationalist views of $F_{(E)}$ might find more affinity with the illustration under the following discussion on $F_{(NE)}$.

²⁰ One strategy suggested by (Lynch 2016) and discussed in (Simard Smith and Lynch 2020) is through the use of irenic reasons. That is, "You rationally persuade someone on the basis of a reason that would make sense internal to her perspective. That is, to rationally persuade you of P, it is necessary that I persuade you on the basis of an irenic reason. A gives an irenic reason R to B for some P, only if were B aware of her principles, and reasoned consistently with them, B would recognize that R is a reason for P. That is, in order for A to give an irenic reason to B, B should be *able* to recognize—even if she in fact does not—that it is a reason from her standpoint. (Lynch 2016, 252; quoted and discussed in Simard Smith and Lynch 2020, 972-973).

²¹ Let me briefly mention a related argument here, which I will not expand on. That is, very clever people, indeed, philosophers who stand tall in the history of philosophy, do, in fact, change their minds about their views – even views which are *fundamental* to their worldviews. This is expressed by Qu, in his discussion of the role of 'consistency' in the history of philosophy: "One might of course contradict one's previous work in later work, given that we are allowed to change our minds" (Qu 2021).

important to the disputant (at least, with regard to $F_{(E)}$). Notice that central to this argument is that Disagreement over Fundamental Beliefs is essentially a worldview disagreement because fundamental beliefs are necessarily connected to one's worldview.

What about $F_{(NE)}$?²² Surely, the argument developed above cannot be relevant to $F_{(NE)}$, given that it requires that the fundamental belief in question can be justified by other beliefs. Here, it is useful to distinguish between persuasion and rational persuasion. The sceptic might grant that one might possibly be persuaded to change their minds about $F_{(NE)}$ (since people do, in fact, change their minds about fundamental beliefs) – whether people *commonly* change their mind is irrelevant, since all that is needed for my argument is that people *possibly* change their minds.²³ However, even granting this, the sceptic would still argue that *rational* persuasion cannot occur – people might be persuaded to change their minds, but they cannot have been persuaded to do so *rationally*. This brings us to the question, what does it take for someone to be rationally persuaded?

One popular approach for understanding 'rational persuasion' considers rational persuasion to focus on the *logical relations* between various propositions. On one view, one rationally persuades another of p if one provides an irenic reason for p . According to Lynch, "A gives an irenic reason R to B for some P, only if were B aware of her principles, and reasoned consistently with them, B would recognize that R is a reason for P." (Lynch 2016, 252). In one sense, we might argue that the case described above (for $F_{(E)}$) might involve Mia providing irenic reasons for Pia to be rationally persuaded to modify her fundamental belief.

Another approach for understanding 'rational persuasion' might be to consider rational persuasion as denoting epistemic fruitfulness. There are various ways of cashing out epistemic fruitfulness, and I leave that question open in this paper.²⁴ Considering one instance, however, might help clarify what I mean. One way to understand epistemic fruitfulness is through the ability of individual propositions to make other beliefs and experiences intelligible. For instance, you may think that the belief that there is an external world is epistemically fruitful (even if I don't have

²² For examples of optimistic approaches towards rational persuasion over 'hinge commitments', see (Lynch 2012), (Ranalli 2018b), (Simard Smith and Lynch 2020) and (Pritchard 2018) and (Pritchard 2021).

²³ It is worth pointing out that, as Lynch has argued, the possibility of rational persuasion over hinge commitments is desirable and integral to democratic politics and treating "one's fellow citizens as rational, autonomous agents who are worthy of equal respect under the law" (Lynch 2012, 69).

²⁴ Here, I suggest that epistemic fruitfulness can be cashed out according to different ways of thinking about epistemic value. For a helpful discussion, see Pritchard 2007.

good reasons to justify the proposition) because it makes many other important beliefs and experiences in my life intelligible. On this view, A rationally persuades B for some P, if A is able to convince B that P is more or less epistemically fruitful than B's initial judgment of the epistemic fruitfulness of P.²⁵

There is, I think, an argument for rational persuasion of $F_{(NE)}$ that parallels the argument for rational persuasion of $F_{(E)}$. The idea is that one may change one's $F_{(NE)}$ when one realizes that $F_{(NE)}$ cannot do the epistemic work that one initially expected it to do (it is not, in the sense mentioned above, as epistemically fruitful as one initially believed it to be). Let me provide an example to clarify what I mean. Suppose, for Bia, p is a $F_{(NE)}$. Suppose Bia's commitment to p makes intelligible a host of other crucial or incidental beliefs in her worldview, say $q, r, s, t...$ Now, in conversation with Dia, Bia becomes rationally persuaded of $-q, -r, -s, -t...$ In one sense, these new beliefs that Bia has acquired does not affect the epistemic status of p – after all, p is not the kind of commitment that was (or might be) justified by other beliefs. Nevertheless, Bia might still decide to give up on p and take on $-p$ due to its epistemic fruitfulness (say, $-p$ makes intelligible $-q, -r, -s, -t...$). It seems to me that, in acquiring a $F_{(NE)}$ that is more epistemically fruitful in her worldview, Bia might reasonably be said to be persuaded for rational reasons. Additionally, one upshot of this view is that it provides a theory to explain not only why people *should* give up their $F_{(NE)}$, but why people *do* give up their $F_{(NE)}$: $F_{(NE)}$ may sometimes lose their psychological importance and hold on the disputant.

Consider that part of the personal (psychological) value of $F_{(NE)}$ is its ability to make intelligible many other beliefs (and experiences) in one's worldview. However, should it lose its ability to make those relevant beliefs (and experiences) intelligible, or worse, should it now become inconsistent with one's newly formed beliefs, giving up on the now irrelevant $F_{(NE)}$ seems a very rational thing to do. Thus, both the epistemic and non-epistemic views of fundamental belief

²⁵ There is some affinity between the strategy developed here and Lynch's discussion of the distinction between 'belief' and 'commitment'. According to Lynch, "Commitment is distinct from belief. It is different from belief because one can commit to a principle without believing, like the scientist who commits to a theory, and so relies on it in subsequent reasoning, while remaining agnostic about its ultimate truth" (Lynch 2012, 83). If we understand $F_{(NE)}$ to include hinge *commitments* in Lynch's sense of 'commitment', following Lynch's analogy of scientific theories, a large part of the value of the commitment is dependent on the fruitfulness of the results that the commitment (scientific theory) is able to generate. In the same way, when the commitment (scientific theory) no longer yields the results we hoped it would (it is less fruitful), one's decision to reduce confidence in, or abandon, one's commitment appears a perfectly rational thing to do.

spelled out above might be subject to rational persuasion in various ways, and relatedly, subjective epistemic obligations.

If this is correct, we can turn to asking what the subjective epistemic obligations are in the case of Disagreements about Fundamental Beliefs. Disagreements about Fundamental Beliefs are particularly troubling because the disagreement likely entails a disagreement about a whole host of other beliefs. Consider the case where one believes in fundamental belief *a*. Fundamental belief *a* provides justification for crucial belief *b*, which in turn provides justification for incidental belief *c*. Suppose this individual disagrees with a peer about *a*, what subjective epistemic obligations is she faced with? In this case, it appears that the way she modifies her attitude toward *a* will have a corresponding impact on her attitudes towards beliefs *b* and *c*. That is, if she suspends her belief in *a*, she ought to suspend her belief in *b* and *c* as well. However, in real-life, cases are usually not so straightforward. Consider a related scenario. In addition to the case described above, we find out that this individual also believes in belief *d*. Belief *d* is a fundamental belief with no justificatory relation to *a*. However, belief *b* derives its justification from *a* and *d*. Now, what ought to happen to belief *b* if she faces the epistemic obligation to suspend *a*? Well, that will depend on the kind of justificatory relation that *b* has with *d*. If *d* is able, on its own, to provide justification for *b*, she might still be epistemically entitled to believe *b*. However, if it turns out that on its own, *d* only provides partial justification for *b*, it follows that *b* is left only with partial justification. Consequently, she ought to reduce her credence for *b* in tandem with the change in level of justification that *b* now has, or suspend her belief in *b*. Subjective epistemic obligations, then, in relation to specific beliefs depend on the justificatory relations the belief has with other beliefs within an individual's worldview.

Similarly, one bears subjective epistemic obligations for Disagreement about Crucial Belief. Suppose the individual mentioned above faces a Disagreement about Crucial Belief for *b*. In conciliating, she is convinced not only to reduce her credence for *b*, but to modify her belief slightly – she now believes in *b**. What are her subjective epistemic obligations? For one, she ought to ensure that there are other fundamental or crucial beliefs that are able to justify *b**. Additionally, while *a* and *d* remain unaffected, it appears that she would need to change her belief in *c* to the extent that *b** no longer provides satisfactory justification for *c*, and *c* depends solely on *b*.

The case becomes more straightforward for Disagreement about Incidental Belief. In this case, modifying c does not affect any other belief in her worldview, and consequently, she has no further subjective epistemic obligations.

Finally, what about cases of Complex Disagreement? In such cases, the disputant's individual obligation depends on the justificatory function the disputed belief plays in the disputant's individual worldview. Roughly, if the disputed belief is a fundamental belief, the disputant's subjective epistemic obligations are those sketched above in cases of Disagreement about Fundamental Belief; if the disputed belief is a crucial belief, the disputant's subjective epistemic obligations are those sketched above in cases of Disagreement about Crucial Belief, and so on.

Notice some important differences between objective and subjective epistemic obligations. For objective epistemic obligations, *all* parties have the same obligation: they either ought to conciliate or remain steadfast – but the obligations are the same for all parties involved. However, for subjective epistemic obligations, parties have different obligations. On one level, it appears that the obligations depend on the kind of disagreement. And in cases where the disputed belief is the same kind (fundamental, crucial and incidental) for both parties, they appear to have the same kind of subjective epistemic obligations – although the actual and practical application of these obligations depend on the specific justificatory function the disputed belief plays within their worldview. However, upon further reflection, and given the possibility of complex cases, it turns out that one's subjective epistemic obligations do not only depend on the kind of disagreement in question, but more specifically, the kind of justificatory status that the disputed belief plays within one's own worldview.

Finally, consider one final argument in support of the view that subjective epistemic obligations need not be similar in all cases of disagreement. The argument here modifies Lougheed's Different Disagreements Argument in the context of subjective epistemic obligations:

- (1) If there are epistemically relevant differences between cases of disagreement, then lessons from one type of disagreement do not straightforwardly apply to *all* cases of disagreement.
- (2) There are epistemically relevant differences between cases of disagreement.

- (3) Therefore, lessons (subjective epistemic obligations) from one type of disagreement (e.g. Disagreement about Fundamental Beliefs) do not straightforwardly apply to all cases of disagreement (e.g. Disagreement about Incidental Beliefs).

Thus far, I have argued that in cases of disagreement, disputants possess not only objective epistemic obligations (obligations towards the proposition under dispute), but also subjective epistemic obligations (obligations towards other related propositions in one's worldview). The way one ought to revise one's beliefs in any disagreement depends on the kind of belief that the disputed proposition is in one's worldview; and the justificatory relations between the disputed belief and other related beliefs in one's worldview. In my view, the discussion above has implications for several other contemporary debates in epistemology. In the next section, I sketch out three.

6. Implications

Subjective Epistemic Obligations of Defeat

One important implication, I think, the analysis above has concerns discussions of defeat, by emphasizing subjective aspects of defeat. The notion of 'defeat' in the epistemic literature is faced with several thorny questions, such as 'what constitutes a (good) defeater belief?', 'to what extent might awareness that an epistemic peer disagrees with me be considered a defeater?' and 'how should one respond to defeater beliefs?' The issue of defeat lies squarely under one's subjective epistemic obligations insofar as the defeater belief plays (or modifies) some justificatory function in relation to other beliefs in one's worldview. Consequently, we might ask, what subjective epistemic obligations does one have when one possesses a defeater belief? Consider again the case where one believes in fundamental belief *a*, crucial belief *b* and incidental belief *c*. Suppose one provided a defeater to lower her confidence in *b*, should the defeat automatically extend to all other beliefs that depend on *b*? Should one therefore suspend her belief in *c*? As argued above, the answer depends on the justification that one possesses for *c* and the kind of justificatory relationship that *b* has in relation to *c*. In the event that one also possesses another belief, say *d*, which, on its own is able to justify *c*, it follows that the defeat of *b* would not entail the defeat of *c*. To make this more concrete, consider the following case. Suppose that James believes that God

exists. James also believes that a cosmological and an ontological argument provide good reasons for the existence of God. Now, suppose that James is provided a defeater against the ontological argument for the existence of God. What is James' subjective epistemic obligation? And what is James entitled to believe?

According to the conception of worldview presented, James' subjective epistemic obligations depend on the kind of belief that 'God exists' is for him, and what, if any, justificatory relations beliefs in the cosmological and ontological argument has in James' worldview. Consider a few examples to make this clearer.

Scenario 1: For James, belief in God is a $F_{(NE)}$. While he may believe that a cosmological and ontological argument might provide good reasons for his belief in God, he does not actually believe in God *on the basis* of either of these arguments. Consequently, James does not possess any subjective epistemic obligations to modify his belief in God, even though he may come to possess a defeater against the ontological argument.

Scenario 2: For James, belief in God is a $F_{(E)}$ which he believes on the basis of crucial beliefs about the cosmological and ontological arguments. Suppose that James thinks that jointly, the arguments provide full support for his belief in God; and this justification is split equally between both arguments. James' defeater against the ontological argument would, *ceteris paribus*, require him to think that his justification for his belief in God is reduced by half.

Scenario 3: For James, belief in God is a $F_{(E)}$ which he believes on the basis of crucial beliefs about the cosmological and ontological arguments. Suppose James thinks that independently, each argument provides full support for his belief in God. James' defeater against the ontological argument would, *ceteris paribus*, not require him to revise the confidence he has in his belief in God since, on its own, the cosmological argument is still able to provide full justification for his belief in God.

There are, of course, a large number of possible ways to vary the scenarios. The key insight here is that the subjective epistemic obligations that accompany the acquisition of a defeater belief is often likely (practically) to be different for each individual. An interesting implication is its ability to explain why people might be entitled or justified to certain beliefs even though they may

possess defeater(s) for related beliefs (beliefs that *a spectator* might think to be related; or even beliefs that *the individual* thinks is related).

Peerhood

Additionally, in my view, the analysis above poses interesting questions for peerhood. Epistemic peerhood is an important consideration for our understanding of epistemic obligations following disagreement. The thought is that if an *epistemic peer* (or epistemic peers) disagrees with me about a proposition, I may have some obligation to revise my confidence in the proposition under dispute (as opposed, say, to an epistemic inferior, where any obligation seems substantially less forceful).

While specifying conditions for epistemic peerhood is therefore a considerably important task, there still seems to be little consensus in the literature about what these considerations ought to be (and how to rank the considerations according to their importance). Examples of conditions proposed include the disputants' (a) cognitive ability, (b) reliability, (c) access to identical evidence, (d) distractions present, (e) attentiveness, (f) intellectual virtues etc.²⁶ Accounts of peerhood tend to take (c) to be an important consideration, where disputants are often described as 'evidential peers' (e.g., Lord 2014). For instance, Lackey explains that "A and B are epistemic peers relative to the question whether *p* when A and B are evidential and cognitive equals with respect to this question—that is, A and B are equally familiar with the evidence and arguments that bear on the question whether *p*, and they are equally competent, intelligent, and fair-minded in their assessment of the evidence and arguments that are relevant to this question" (Lackey 2013, 244).

What exactly does it mean, however, to have access to identical evidence, or to be an evidential peer? It seems to me that what is relevant to (c) is not *only* that disputants actually have access to the same evidence; it is about one's attitude toward the disputed proposition *on the basis of* the same presuppositions. The reason why we think that access to the same evidence is important is because the same access should produce the same presuppositions, on the basis of which, disputants should agree about what they ought to rationally believe. Practically, however, given the way worldviews work, and how most beliefs in each individual's worldview stands in

²⁶ See, for instance, (Frances 2014).

justificatory relationships to many other beliefs in one's worldview, the probability of having any two disputants who share the exact same presuppositions seems extremely low. Given that one's treatment and interpretation of the same evidence is likely to depend on other justificatory beliefs (that may sometimes lie outside the context of the disputed subject), and that considering all such evidence (and presuppositions) would seem too demanding, why should we expect that epistemic peers should end up with the same beliefs? The Historical Fact Case demonstrates how, even with access to the same evidence, what would be 'rational' for each disputant to believe might still be different and possibly conflicting – given that they may not share other presuppositions. In fact, we may attain a contrary observation. If epistemic peers disagree on a significant number of fundamental and crucial beliefs, it would be unsurprising if, when attending to a dispute, they may share 'the same evidence' base, disagree about the disputed belief, and still be 'rational' about their attitudes towards the disputed belief – due to how other fundamental and crucial beliefs might be connected to the disputed belief.

This consequence has at least two implications for accounts of evidential peerhood. For accounts which require that peers share the same presuppositions, we now have a sceptical argument against the likelihood that any two (non-identical) people would be considered evidential peers. The point is not only that two people are unlikely to share the same body of evidence, but that it is even more unlikely that disputants would share the same presuppositions. Relatedly, it advises that accounts which care about (c) ought to also understand shared evidence in relation to shared presuppositions.²⁷

Alternatively, the above argument may be viewed as an argument in support of a related, though distinct, account of peerhood – reliability peers. Roughly, a reliability peer is someone who I may consider equally reliable in assessing the truth value of p .²⁸ Given that reliability peerhood does not require that disputants share the same evidence or presuppositions, it is immune to the criticism waged against evidential peerhood. In this regard, reliability accounts of peerhood might be viewed as superior to evidential accounts because they are able to explain why disputants may

²⁷ Of course, there are other accounts of peerhood which remain unaffected by this consideration (any account, for instance, which does not consider (c) as a requirement for peerhood, remains unaffected by my concerns here). For a helpful related discussion on 'shared', 'similar' and 'identical' evidence, see (Elgin 2017), (Lougheed 2019) and (Lougheed 2020).

²⁸ For instance, see discussions in (Goldberg 2009) and (Schafer 2015).

remain epistemic peers even though they may neither share the same (or even similar) evidence nor presuppositions.

Epistemic Injustice

Finally, it appears to me that the analysis above motivates an additional area of inquiry in relation to discussions on epistemic injustice, which is less discussed in the literature, what I call ‘doxastic prejudice’. One way to understand epistemic injustice is to consider situations in which *S* unfairly downgrades *A* with respect to *p*, if *S*’s view about *A* with respect to *p* is influenced by irrelevant factors. Within the literature on testimonial injustice, these irrelevant factors often refer to non-epistemic factors, such as race and gender. There are, I suggest, also irrelevant epistemic factors (such as prejudiced beliefs) which may result in epistemic injustice.²⁹ In this way, *S* unfairly downgrades *A* with respect to *p*, if *S*’s view about *A* with respect to *p* is influenced by *S*’s view of *A*’s belief in *r*, insofar as *A*’s belief in *r* is epistemically irrelevant to *p*.

Suppose Billy and Dilly are epistemic peers. Dilly believes in *x*. Billy and Dilly disagree about some crucial belief *y*. Billy thinks that anyone who believes in *x* is an epistemic inferior, even though *x* is irrelevant to *y*. When they disagree about *y*, Billy treats Dilly as an epistemic inferior because Dilly believes in *x*. Billy therefore thinks that he has no objective epistemic obligation to modify his belief in *y*; or any subjective epistemic obligations whatsoever. In this scenario, it would appear that Billy has unfairly downgraded Dilly. That all parties in a disagreement possess a worldview implies that all parties would hold many beliefs, some of which are related, others of which are unrelated, to the disputed proposition. Thus, *S* unfairly downgrades *A* with respect to *p*, if *S* thinks that *A* is an epistemic inferior by virtue of the fact that *A* possesses some other belief (in her worldview) which is irrelevant to *p*.

²⁹ There is a hint of this within the literature. For instance, downgrading someone due to religious, philosophical or political associations, for instance, can be considered cases of epistemic injustice. In these cases, there are often epistemic factors involved. For instance, to downgrade someone due to their political association to political view *A* has an epistemic component because the downgrade may also be thought to be due to their *beliefs* in political view *A*.

7. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have argued that whenever one faces a disagreement, one possesses not only objective epistemic obligations (with respect to the proposition under dispute) but also subjective epistemic obligations (with respect to other propositions in one's worldview). To clarify the discussion on subjective epistemic obligations, I have distinguished three classes of beliefs in one's worldview (fundamental beliefs, crucial beliefs and incidental beliefs). Due to this distinction, I have proposed four different kinds of disagreements that may occur, and clarified the subjective epistemic obligations that accompany each of these disagreements. In doing so, one upshot of the discussion is an argument for the possibility of rational persuasion for epistemic and non-epistemic conceptions of fundamental beliefs. Finally, I suggested that the analysis above has implications for related areas in contemporary epistemology. In my view, there is space for much of the analysis presented to be discussed in more detail; and I hope that the implications accompanying the distinction between objective and subjective epistemic obligations might be investigated further.

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