



BRILL  
RODOPI

GRAZER PHILOSOPHISCHE STUDIEN 94 (2017) 194–225

Grazer  
Philosophische  
Studien  
brill.com/gps

# Nonconciliation in Peer Disagreement: Its Phenomenology and Its Rationality

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## Abstract

The authors argue in favor of the “nonconciliation” (or “steadfast”) position concerning the problem of peer disagreement. Throughout the paper they place heavy emphasis on matters of phenomenology—on how things *seem epistemically* with respect to the net import of one’s available evidence vis-à-vis the disputed claim *p*, and on how such phenomenology is affected by the awareness that an interlocutor whom one initially regards as an epistemic peer disagrees with oneself about *p*. Central to the argument is a nested goal/sub-goal hierarchy that the authors claim is inherent to the structure of epistemically responsible belief-formation: pursuing true beliefs by pursuing beliefs that are objectively likely given one’s total available evidence; pursuing this sub-goal by pursuing beliefs that are likely true (given that evidence) relative to one’s own deep epistemic sensibility; and pursuing this sub-sub-goal by forming beliefs in accordance with one’s own all-in, *ultima facie*, epistemic seemings.

## Keywords

peer disagreement – nonconciliation – steadfastness – rationality – epistemic seemings

### 1 Introduction

The “nonconciliation” (or “steadfast”) position concerning the problem of peer disagreement asserts that if one finds oneself in disagreement about some proposition  $p$  with someone whom one regards as an “epistemic peer” concerning matters like the one at issue, and one finds oneself still believing  $p$  and feeling justified in believing  $p$  in light of one’s overall available evidence, then it is rationally permissible—perhaps even rationally mandatory—to “stick to one’s guns” by continuing to believe  $p$ .<sup>1</sup> The “conciliation” position, by contrast, asserts that in such circumstances, one is rationally obligated to stop believing  $p$ —whether or not one is psychologically capable of doing so.<sup>2</sup> In this paper we will argue in favor of nonconciliation. Our argument will be novel, in four principal respects.

First, throughout the paper we will place heavy emphasis on matters of phenomenology—on how things *seem epistemically* with respect to the net evidential import vis-à-vis  $p$  of one’s available evidence, and on how such phenomenology is affected by the awareness that an interlocutor whom one initially regards as an epistemic peer disagrees with oneself about  $p$ .

Second, we will distinguish between several distinct pertinent notions of epistemic peerhood, and we will urge the need to appreciate these different notions and their interrelations with one another in order to properly understand the debate between conciliationists and nonconciliationists.

Third, on our version of nonconciliationism, there is an important respect in which one can, and in many cases should, adjust one’s epistemic attitude regarding  $p$  in light of known peer disagreement, while yet continuing to believe  $p$ —viz., one can believe  $p$  *less strongly* than one did before. This fact allows our account to accommodate what is right about conciliationism, while repudiating conciliation itself.

Fourth, our case for nonconciliationism will include a novel take on an epistemological debate which lately has come to be widely regarded as closely intertwined with the conciliationism/nonconciliationism dispute—viz., the debate between advocates of “Uniqueness” and advocates of “Permissiveness.”

1 See van Inwagen (1996), Kelly (2005), Sosa (2010).

2 See Elga (2007), Christensen (2007, 2011), Feldman (2003, 2006, 2007), Kornblith (2010), Bogardus (2009), Matheson (2009), Cohen (2013).

On one influential recent formulation (Schoenfield 2014, p. 195), Uniqueness is characterized as the following thesis (with Permissiveness being characterized as the denial of this thesis):

UNIQUENESS: For any body of evidence E, and any proposition P, there is only one doxastic attitude to take toward E that is consistent with being rational and having evidence E.<sup>3</sup>

There has been near-consensus in the recent literature that the case for conciliationism pretty much coincides with the case for Uniqueness, and that the case for nonconciliationism pretty much coincides with the case for Permissiveness.<sup>4</sup> But an important corollary of our own case for nonconciliationism will be that this recent near-consensus rests on a false presupposition about epistemic rationality.

## 2 Preliminaries

We begin with some remarks by way of partial elaboration of the lately-noted distinctive features of our own approach to the dispute between proponents and opponents of conciliationism.

### 2.1 *Peerhood and Common Evidence*

It is common in this dispute to build into the operative notion of epistemic peerhood the stipulation that any two persons who are epistemic peers with respect to a given proposition *p* possess all and only the same pertinent evidence vis-à-vis *p*. On this construal, regarding someone as one's epistemic peer vis-à-vis *p* entails *believing* (at least implicitly) that this person possesses all and only the same pertinent evidence concerning *p* as one possesses oneself.

This same-total-evidence requirement is quite exacting; indeed, it threatens to make it difficult or impossible ever to know—or ever to justifiably believe—that someone is one's epistemic peer regarding some given matter. It is useful, therefore, to introduce a weaker requirement, which we will call the condition of *full evidential common ground*. Roughly and generically, the idea is this: two persons have full evidential common ground regarding a proposition *p* just in

3 We take it that 'having evidence E' is to be understood here as 'having *total* (pertinent) evidence E'.

4 See, for instance, Douven (2009), Kelly (2010), Ballantyne and Coffman (2012), Schoenfield (2014). For some resistance to the now widely accepted view that conciliationism and uniqueness stand or fall together, see Cohen (2013), Christensen (2016).

case they are in agreement about all *articulated or readily articulable* considerations that count for them as pertinent evidence concerning *p*.

Hereafter in this paper we will construe the notion of epistemic peerhood as requiring only full evidential common ground, rather than as requiring two peers to possess exactly the same total evidence. (Let *strong* peerhood be the kind that requires exact match in total evidence.) This leaves open the possibility that one or both of two peers regarding *p* is in possession of implicit evidence, not readily articulable, that is not possessed by the other peer. It also makes it much easier to know, or anyway to justifiably believe, that another person is one's own epistemic peer with respect to some specific issue.

In our view, the key considerations motivating conciliationism already arise with respect to peerhood as we propose to construe it here. This makes those issues all the more pressing, since peerhood in our sense comes about more readily—as does knowledge or justified belief that one is actually in a situation of disagreement with an epistemic peer.

A second distinction regarding types of peerhood, orthogonal to the present distinction involving full evidential common ground vs. exact match in total evidence, will be invoked in Section 3 below.

## 2.2 *Incorporating Strength of Belief*

Among one's beliefs, one holds some more strongly than others. There is nothing mysterious about this; roughly, the strength of one's belief in a proposition *p* depends upon the strength, vis-a-vis *p*, of one's available evidence. Although the proposition *Washington D.C. is the national capital of the United States of America* and the proposition *Aristotle was a teacher of Alexander the Great* are both evidentially well warranted for most of us—and are both sufficiently well warranted evidentially to be epistemically belief-worthy—nonetheless virtually all of us have *stronger* evidence for the former than we do for the latter. Accordingly, virtually all of us hold the former belief more strongly than we hold the latter. Roughly, at least, degree of strength with which one holds a belief is a matter of the extent to which the strength of the available evidence one has for that belief exceeds the strength of evidence that would suffice to propositionally justify that belief.

Strength of belief, understood pre-theoretically and commonsensically, is a qualitative notion, not a quantitative one. (Likewise for the notion of *evidential* strength.) Strength of belief exhibits comparative qualitative degrees: some beliefs are held more strongly than others. It also exhibits non-comparative qualitative degrees: some beliefs are held very strongly, others are held somewhat strongly, etc.

Strength of belief should be sharply distinguished from a distinct notion, which we will call *plausibility* of *p* (for a particular agent, given a body of

available evidence.) In the general case, this too is a qualitative notion, rather than a quantitative one. On our current usage, varying qualitative degrees of plausibility—other than the limit cases of complete plausibility and complete implausibility—can accrue only to a proposition that is neither believed nor disbelieved. Varying strengths, on the other hand, can only accrue to a *belief* that  $p$ , i.e., the psychological state of regarding  $p$  as completely plausible.

Since a belief that  $p$  can be held with varying degrees of strength, while yet all the while still being held, the possibility of strength-variation is surely relevant to the current debate between advocates of conciliation and advocates of nonconciliation concerning peer disagreement. Those, like ourselves, who favor nonconciliation might very well be able to appeal to the notion of belief-strength as a way of accommodating whatever is right in the conciliation view. We will recur to this theme throughout the paper.

In this connection, it is important not to conflate two distinct issues. On one hand is the original issue in the peer disagreement debate, the principal issue we are addressing here—viz., whether or not it ever is rationally permissible to *retain one's belief* in a proposition  $p$  when confronted with a respected epistemic peer who disbelieves  $p$ . On the other hand is the issue of what is rationally required or rationally permissible with respect to *modulating* one's doxastic attitude vis-à-vis  $p$  when confronted with a respected epistemic peer with a different and less positive doxastic attitude toward  $p$ —where such modulation could be a matter of either (i) retaining one's belief in  $p$  but lowering this belief's strength, or (ii) coming to regard  $p$  as less plausible than one did before (if one already was agnostic about  $p$ ), or perhaps even (iii) moving from believing  $p$  to suspension of this belief.<sup>5</sup> The issue of doxastic modulation is also one to which we will recur throughout this paper; but it is distinct from the conciliation/nonconciliation issue per se, which concerns the rational permissibility or impermissibility of belief *retention*.<sup>6</sup>

5 A process/product distinction also becomes important with respect to questions of doxastic modulation. It is one thing to hold that one should modulate downward one's doxastic attitude vis-à-vis  $p$  when *initially confronted* with a peer whose doxastic attitude toward  $p$  is less positive than one's own; it is quite another thing to hold that one's entire process of thinking through what one's peer has to say about  $p$  should terminate in a doxastic attitude toward  $p$  that is less positive than one's original doxastic attitude.

6 Our argument below in support of nonconciliationism about belief retention will also be applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to nonconciliationism about doxastic modulation. Although downward doxastic modulation in the face of a respected peer's disagreement is often called for even in situations where one justifiably retains one's belief itself, we maintain that one is not always rationally required, in such situations to hold the belief less strongly than before.

Also important to appreciate is the intimate connection between plausibility and strength. Both are closely tied to the degree of evidential support (which typically is qualitative, not quantitative). Plausibility, when non-total, is a matter of how (ordinally/qualitatively) close a not-believed proposition is to being believed. Strength of belief is a matter of how (ordinally/qualitatively) *distant* a believed proposition is from *not* being believed.

### 2.3 *The Concept of Credence and the Peer Disagreement Debate*

The contemporary philosophical debate about peer disagreement was originally framed in terms of belief. Those advocating the position that came to be called “steadfastness” or “nonconciliation”—e.g., van Inwagen (1996)—maintained that sometimes it is rationally permissible to retain one’s belief that  $p$  even while knowing that one’s respected peer believes  $\sim p$ ; those advocating the position that came to be called “conciliation”—e.g., Feldman (2003)—maintained that in such situations one is always rationally required to suspend belief about  $p$ . This framing of the debate leaves open the issue of what is rationally required or rationally permissible, in a situation of peer disagreement, with respect to doxastic modulation.

Soon, however, many parties to the debate began framing it in terms of so-called “credence” rather than belief. (Indeed, the label ‘conciliation’ really fits the idea of adjusting one’s credence in the direction of the peer’s credence better than it fits belief-suspension.) This approach treats nonconciliationism as the view that it is sometimes rationally permissible, in a situation where one’s peer’s credence in a proposition  $p$  is lower than one’s own, to retain one’s original credence in  $p$ ; and it treats conciliationism as the competing view that in such situations one always is rationally required to adjust one’s credence in  $p$  downward. Typically, those who frame the debate this way set aside any explicit discussion of belief *per se*; and typically, they never explicitly acknowledge the possibility of one’s belief both persisting and yet becoming diminished in strength.

In our view, this shift from belief-talk to credence-talk was very unfortunate. We ourselves framed the debate the original way in the opening paragraph of this paper, and we will remain with this approach throughout. In this subsection we briefly explain why.

Some who invoke the notion of credence think of it as quantitative, zero-to-one ratio-scale, *degree of partial belief*—with full-fledged belief being credence of degree 1 and full-fledged disbelief being credence of degree 0. On this view, the original versions of nonconciliationism and conciliationism become special cases of nonconciliationism and conciliationism about credence—viz.,

the special cases in which one's initial credence for proposition  $p$  is 1. Because of this genus/species relation, adopting this conception of credence—while also setting aside explicit discussion of belief *per se*, and never acknowledging or discussing modulation in belief-strength—is apt to be accompanied by an implicit acceptance of the idea that the only pertinent kind of doxastic modulation is change in credence.<sup>7</sup> The distinct notions above dubbed 'plausibility' and 'strength' thereby get effectively conflated with one another (with this conflationary amalgam also being treated as quantitative)—with the result that the original issue about belief-persistence gets effectively conflated with the distinct issue about doxastic modulation. This is unfortunate, because a clear-headed advocate of nonconciliationism about belief retention could, in principle, adopt any of various different positions concerning what is rationally required or rationally permitted, in the face of peer disagreement, with respect to doxastic modulation.

Others who invoke the notion of credence think of full-fledged belief as coinciding not with degree-1 credence but rather with credence at or above some specific quantitative threshold (perhaps contextually determined); they think of degree-1 credence as something like absolute certainty. When credence is construed in this alternative way, plausibility and strength both in effect get accommodated (while both being construed quantitatively in terms of a single 0-to-1 credence scale): plausibility becomes degree of credence that falls below the belief-threshold, whereas strength becomes degree of credence that falls at or above that threshold. However, now it is clearly inappropriate to reconstruct the two original competing positions in the debate as corresponding, respectively, to (1) retaining one's credence in  $p$  in the face of peer disagreement, vs. (2) altering one's credence in  $p$  in the direction of one's peer's credence in  $p$ . For, an alteration of the latter kind might leave in place one's *belief* in  $p$  (and a corresponding alteration in one's peer's credence in  $\sim p$  might leave in place her/his belief in  $\sim p$ ). But retaining one's belief state (or disbelief state) corresponds to the original position that came to be called "steadfastness" or "non-conciliation," the position defended by van Inwagen (1996)—which pertains to belief retention, not doxastic modulation. So on this second construal of credence, framing the debate in terms of credence once again has the effect of

7 Admittedly, one need not accept this idea, even if one does adopt the conception of credence now under discussion. Still, the temptation is there; and those who frame the disagreement debate using credence-talk, insofar as they embrace this construal of credence, certainly seem to succumb to that temptation. But in any case, our principal objection, to be stated shortly below, is to the very notion of credence itself.

conflating (now more blatantly) the original issue about belief retention with the distinct issue of doxastic modulation.<sup>8</sup>

So re-framing the original debate in terms of credence is either an outright conflation of these two distinct issues, or at least is apt to be accompanied by such a conflation—depending upon how one construes the relation between credence and full-fledged belief. But in addition, in our view—and more fundamentally—the notion of credence itself, however construed, suffers from the following very serious difficulties. First, the idea that actual humans have quantizable, zero-to-one ratio-scale, doxastic attitudes toward virtually any proposition that they can understand and contemplate is a highly implausible psychological myth. Second, the idea that one should aspire to emulate as best one can the doxastic attitudes of an “ideal Bayesian reasoner” who possesses (both synchronically and diachronically) the same evidence as oneself runs afoul of the fact that two different such ideal Bayesian reasoners will differ among themselves in their credences—e.g., because they start off with different *prior* credences; thus, there are no determinate “target credences” that one should seek to emulate in forming and updating one’s doxastic attitudes.<sup>9</sup>

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8 A referee has suggested that because we maintain in this paper that peer disagreement typically creates rational pressure for epistemic agents to adjust the strength of their doxastic attitudes, the view we advocate might better be called “conciliationism” rather than “steadfastness” or “nonconciliationism.” Insofar as the pretheoretic meanings of these expressions are concerned, there is something to be said for this suggestion. Nonetheless, the *original* issue in the peer disagreement debate is about the rational permissibility of belief retention. Insofar as one focuses primarily on that original issue (as we are doing here), while also acquiescing in the somewhat unfortunate terminology that has become standard (as we also are doing here), the claim that belief retention is sometimes rationally permissible in the face of peer disagreement counts as “steadfastness” or “nonconciliationism”—because in such cases, one continues to hold one’s belief. Furthermore, it is important not to read too much into our concession that disagreement often occasions a “rational pressure” to revise downward the strength of one’s belief. Relevant here is the process/product distinction bruited in footnote 5. Although an encountered disagreement with a respected peer constitutes an input to doxastic cognition that creates *pressure* toward downward doxastic modulation, in our view such modulation need not necessarily emerge from the resulting process of weighing all pertinent evidence (including the evidence constituting both the peer’s disagreement itself and the peer’s stated reasons for disagreeing). Conciliationism about doxastic modulation, on the other hand, is the view that downward doxastic modulation is *rationally required*, in such circumstances, as the output of the process.

9 For further elaboration of such problems with the notion of credence, see Horgan (2016a, forthcoming). In Horgan (2016a) and several other papers in Horgan (2016b), the following two additional claims are propounded and defended. First, epistemic probability is *quantitative degree of evidential support*, relative to a specific body of evidence. Second, epistemic



#### 2.4 *Meta-Uniqueness and the Uniqueness/Permissiveness Debate*

The thesis of Uniqueness, as formulated above (following Schoenfield 2014), presupposes in effect that there is just one kind of epistemic rationality that pertains to doxastic attitudes. The thesis of Permissiveness, formulated as the denial of Uniqueness (again following Schoenfield 2014), shares this presupposition.<sup>10</sup> And the same goes for other proposed formulations of Uniqueness and Permissiveness in the recent philosophical literature. We will call this widely shared presupposition *Meta-Uniqueness*.

Suppose, however, that there are two or more distinct kinds of epistemic rationality, each of which constitutes a distinct respect in which a given doxastic attitude *A*, toward a given proposition *p* in a given epistemic situation *S*, can be either rational or irrational. More specifically, suppose that there are two or more distinct kinds of epistemic rationality that are related to one another in a *constitutive means-ends hierarchy*: i.e., exhibiting one kind of epistemic rationality necessarily constitutes an epistemic agent's best means toward the end of exhibiting another kind. If so, then *Meta-Uniqueness* is false. Moreover, this will open up the possibility that Uniqueness holds for some kind(s) of epistemic rationality, whereas Permissiveness holds for other kind(s).

Our argument below in support of nonconciliation will invoke the contention that there is just such a constitutive means-ends hierarchy among several distinct kinds of epistemic rationality. One consequence will be that the Uniqueness/Permissiveness debate rests upon a false presupposition, and hence does not really map neatly onto the conciliationism/nonconciliationism debate. Another consequence will be that nonconciliationism is correct even if Uniqueness holds for the kind of epistemic rationality that is an end toward which the other kinds of epistemic rationality figure constitutively as means.

### 3 The Phenomenology of Peer Disagreement

What is the phenomenology of peer disagreement? That is, what is it like, experientially, to find oneself in disagreement about *p* with someone who one

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probability accrues to a given proposition *p* only under quite special evidential circumstances involving either (i) *p*'s possessing a known (or justifiably believed) objective chance, or (ii) *p*'s belonging to a partition of possibilities that is subject to evidential indifference that is grounded in strong evidential symmetries vis-à-vis those possibilities.

10 These two theses also presuppose what we are calling *strong* epistemic peerhood (cf. Section 2.1).

regards as an epistemic peer about issues of the kind under consideration? Our purpose in this section is to answer this question with as much descriptive accuracy as we can, guided primarily by introspective recollection: bringing to mind various disputes with respected peers that one has been party to in philosophy, and attending introspectively to one's own phenomenology as a party to such a dispute. The hope is that what we say will resonate with you the reader—will accord with your own introspective recollection about the experience of dialectical disputation with interlocutors you respect intellectually. It will emerge that the question has two quite different answers, pertaining to two distinct kinds of disagreement.

We begin with a distinction. Let a *global* epistemic peer be someone who is one's own epistemic peer with respect to a certain subject matter—perhaps quite general in scope, or perhaps fairly circumscribed—that both (i) includes the currently disputed issue as a proper part, and yet (ii) is broader in scope than the currently disputed issue. And let a *local* epistemic peer be someone who is one's own epistemic peer with respect to the currently disputed issue itself. It is important to appreciate that someone could be one's global epistemic peer, with respect to some subject matter that includes the currently disputed issue, without also being one's local epistemic peer with respect to that issue itself.

Now to our phenomenological question. There are two distinct kinds of situation, differing markedly in their phenomenology. First are situations in which one learns that oneself and another person have differing beliefs about some specific matter, and one finds oneself regarding the other person as one's local epistemic peer. One such case, frequently discussed in the recent literature (e.g., Christensen 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011), is where the other person and oneself each have mentally added up the items on a group check after a meal and have arrived at different beliefs about the total cost of the meal. The two diners have dined together many times and usually have landed on the same amount when calculating the cost of the meal. Furthermore, in the past when they came to different amounts, each has been right roughly half the time. In such a situation, one is apt to find oneself regarding the other person as one's local epistemic peer with respect to mental math—i.e., not only as being one's peer in mental math generally, but also as being one's peer with respect to the specific calculational task at hand. Accordingly, one also is apt to find oneself believing that the possibility of having made an addition error oneself is equally as likely as the possibility that the other person made an addition error—and, for that reason, one is apt to find oneself *no longer holding* one's earlier belief about the check-total (the belief one formed via mental math). This is an example of what we will call the phenomenology of *epistemic conciliation*: one finds

oneself regarding the other person as a local epistemic peer, and so, since one's earlier belief conflicts with the other person's belief, one finds oneself no longer holding that belief. A key component of the phenomenology of epistemic conciliation, of course, is the phenomenology of *local epistemic peerhood*.

In sharp contrast to such situations are ones with the following features. Although one does regard the other person as one's global epistemic peer—or perhaps even one's global epistemic superior—with respect to matters that include the matter now at issue (viz., the proposition *p*), and although one knows that both parties have engaged in epistemically responsible inquiry (perhaps including extensive, mutually open-minded, mutually non-dogmatic, dialectical engagement with one another concerning *p*), nevertheless one finds oneself continuing to believe *p*, and continuing to regard *p* as evidentially well warranted by one's net available evidence—even though one knows that the other person disbelieves *p*. Furthermore, and as a corollary, one finds oneself thinking this: with respect to the specific issue about proposition *p*, the other person is somehow *epistemically skewed*—i.e., on this matter, the other person is one's local epistemic inferior. The combination of experiential features just described constitutes what we will call the phenomenology of *epistemic non-conciliation*. A key component of it is the phenomenology of *local epistemic superiority*: it seems to oneself that with respect to *p*, one's own experiential take on the net import of the available evidence is superior to the other person's, and that the other's has gone awry.

It bears emphasis that the phenomenology of epistemic nonconciliation, when it occurs in contexts of sincere and open-minded dialectical disputation with an interlocutor whom one regards throughout as one's global epistemic peer, is not smug. On the contrary, one finds that despite one's considerable respect for the epistemic acumen of the other person, and despite having carefully reflected on the considerations and arguments that other person has put forward, one's original epistemic seemings persist concerning *p*; and because they persist, one finds oneself with a *respectful* attitude of local epistemic superiority toward the other person. This is not self-satisfied smugness; rather, it is the what-it's-like of following the evidence where it seems to oneself, upon due and careful reflection, to lead.<sup>11</sup>

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11 Hilary Putnam famously said the following about his dispute with Robert Nozick about the legitimacy or not of public schools: "Each of us regards the other as lacking, at this level, a certain kind of sensitivity and perception. To be perfectly honest, there is in each of us something akin to *contempt*, not for the other's *mind*—for we each have the highest regard for each other's mind—nor for the other as a *person*—...but for a certain complex

We submit that the phenomenology of epistemic nonconciliation, with its constitutive component the phenomenology of local epistemic superiority, is what really happens in most cases of dialectical disputation in philosophy in which one starts off believing  $p$  and one continues to believe  $p$ . One's belief persists because the belief seems to oneself, and continues to seem to oneself, to be well warranted by one's overall available evidence—well enough warranted to be justified. (The strength of one's belief can go down or up during the process of disputation, of course, but that is another matter.) Correlative with the persistence of the belief, and with its continuing to seem warranted, is the phenomenology of local epistemic superiority. The reason why one does not suspend one's belief in  $p$ , despite knowing that the person one regards as one's global epistemic peer continues to disbelieve  $p$ , is that one finds oneself regarding that person as one's local epistemic inferior. Thus, nonconciliation is what *actually happens*; and we have been describing its phenomenology.

“Well and good as a description of what actually happens,” you might say, “but is it *rationally permissible* to retain one's belief in  $p$  in such circumstances, and is it rationally permissible to regard one's interlocutor as one's local epistemic inferior?” We readily acknowledge that phenomenological description is not enough. This normative question also must be addressed.

#### 4 The Symmetry Challenge

The problem of peer disagreement arises largely because of symmetry considerations. The thought is that if one regards one's interlocutor as an epistemic peer, then one should acknowledge that the interlocutor's belief in  $\sim p$  is no less likely to be adequately well supported by the available evidence than is one's own belief in  $p$ ; accordingly (so the thought goes), rationality requires suspending one's belief in  $p$ .

Assuming the accuracy of our description in Section 3 of the typical phenomenology of nonconciliation in cases of persistent peer disagreement, considerations of symmetry arise regarding this phenomenology itself. Normally, in such a dispute one will justifiably believe—indeed, one will know—that one's interlocutor's belief in  $\sim p$  is accompanied by epistemic phenomenology that parallels one's own—and hence (i) that one's interlocutor finds herself/himself continuing to believe  $\sim p$ , (ii) that  $\sim p$  continues to seem to her/him

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of emotions and judgments in the other.” (Putnam 1981, 165) The word ‘contempt’ is a bit strong for many disputes, but still this somehow gets it, phenomenologically.

to be epistemically justified by the overall available evidence, and (iii) that she/he regards herself/himself as being locally epistemic superior with respect to  $p$  (and regards oneself as locally epistemically inferior on this specific issue). In fact, in paradigmatic situations of dialectical disagreement between persons who regard each other as global epistemic peers, there will be *common knowledge* that each party to the dispute undergoes, with respect to  $p$ , the epistemic phenomenology we described in Section 3.

In light of this common knowledge, the symmetry worry kicks in. Why privilege one's own epistemic phenomenology vis-à-vis  $p$  over the interlocutor's parallel epistemic phenomenology vis-à-vis  $\sim p$ ? Why think that one's own epistemic phenomenology is any more likely to be tracking the actual import of the pertinent evidence than is the interlocutor's parallel phenomenology?

Of course, given our stipulation in Section 2.1 that we are construing peerhood as requiring only total evidential common ground—and not complete match of total available pertinent evidence—it may well be that one possesses, and somehow implicitly appreciates, certain items of pertinent evidence that are not possessed by one's interlocutor. (More on this in Section 5.) But the same goes for one's interlocutor, relative to oneself. So essentially the same symmetry worry remains in force. Why think that one's own epistemic phenomenology is any more likely to be tracking the actual import of the *total* pertinent evidence—comprising all of (i) the full evidential common ground, (ii) one's own implicitly appreciated additional available evidence (if any), and (iii) the interlocutor's own implicitly appreciated additional available evidence (if any)—than is the interlocutor's parallel phenomenology? (This is why, as we said in Section 2.1, the motivation for conciliationism remains essentially intact even if one construes peerhood—as we are doing here—as requiring not complete match of available evidence but only full evidential common ground.)

And the symmetry worry kicks in the other way around too, of course: not only does one have no apparent good reason to privilege one's own epistemic phenomenology regarding  $p$  over the interlocutor's, but one has no apparent reason to privilege her/his phenomenology over one's own.

Privileging either, therefore, now looks to be quite *arbitrary* from an epistemic point of view; the two competing phenomenologies effectively seem to “cancel each other out” with respect to the question of the justificatory status of  $p$  and of  $\sim p$ . Because of this cancellation effect, it seems, one's net overall evidence no longer justifies one's belief in  $p$ ; likewise, the interlocutor's net overall evidence no longer justifies her/his belief in  $\sim p$ . Rationality therefore requires both parties to *suspend* their respective beliefs about  $p$ . Although non-conciliation may well be what actually happens in prototypical situations of

dialectical disputation, and although the phenomenology of nonconciliation may well have the features we described in Section 3, nevertheless it is actually *irrational* to retain one's disputed belief in such a situation. Rationality requires suspending the belief—whether one is capable of that or not.

So it seems to the advocates of conciliation. Admittedly, this reasoning confers considerable *prima facie* plausibility on the conciliationist position. The challenge to us nonconciliationists is to articulate a satisfactory response.

## 5 Epistemic Seemings, Epistemic Sensibility, and the Chromatic Illumination of Epistemic Experience

When we described in Section 3 the phenomenology of epistemic nonconciliation, which includes the phenomenology of local epistemic superiority, we focused on how things *seem epistemically* to someone undergoing such phenomenology. Such epistemic seemings will figure centrally in our subsequent reply to the symmetry challenge. As prelude to that reply, in this section and the next we will address in some detail some key features of epistemic seemings—features which, once recognized and acknowledged, will ground our defense of nonconciliationism. (Our principal claims about epistemic seemings in this and the next section will be descriptive; they will provide the descriptive grounding for the key normative claims we will make in Section 7, in reply to the symmetry challenge.)

### 5.1 *Epistemic Seemings and Epistemic Sensibility*

One's epistemic sensibility consists roughly in certain dispositions one possesses with respect to belief formation on the basis of readily articulable evidence—the kind of evidence that counts as full common ground in cases of disagreement with epistemic peers. The dispositions that constitute one's epistemic sensibility can embody any or all of the following three factors. First are certain epistemic *normative standards*, standards pertaining to evidential support.<sup>12,13</sup> Second are certain items of *implicitly appreciated*

12 Our emphasis here on evidence, and on one's standards of evidential support, is not at odds with epistemological positions such as process reliabilism about epistemic justification. For, a process reliabilist can construe evidence for *p* as—roughly, and ignoring important complications about *total* evidence—available information which, if fed into a reliable belief-forming process, would generate a belief that *p*. For discussion and elaboration see Henderson, Horgan, and Potrč (2007) and Section 7.3 of Henderson and Horgan (2011).

13 One very nice philosophical discussion of the normative-standards aspect of what we are here calling one's epistemic sensibility—the best one we know of—is by Richard Foley

*evidence*—information that is evidentially pertinent (according to one's own epistemic normative standards), and whose evidential pertinence gets accommodated in one's belief-forming processes, while *yet* not being readily articulable. Third are certain *empirical/normative epistemic entanglements* (as we will put it)—aspects of one's epistemic sensibility that incorporate matters normative and matters empirical in such a way that the two matters are not cleanly separable from one another. (Candidate examples of such epistemic entanglements are the epistemic linkages between perceptual experiences and expert-level categorization-judgments—say, in birdwatching, or in wine-tasting, or in X-ray interpretation, or in high-level speed-chess.)

A competence/performance distinction arises here: when one forms beliefs in a manner that accords with one's epistemic sensibility, one is exhibiting epistemic competence vis-à-vis that sensibility, whereas when one forms beliefs in a manner that does not thus conform, one is committing a performance error vis-à-vis that sensibility. As an example of a performance error with respect to one's own epistemic sensibility, consider the infamous Monty Hall problem. Monty, the host of a game show, reliably informs the contestant that a fine prize lies behind one of three visible doors, and that there is nothing behind the other two. After the contestant chooses one of the doors, Monty reliably says to the contestant, "I know where the prize is, and I will now open a door that (i) you did not choose and (ii) has no prize behind it"; Monty then proceeds to do so. Monty now offers the contestant the opportunity to switch to the remaining unopened door. The question arises: Is there any advantage in switching, or is the prize equally likely to be behind either of the two unopened doors?

Almost everyone, upon being initially confronted with this problem, experiences a strong intuition that the prize is equally likely to be behind either of the unopened doors. Yet the correct answer is that the contestant is twice as likely to win by switching. Most of us can come to be persuaded that it is so, if only by being walked through some mathematical reasoning deploying principles of probability theory that we can accept as intuitively correct. When that happens, one comes to appreciate that the initial intuition was mistaken and does not actually accord with one's own epistemic sensibility. The initial intuitive judgment was a performance error, by one's own epistemic lights.<sup>14</sup>

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in his 1993 book *Working Without a Net*; his preferred expression is 'subjective rationality'. Roughly, the judgments of belief-worthiness that accord with one's subjective rationality are those that one would endorse upon duly careful, duly attentive, duly unbiased, reflection.

14 Making the correct answer *itself* intuitively correct is another matter, though. For a discussion of the Monty Hall problem that has this effect at least for the discussion's author, see Horgan (1995).

There is little doubt that each of us humans is prone, to some extent at least, to certain kinds of epistemic performance errors vis-à-vis her/his own epistemic sensibility. Epistemic responsibility requires one to be aware of this fact, and to guard against it during the course of one's ongoing practice of inquiry in the service of belief-formation. Nevertheless, often one finds oneself in an epistemic situation in which (i) one seems to oneself to have been duly careful in this regard, (ii) one has no epistemic seemings (apart perhaps, in some cases, from being disagreed with by someone who one considers a global epistemic peer) suggesting that one might nonetheless be now guilty of a performance error, (iii) meanwhile one's epistemic seemings persistently favor  $p$  to such an extent that  $p$  seems eminently belief-worthy given one's total evidence, and (iv) one also finds oneself with a plausible-seeming way of understanding both (iv.a) why an intelligent person might be moved to believe  $\sim p$  by the very considerations adduced in favor of  $\sim p$  by one's disputant, and (iv.b) why a belief in  $\sim p$  formed in that way would be mistaken.<sup>15</sup> Among the kinds of situations where this is so—indeed, somewhat *paradigmatic* among these kinds of situations—are those in which one has engaged in (what seems to oneself to have been) careful, sustained, reflective, dialectical disputation with others who one regards as one's global epistemic peers about issues of the kind under dispute. Dialectical volleys from respected interlocutors often constitute especially powerful potential defeaters of the presumption that one's epistemic seemings really do emanate from one's own epistemic sensibility; for, those dialectical volleys might well trigger a switch in one's epistemic phenomenology vis-à-vis  $p$ , with the earlier epistemic seemings now being experienced as performance errors relative to one's own epistemic sensibility. But sometimes this does *not* happen; instead  $p$  still seems epistemically well warranted by one's overall evidence, even after due consideration of the interlocutor's latest dialectical volley contra  $p$ . Indeed, sometimes one instead finds oneself able to return the opponent's volley back across the dialectical net in a way that seems convincing to oneself—although sooner or later any particular dialectical exchange between specific disputants comes to an end, often with the disagreement still persisting.

15 Normally, the seemings just described will not all take the form of conscious and explicit *beliefs*. Perhaps they deserve to be called implicit beliefs, or perhaps not; we take no stand on this question. They are, however, subject to normative-epistemic evaluation: they are the kinds of cognitive states that are capable of being epistemically justified or epistemically unjustified. Also, there is quite a lot more that we think needs saying about items (ii) and (iv); on this matter, see Henderson and Horgan (2016).



One's epistemic sensibility, as we said, constitutes one's own normative criteria with respect to matters of evidential relevance and evidential support, together perhaps with—and sometimes entangled with—certain implicitly appreciated items of evidentially relevant information. Phenomenological introspection reveals that normally the aspects of one's epistemic sensibility that are operative in any given occasion of belief-formation or belief-persistence are not fully and explicitly present in consciousness. Although often one can say something vague and loose about why one's overall evidence seems to oneself to warrant  $p$ —e.g., “Proposition  $p$  seems best supported by abductive inference to the best explanation, and in relation to considerations of wide reflective equilibrium”—such remarks typically are far too nonspecific to constitute a *full* articulation of why and how one's overall epistemic sensibility and one's overall available evidence combine to render  $p$  well warranted (relative to one's own sensibility). To a large extent, it seems, the psychological operation of one's epistemic sensibility occurs outside of conscious awareness.<sup>16</sup>

This does not mean, however, that conscious experience is *impervious* to those aspects of one's epistemic sensibility that are operative on a given occasion of belief formation/persistence without being explicitly present in consciousness. On the contrary. When one focuses reflective attention on epistemic seemings—e.g., on a specific experience of a proposition seeming to be well warranted by one's overall available evidence—one finds that such an epistemic seeming, concerning a specific proposition, will often have a quite *specific* good-evidential-warrant phenomenal aspect to it, rather than being phenomenologically generic. We turn next to this matter.

## 5.2 *Epistemic Seemings as Chromatically Illuminated*

The expression we use, for the psychological process at work here that links the operative factors that are not explicitly present in consciousness to the specific

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16 Moreover, considerations of tractability demands on cognitive processing strongly suggest that the psychological operation of numerous pertinent specific aspects of one's epistemic normative standards, and of numerous pertinent specific items of background information, occurs (and can only occur) largely automatically by virtue of the standing structure of one's cognitive architecture, rather than occurring in a way that deploys—either consciously or even unconsciously—explicit, occurrent, representations of those sensibility-aspects. Mental intentionality that is operative in this psychologically automatic and non-explicit way was dubbed *morphological content* in Horgan and Tienson (1995, 1996). For elaboration and defense of the claim that morphological content figures importantly (and must) in much human belief-formation, see those texts, Henderson and Horgan (2000, 2011 Chapter 7, 2016), and Horgan and Potrč (2010).

phenomenal character of the epistemic seeming, is *chromatic illumination*.<sup>17</sup> The chromatically illuminated character of one's epistemic seemings typically enables one to say *something*, if queried, about reasons for a belief one holds on the basis of those seemings; and what one says is typically experienced as emanating directly from the epistemic-seeming experience *itself* (rather than being experienced, say, as a mere hypothesis about why proposition *p* seems belief-worthy given one's evidence). On the other hand, typically the chromatically illuminated character of one's conscious epistemic seemings also intimates that there is more—perhaps considerably more—below the conscious surface than is directly, explicitly, present in consciousness. What's below the surface is one's pertinent normative epistemic standards (albeit perhaps partly articulable), together perhaps with pertinent background information (albeit again perhaps partly articulable).

These claims about the operation of one's epistemic sensibility are the products of attentive phenomenological reflection on the pertinent kinds of experience. They are *empirical* psychological claims; and the fact that they accord with one's attentive first-person introspective judgments constitutes empirical evidence for them—*strong* empirical evidence, in our view, albeit defeasible in principle. For purposes of the present paper, this suffices.

The upshot so far concerning epistemic seemings, including those that arise in the phenomenology of nonconciliation, is that they are far from being epistemically unanchored *sui generis* experiences. On the contrary, they have the default epistemic status of being the products of one's own epistemic competence in deploying, vis-à-vis one's total available evidence (perhaps including

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17 The notion of chromatic illumination was introduced in Horgan and Potrč (2010), where it is elaborated at some length in connection both with the phenomenology of belief-formation and with the epistemic relevance of information and normative standards that are operative in belief formation as morphological content (and that thereby get implicitly appreciated without being explicitly represented in consciousness). For further discussion of morphological content and chromatic illumination, specifically in relation to the phenomenology of epistemic seemings and the issue of rational disagreement, see Henderson and Horgan (2016). That paper, which is complementary to the present one, focuses largely on an aspect of peer-disagreement situations we do not discuss here: viz., the ways that a fitting response to disagreement regarding some proposition *p* typically involves undertaking two strongly interrelated tasks: (1) assessing the all-things-considered epistemic status of *p* (where among the things considered are the interlocutor's denial of *p* and stated reasons for that denial), and (2) arriving at a sympathetic explanatory understanding (albeit perhaps a *debunking* sympathetic understanding) of the interlocutor's own epistemic attitude toward *p*.

implicitly appreciated background information), one's own deep epistemic sensibility regarding matters of evidential support.

## 6 The Dynamics of Epistemic Seemings

We turn now to some observations about ways that epistemic seemings interact with one another dynamically, and ways that epistemic seemings evolve as an epistemic agent acquires new information. (Hereafter we often will refer to epistemic seemings just as 'seemings'.)

One pertinent distinction, concerning seemings involving some proposition  $p$ , is between what we will call *direct* seemings and what we will call *all-in* seemings. Direct seemings involve the experienced belief-worthiness of  $p$  as just considered in itself, apart from any wider seemings one might undergo that are pertinent to the reliability of the direct seemings. Any such wider seemings belong to the class of all-in seemings vis-à-vis  $p$ .

An important kind of wider seeming concerning  $p$ , already emphasized earlier, is a seeming with respect to whether or not one has been thus far duly and adequately epistemically responsible in one's inquiry vis-à-vis  $p$ . Lacking such a seeming as-of having conducted one's inquiry responsibly, one's all-in seemings regarding  $p$  normally will be at least somewhat equivocal.

Another pertinent distinction, orthogonal to the direct/all-in distinction, is between *prima facie* seemings and *ultima facie* seemings. *Ultima facie* seemings are settled ones—often, ones that are present *upon reflection* (although many *prima facie* seemings—e.g., everyday sensory-perceptual seemings—normally are also *ultima facie* by default). Sometimes a *prima facie* seeming (either direct or all-in) survives the process of reflection and becomes an *ultima facie* one. But sometimes certain *prima facie* seemings do not survive the reflective process. Both direct seemings and all-in seemings can change during the course of reflection; thus, direct *prima facie* seemings can get displaced by distinct, direct, *ultima facie* seemings, and all-in *prima facie* seemings can get displaced by distinct, all-in, *ultima facie* seemings. One pertinent kind of reflection can occur in the absence of newly acquired evidence, by just “turning things over in one's mind.” But newly acquired evidence also can occasion such reflection too.

With these distinctions at hand, we have several observations to make regarding the dynamics of seemings. First, an especially noteworthy form of seeming-dynamics involves reflection in which one's *prima facie* direct seeming, as-of the belief-worthiness of proposition  $p$ , comes into conflict with certain other *prima facie* all-in seemings vis-à-vis  $p$ —for instance, all-in

seemings to the effect that one's *prima facie* direct seemings are apt to be misleading and unreliable in the present circumstances. Often when this happens, the net result of the reflective process will be an *ultima facie* all-in seeming as-of  $p$  not being belief-worthy after all. In one way this can happen, one's *prima facie* direct seeming concerning  $p$  remains intact (and thus is now an *ultima facie* direct seeming), despite being over-ruled by one's *ultima facie* all-in seeming. (For example, one carefully reads through a moderately complex mathematical demonstration of the  $\frac{2}{3}$  answer to the Monty Hall problem and becomes convinced by it, even though the  $\frac{1}{2}$  answer continues to seem right intuitively—i.e., directly.) In another way it can happen, one's *prima facie* direct seeming gets displaced itself by the reflective process, and is replaced by an *ultima facie* direct seeming that accords with the *ultima facie* all-in seeming. (For example, one is confronted by sound argument for the  $\frac{2}{3}$  answer in the Monty Hall problem that is itself quite simple and intuitive, and one's *prima facie* direct seeming as-of the answer being  $\frac{1}{2}$  now gets straightforwardly displaced, via this intuitive reasoning, by the *ultima facie* direct seeming as-of the answer being  $\frac{2}{3}$ .)

Second, also important are seeming-dynamics pertaining to testimony. Sometimes one's all-in seeming concerning  $p$  will rest heavily on certain seemings one has concerning a high level of expertise and reliability vis-à-vis  $p$  possessed by certain specific members of one's wider community, together with seemings one has concerning the lack of such expertise and reliability in oneself. In some cases this will happen without one's having experienced any direct seeming at all concerning  $p$ . In other cases it might happen despite one's having a direct *prima facie* seeming as-of  $p$  that persists as an *ultima facie* direct seeming—for instance, in a situation where one accepts on testimony a report by a well-informed mathematician that nowadays there is no controversy at all among mathematicians that the correct answer to the Monty Hall problem is  $\frac{2}{3}$ , even though one's own *ultima facie* direct seeming is still that the correct answer is  $\frac{1}{2}$ .

Third, when one learns that one is in disagreement about a proposition  $p$ , with someone who one regards as a global epistemic peer, then normally this information will alter downward somewhat the (ordinal) position of one's  $p$ -regarding epistemic state on the plausibility/strength spectrum (at least temporarily, pending further inquiry or dialectical exchange)—although perhaps not enough to effect a transition from believing  $p$  to no longer believing  $p$ .

Fourth, often in such a disagreement-situation, one seems to oneself to incur an epistemic responsibility to pursue further one's inquiry concerning  $p$ , and to do so in specific ways. These can include reading what one's global peer has written on the topic (and what others have written who one's global peer

cites and respects), hearing out one's global peer in direct dialectical exchange, non-dogmatically pondering those written and oral considerations, and so forth. And of course, often one then appropriates such things, and often thereafter it now once again seems to oneself that one has duly discharged one's responsibilities in this respect (perhaps while yet being open to still further inquiry and dialectical exchange regarding  $p$ ).

Finally, fifth, once the pertinent considerations have been fed into the process of reflection and this process has settled, the chips fall where they may as regards one's responsible-seeming, *ultima facie*, all-in seemings vis-à-vis  $p$ —and, accordingly, as regards whether or not one still believes  $p$  (and if so, how strongly.) Belief or non-belief regarding  $p$ , and also strength (if  $p$  is still believed) normally is inherited—involuntarily—straight from one's *ultima facie* all-in epistemic seeming regarding  $p$ . Sometimes this seeming leads to reconciliation:  $p$  no longer seems belief-worthy, and so one no longer believes  $p$ . (Christensen's check-adding case is a familiar example.) Sometimes it leads to reversal, even if one's *prima facie* direct seeming persists: one's *ultima facie* all-in seeming is as-of  $\sim p$ , even if one has an *ultima facie* direct seeming as-of  $p$ . And, of course, sometimes one's *ultima facie* all-in seeming leads to nonconciliation: this seeming is as-of  $p$ , despite the downward pressure on the plausibility/strength spectrum that is exerted by one's knowledge that someone who one regards as a global epistemic peer believes  $\sim p$ .

## 7 Responding to the Symmetry Challenge

With the descriptive observations about epistemic seemings in Sections 4–6 as groundwork, we are ready now to address the normative epistemic question that arises in light of the symmetry challenge. In a situation in which one finds oneself believing  $p$  and one experiences the phenomenology of nonconciliation with respect to someone who one regards as a global epistemic peer who one knows believes  $\sim p$ , is one epistemically obligated to conciliate (whether or not one can), thereby suspending judgment about  $p$ ? Or is it instead epistemically permissible—perhaps even epistemically mandatory—to remain steadfast in believing  $p$ ? To put the issue slightly differently: In such a situation, do considerations of symmetry—including the symmetrical fact that each party to the dispute experiences the phenomenology of nonconciliation with respect to the other party, and the second symmetrical fact that this first symmetrical fact is common knowledge between the two parties—make it epistemically impermissible to privilege one's own belief over the disputant's belief by regarding one's own belief, but not the other's, as well warranted in light of all

one's available evidence? Or is it instead epistemically permissible—or perhaps even epistemically obligatory—to “break symmetry” by privileging one's own belief in this way?

We maintain that such symmetry-breaking is indeed epistemically permissible, and is plausibly regarded as epistemically mandatory too. This is true, we claim, for *each* party to the dispute, in a situation where each regards the other as a global peer and each knows that they both experience the phenomenology of nonconciliation. Our argument will proceed by considering a nested series of successive goals, related to one another in a means-ends hierarchy of goal, sub-goal, sub-sub-goal, etc., that all appear to be constitutively involved in rational belief formation. The two key normative claims will be these: first, as a *situated* epistemic agent, normally the best one can do with respect to pursuing any given goal in the hierarchy is to pursue the sub-goal immediately beneath it;<sup>18</sup> and second, one is epistemically permitted—and, plausibly, one is epistemically required—to form one's beliefs in a manner that constitutes doing one's best, as a situated agent, in immediate pursuit of the lowest sub-goal in the nested series of epistemic goals.<sup>19,20</sup>

A principal epistemic goal in belief formation is that the propositions one believes are true. (We will call this the *truth goal*.) This should not be controversial. Perhaps there are additional principal epistemic goals in belief formation too, over and above the truth goal; or, alternatively, perhaps any other principal goals—e.g., the goal of forming *richly explanatory* true beliefs—are better classified as non-epistemic. We here remain neutral on that issue, which

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18 The reason for the qualifier ‘normally’ is explained in the penultimate paragraph of the present section.

19 Because rational belief-formation involves a hierarchy of constitutive goals and sub-goals, beliefs are susceptible to multiple kinds of epistemic appraisal. Normative evaluation of an epistemic agent's belief that *p*, expressible for instance by deploying the notion of epistemic justification, can be primarily focused on any specific level in this hierarchy, or on several together—depending on one's evaluative purposes in a specific context. (The belief might do well in some such epistemic-evaluative respects without doing well in others.) Roughly speaking, teleological evaluation will focus more on the higher parts of the hierarchy, whereas deontological evaluation will focus more on the lower parts.

20 A referee has expressed concern that deontological evaluation perhaps presupposes voluntarism about belief formation, which is a dubious doctrine. In our view, however, deontological evaluation does not presuppose epistemic voluntarism. Rather, it only presupposes—correctly—that belief formation is an exercise of epistemic *agency*, involving (inter alia) the deployment of one's competence in evidence appraisal. Exploring the notion of epistemic agency in detail, including distinctive aspects of its phenomenology, is a large and important task that we cannot pursue here.

is why we use the indefinite article: the goal in question is *a* principal epistemic goal in belief formation, whether or not there is such a unique thing as *the* principal epistemic goal in belief formation.

As we said, an epistemic agent is *situated* (qua epistemic agent). There are various aspects of such epistemic situatedness, and these determine the successive sub-goals in the pertinent goal/subgoal hierarchy. To begin with, the agent is situated with respect to the agent's own body of *total available evidence vis-à-vis p*—which is apt to include not just readily articulable evidence (the kind that can constitute common ground with an epistemic peer), but also implicitly appreciated evidence that chromatically illuminates the agent's epistemic seemings. Because of this, the epistemic agent unavoidably confronts a principal subsidiary goal, pursuit of which will constitute doing one's best in pursuit of the truth goal itself—viz., that the propositions one believes are *likely true*, given the total available evidence. We will call this the goal of *objective epistemic rationality*.<sup>21</sup>

Another aspect of epistemic situatedness, qua being an epistemic agent, is that one has a specific epistemic sensibility; it embodies one's own deep standards with respect to matters of evidential import, often it also embodies implicit appreciation of items of evidence that are not readily articulable, and sometimes it may embody an entangling of standards-cum-evidence. (As noted already, one's epistemic sensibility is largely implicit in one's cognitive architecture, and operates largely outside of explicit conscious awareness while also effecting specific kinds of chromatic illumination upon the phenomenal character of one's epistemic seemings.) Because of this, the epistemic agent unavoidably confronts a yet-more-subsidiary goal, pursuit of which will constitute doing one's best in pursuit of the principal sub-goal of

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21 A referee has expressed concern that we are overlooking an important consideration that arguably is itself a constitutive subgoal vis-à-vis the truth goal: viz., deploying a reliable belief-forming process vis-à-vis *p*. Our response is the following. First, although there are indeed reliability-involving normative desiderata concerning belief formation, the most fundamental one—the one linked constitutively to the truth goal—is what we elsewhere have dubbed *transglobal* reliability, viz., reliability across a wide range of epistemically possible global environments. (The belief-forming processes of your brain-in-a-vat experiential duplicate are no less transglobally reliable than are yours, even though these processes are not reliable within the envatted brain's own actual global environment.) Second, transglobal reliability is itself so tightly intertwined conceptually with objective epistemic rationality—i.e., with likely truth, given one's available evidence—that the two cannot come apart. See Horgan and Henderson (2001, 2006, 2007, 2011 Chapters 3–5 and Section 7.1), Henderson, Horgan, and Potrč (2007).

objective truth-oriented rationality (and thereby, in doing one's best in pursuit of the truth goal): viz., that the propositions one believes are likely true *according to one's own epistemic sensibility*, given the total readily-articulable available evidence (the kind of evidence that constitutes common ground with global peers, in situations of peer disagreement). We will call this the goal of *sensibility-based subjective epistemic rationality*.<sup>22</sup>

By now, we trust, you the reader can see where this line of reasoning is headed. Yet another aspect of epistemic situatedness, qua being an epistemic agent, is the overall character of one's ongoing experiences—including, in particular, the overall character of one's epistemic seemings. Those seemings can, and often, do, exhibit the various dynamic and interactive aspects that we described in preceding sections. They can be, and often are, holistically responsive to experiential "warning flags" concerning certain *prima facie* direct seemings—e.g., the testimony of a knowledgeable mathematician as a serious warning flag concerning one's *prima facie* direct seeming that the correct answer in the Monty Hall problem is  $\frac{1}{2}$ . They can be, and often are, imbued with chromatic illumination as-of one's having been duly responsible in one's inquiry to date concerning the believed proposition *p*. But as an epistemic agent, one is *experientially* situated in the world, and one cannot transcend one's own experiential perspective—although of course one can engage in richly abductive belief-formation, including via epistemic seemings that rely very heavily on testimony, thereby indirectly accommodating the experiential perspectives of others into one's own overall experiential perspective. Because of this, the epistemic agent unavoidably confronts a still-yet-more-subsidiary goal, pursuit of which will constitute doing one's best in pursuit of the sub-goal of sensibility-based subjective rationality: viz., forming beliefs in accordance with one's responsible-seeming, *ultima facie*, all-in epistemic seemings. We will call this the goal of *experiential subjective epistemic rationality*.

So the case for steadfastness can be formulated as follows. In situations of disagreement with someone who one considers a global peer and in which one experiences the phenomenology of nonconciliation, it is epistemically permissible—and plausibly is epistemically obligatory—to form beliefs in a manner that constitutes doing the best one can in pursuit of the truth goal. In order to do the best one can in this latter respect, one must form beliefs

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22 This goal should incorporate, and allow for, potential subsequent alterations in one's current epistemic sensibility that could aptly be regarded, even from the perspective of more deeply ingrained aspects of this current sensibility, as *improvements* in one's overall epistemic sensibility. We return to this theme in Section 8 below.



in a manner that constitutes doing the best one can in pursuit of the goal of objective epistemic rationality. In order to do the best one can in this latter respect, one must form beliefs in a manner that constitutes doing the best one can in pursuit of the goal of sensibility-based subjective epistemic rationality. In order to do the best one can in this latter respect, one must form beliefs that constitute doing the best one can in pursuit of the goal of experiential subjective rationality. One does the best one can in the latter respect by forming or maintaining beliefs that accord with one's responsible-seeming, *ultima facie*, all-in epistemic seemings. In situations of disagreement with someone who one considers a global peer and in which one experiences the phenomenology of nonconciliation, steadfastness with respect to the disputed proposition constitutes maintaining a belief that accords with one's responsible-seeming, *ultima facie*, all-in epistemic seemings. Therefore, in such situations, it is epistemically permissible to remain steadfast, rather than conciliating—and plausibly it is epistemically obligatory to do so.

The argument just given is subject to the following qualification. “Doing the best one can” is a somewhat context-sensitive notion. Typically, the operative contextual parameter-setting, for judging whether or not someone is doing epistemically the best that she/he can, will be geared to the person's own responsible-seeming, *ultima facie*, all-in epistemic seemings. Consider, however, a person of normal intelligence, with standard kinds of access to pertinent information, in whom for some issues such epistemic seemings reflect an epistemic sensibility that is badly skewed even relative to a low base-line standard for what constitutes a minimally evidence-sensitive epistemic sensibility in a person of normal intelligence with standard kinds of access to pertinent information. We will call such a person *epistemically benighted*. (The person either possesses that highly deficient sensibility or else systematically experiences epistemic seemings that constitute performance errors relative to the person's own epistemic sensibility.) One's deontic epistemic assessments of an epistemically benighted person's beliefs might well deploy a contextual parameter setting, for the notion “doing the best one can,” under which one will judge that this person *fails* to do her/his epistemic best on certain issues by forming beliefs about those issues in accordance with her/his responsible-seeming, *ultima facie*, all-in epistemic seemings. (A candidate plausible example is the belief that global warming is a hoax, as held sincerely and reflectively by people of normal intelligence who have the same kinds of access as the rest of us to the widely and easily available pertinent evidence.)

Our argument in support of reconciliation applies not only to oneself but also to one's disputant, *mutatis mutandis*. The symmetry of the dialectical situation gets broken both ways, because two different epistemic agents

are involved. The situatedness of epistemic agency breaks the symmetry, and in the end the two agents are differently situated epistemically—each within her/his overall experiential “skin”.<sup>23</sup>

## 8 The Smugness Objection

We turn next to a likely objection to our argument for nonconciliation, and we offer our proposed reply. The advocate of conciliation might yet invoke symmetry considerations against us, by arguing that it is just *irresponsibly smug* to rely on one’s epistemic seemings vis-à-vis  $p$  in a situation where one knows that someone who one regards as a global epistemic peer believes  $\sim p$ . The argument goes as follows.

Reliance on one’s epistemic seemings, in such a situation, *insulates those very seemings from proper critical scrutiny*—and thereby also underwrites an illegitimate attitude of local epistemic superiority over one’s interlocutor. There are actually two layers of unduly un-critical self-insulation here: first, in relying on one’s epistemic seemings one insulates oneself from duly responsible consideration of the possibility that those very seemings are the product of a performance error, relative to one’s own underlying epistemic sensibility; and second, even in situations where one’s seemings do reflect one’s epistemic sensibility, in relying on those seemings one insulates oneself from duly responsible consideration of the possibility that one’s epistemic sensibility itself is locally skewed vis-à-vis  $p$ . If one instead adopts a duly responsible self-critical attitude toward one’s epistemic seemings and one’s epistemic sensibility, then one will realize that one’s own epistemic seemings and those of one’s interlocutor nullify one another evidentially; and thus, will realize that the only epistemically responsible doxastic attitude toward  $p$  is the attitude of

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23 A referee has expressed the following worry. Doesn’t the fact that belief-forming and belief-sustaining methods should be truth-conducive (because of the truth goal) entail that one’s epistemic seemings must be truth-conducive too in order for one to be rationally permitted (or rationally required) to rely on those seemings? Yet there is no guarantee that one’s epistemic seemings will meet this criterion. We have two points to make in reply. First, there is no such entailment, because doing one’s best vis-à-vis a constitutive sub-goal does not guarantee doing well with respect to the superordinate goal(s). Second, someone who is epistemically benighted with respect to a given topic does not qualify as “doing the best one can” with respect to the truth goal (or the goal of objective epistemic rationality) by relying on her/his responsible-seeming, *ultima facie*, all-in epistemic seemings regarding that topic.

suspended judgment. Persisting in believing  $p$ , in the face of known disagreement about  $p$  with someone who one regards as a global epistemic peer, is therefore irrational.

We reply as follows. It is true enough, and important, that in situations of known disagreement about  $p$  with someone who one regards as one's global epistemic peer, epistemically responsible inquiry requires one to be open both to the possibility that one's epistemic seemings vis-à-vis  $p$  are performance errors relative to one's epistemic sensibility, and to the possibility that one's epistemic sensibility itself is locally skewed regarding the net import vis-à-vis  $p$  of one's total available evidence. But epistemically responsible openness to such possibilities is a matter of pursuing one's ongoing dialectical inquiry regarding  $p$  in a manner that seems to oneself to make it sufficiently likely that *if* there is a high objective likelihood that one of these deficiency-possibilities actually obtains, then one will come to recognize this fact via duly-careful-seeming attention to the considerations against  $p$  that one's interlocutor has put forward. (This need not amount to embracing the *negation* of  $p$  because of those considerations.) If one has indeed conducted one's inquiry in that manner, and nonetheless no such recognition-experience has occurred, then one is *not* required to treat those possibilities, in combination with the known disagreement about  $p$ , as undermining one's justification for believing  $p$ .<sup>24</sup>

Performance errors underlying one's own epistemic seemings can get revealed to oneself in the course of responsible dialectical exchange, and sometimes are. Furthermore, portions of one's epistemic sensibility can get revealed to oneself to be defective relative to other, more firmly entrenched, portions of that sensibility; and this can lead to revisions in one's overall epistemic sensibility—in the manner of Neurath's boat. In principle, *large* portions of one's epistemic sensibility can get replaced this way, in a manner analogous to building an entire new boat while positioned in the old boat's life-raft.

Paradigmatically, these kinds of diachronic repudiation of one's prior epistemic seemings occur in contexts of responsibly conducted dialectical inquiry, in which one open-mindedly and non-dogmatically exposes oneself to

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24 We suspect too that the tendency to think that symmetry considerations make it rationally obligatory for the two interlocutors to suspend their respective beliefs in  $p$  and  $\sim p$  is driven partly by an un-noticed conflation between two distinct kinds of epistemic perspective: (i) that of one or the other of the interlocutors themselves, and (ii) that of a third party who is ignorant about which proposition  $p$  is under dispute, and whose only pertinent knowledge about the two disputing parties is that they regard one another as global peers. *Of course* someone with the second kind of epistemic perspective should consider both disputants equally susceptible to performance error or skewed epistemic sensibility.

considerations against  $p$  that are being put forward by someone who one regards as a global epistemic peer (or a global epistemic superior). In the paradigm cases, the result of such exposure is a certain *new* epistemic seeming—e.g., an epistemic seeming whose content is that one's earlier epistemic seeming was (or probably was) the product of a performance error—or an epistemic seeming whose content is that one's earlier epistemic sensibility was (or probably was) locally skewed vis-à-vis  $p$ . Although it is indeed epistemically appropriate in such circumstances to stop believing  $p$ , the crucial point is that this appropriateness arises not because one ceases to be doxastically guided by one's epistemic seemings, but because one is now being guided by new epistemic seemings that displace the earlier ones. One has bootstrapped one's way past those earlier seemings, all right—but one has done so by relying on further, more recent, epistemic seemings. Non-smugness in one's belief-forming inquiry is a matter of open-mindedly exposing oneself to sources of evidence that one justifiably believes have a reasonable *likelihood* of engendering this kind of change in one's doxastic phenomenology (if one's current seemings regarding  $p$  are indeed the product either of a performance error or a locally skewed epistemic sensibility), and then seeing whether or not that actually happens. If one does so but it doesn't happen, then one is not being irresponsibly smug in holding on to one's belief that  $p$ . On the contrary: one's epistemic seemings, in situations where one justifiably believes that one has been responsible in one's inquiry procedures, are one's subjective best take on the objective net import of one's available evidence.<sup>25</sup>

25 A referee has expressed concern that performance errors due to factors like bias can ramify in a way that generates a problematic regress or circle: one's first-order seeming results from a performance error; it seems to oneself that this first-order seeming does not result from a performance error, but this higher-order seeming itself results from a performance error; it seems to oneself that one has been duly responsible in the inquiry that generated the first-order seeming, but this higher-order seeming too is the product of a performance error; and so forth. We have two points to make in reply. First, although there is always the possibility that one's first-order and higher-order seemings together constitute a package of mutually reinforcing performance errors, normally the best one can do to avoid this is to consider one's respected peer's opposing considerations regarding the disputed proposition  $p$  in a way that seems to oneself to be careful and open-minded. (Do that with the Monty Hall problem, for example, and you should wind up with a responsible-seeming, *ultima facie*, all-in epistemic seeming that the correct answer is  $\frac{2}{3}$ .) Second, if one experiences a package of mutually reinforcing first-order and higher-order seemings all of which constitute performance errors that are epistemically benighted (see the penultimate paragraph of Section 7), then one does not qualify as doing one's best vis-à-vis the truth goal and the sub-goal of objective epistemic rationality; in such a case, our argument in defense of steadfastness is not applicable.

## 9 Denying Meta-Uniqueness

Our argument for nonconciliation has appealed to a putative epistemic means/ends hierarchy, which includes the truth-goal as an ultimate epistemic end and then includes three kinds of epistemic rationality respectively (viz., objective rationality, sensibility-based subjective rationality, and experiential subjective rationality) as successively nested sub-goals.

The existence of these three distinct kinds of epistemic rationality, all relevant in a constitutively means-ends manner to epistemically apt belief-formation, entails that Meta-Uniqueness about epistemic rationality is false. Yet the theses known as Uniqueness and Permissiveness both presuppose Meta-Uniqueness. Those theses therefore suffer from a false presupposition. And this fact, in turn, gives the lie to the belief—widespread in the recent philosophical literature on the debate between conciliationists and nonconciliationists—that the fate of conciliationism coincides with the fate of Uniqueness, whereas the fate of nonconciliationism coincides with the fate of Permissiveness.

As regards both experiential subjective rationality and sensibility-based subjective rationality, Permissiveness clearly obtains. This is because both kinds of subjective rationality are characterized in an agent-relative matter—i.e., relative to the epistemic agent's *own* epistemic sensibility and *own* epistemic seemings.

As regards objective rationality, on the other hand, our argument in this paper is entirely compatible with Uniqueness. Suppose that Uniqueness is correct for objective rationality.<sup>26</sup> Suppose too that two persons A and B who rightly regard one another as global epistemic peers are such that (i) one and the same doxastic attitude toward proposition *p* is (uniquely) objectively rational for each of them, given their respective available bodies of total available pertinent evidence, (ii) person A has the objectively rational doxastic attitude toward *p*,

26 Uniqueness, as formulated in the passage from Shoenfield (2014) we quoted in Section 1, concerns what she calls “doxastic attitudes.” She intends them to be understood as being individuated in a fine-grained way. She takes them to be the putative psychological states called credences. We ourselves take a particular doxastic attitude toward *p* to be either (i) a belief in *p* that possesses a specific degree of strength, or (ii) a state of suspended belief concerning *p* that attaches a specific degree of plausibility to *p*. (Recall that for us, plausibility and strength can have various *qualitative* degrees both comparative and non-comparative, but typically are not quantifiable.) Of course, even if Uniqueness regarding objective rationality does not hold for doxastic attitudes as individuated in this fine-grained way, it might still hold with respect to the coarse-grained doxastic attitudes of belief and suspended belief.

and (iii) person B has a different, objectively irrational, doxastic attitude toward  $p$ . (Condition (i) might obtain because the common-ground evidence constitutes each person's total pertinent evidence; or it might obtain because each person's total pertinent evidence has the same net import vis-à-vis  $p$ , even if one person's total pertinent evidence differs somewhat from the other's.) Insofar as B's doxastic attitude is experientially subjectively rational (and perhaps thereby is sensibility-based subjectively rational as well), and as long as this doxastic attitude is not epistemically benighted, B is *doing his/her epistemically responsible best, qua situated epistemic agent*. And it is rationally permissible, arguably even rationally required, for B to do his/her epistemically responsible best in belief formation.

### Acknowledgements

For helpful discussion and/or comments, we thank Nathan Ballantyne, Stewart Cohen, Eyal Tal, Mark Timmons, and an anonymous referee.

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