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RATIONAL DISAGREEMENT AFTER FULL DISCLOSURE

ABSTRACT

The question I consider is this:

> *The Question*: Can two people – who are, and realize they are, intellectually virtuous to about the same degree – both be rational in continuing knowingly to disagree after full disclosure (by each to the other of all the relevant evidence they can think of) while at the same time thinking that the other may well be rational too?

I distinguish two kinds of rationality – internal and external – and argue in section 1 that, whichever kind we have in mind, the answer to The Question is 'yes' (though that positive answer is less wholehearted in the case of external rationality). Then, in section 2, I briefly make some more general remarks about when discovering a disagreement provides a defeater and when it doesn't. In the final section, I consider an important objection to the answer given in section 1 to The Question.

Consider two friends, both of whom are – and seem to each other to be – intellectually virtuous. (For the purposes of this paper, to be intellectually virtuous is to be intelligent, thoughtful, and sincerely seeking the truth.) Neither friend is, or seems to the other to be, noticeably more or less intellectually virtuous than the other. Now suppose that these friends discover that they disagree with each other on a matter of some importance to them (political or moral or religious). And suppose they patiently take the time to lay out for each other all the relevant evidence they can think of for their respective positions (that's what I'll call 'full disclosure' of evidence). Moreover, suppose that after doing this, their disagreement persists and yet neither one has a change of mind about their being roughly equal in intellectual virtue. The question I want to consider is this:

> *The Question*: Can two people – who are, and realize they are, intellectually virtuous to about the same degree – both be rational in continuing knowingly to disagree after full disclosure (by each to the other of all the relevant evidence they can think of) while at the same time thinking that the other may well be rational too?

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This question is of importance to us because we often find ourselves in such situations and we want to know how best to understand them. It's tempting to think that – in light of our recognition of the other person's intellectual virtue – we should be respectful of the one with whom we continue to disagree, which seems to involve thinking this other person's position is rational, despite our persistent disagreement.[1] It's also tempting to think that if someone of equal intellectual virtue disagrees with us even after full disclosure, then if that person's position is rational, we aren't rational in continuing to hold a different view on the matter: we should either give up our view or conclude that the other person's position is not rational. This second temptation pushes us toward a negative answer to The Question, and much of the recent literature leans in this direction.[2]

Support for a negative answer to The Question can arise in different ways. One might think the answer is 'no', either because (i) even though both parties might be rational in continuing knowingly to disagree, neither would be rational in thinking the other's position is rational or (ii) although one of them could be rational in continuing knowingly to disagree, they couldn't both be rational in continuing knowingly to disagree or (iii) neither could be rational in continuing knowingly to disagree in those circumstances – the rational response for each is to withhold judgment about the disputed matter. I will be distinguishing two kinds of rationality – internal and external – and arguing that, whichever kind we have in mind, the answer to The Question is 'yes' (though that positive answer is less wholehearted in the case of external rationality).

The distinction between internal and external rationality can be understood by considering a man who forms a noninferential belief that p in response to an experience E. Suppose that he has experience E only as a result of cognitive malfunction due to brain damage. But suppose that, for humans, the epistemically appropriate way to respond to experience of the same phenomenal type as E is to believe p. Is this belief that p rational or not? One way to address this question is to make use of a distinction introduced by Plantinga between internal rationality and external rationality. According to Plantinga (2000, 110–2), internal rationality has to do with what goes on in belief formation "downstream from experience", whereas external rationality is broader in that it also depends on what goes on in belief formation causally prior to or upstream from experience. As I'll be using these terms, a belief is *internally rational* if and only if it is an epistemically appropriate response to the subject's mental states.[3] And a belief is *externally rational* if and only if the believer's cognitive processing mechanisms are working as they epistemically should be in producing the belief (including where their working well is not in response to the subject's mental states). Thus, external rationality requires, at the very least, that in cases where a belief is based on experiential evidence, this experiential evidence is not itself due to cognitive malfunction or manipulations of the believer's cognitive processing mechanisms by a deceptive evil demon or a mad scientist's supercomputer. This is something not required for internal rationality. So, returning to the example of the man who forms B in response to E – an

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experience he has only as a result of cognitive malfunction – we can say that his belief is internally rational (since it isn't epistemically inappropriate for him to hold B on the basis of E) but it isn't externally rational (since he has experience E as a result of cognitive malfunction, which means that some of the cognitive mechanisms involved in the production of B aren't working as they epistemically should).

The paper will proceed as follows. In section 1, I will give my answer to The Question, looking first at internal rationality, then at external rationality. Then, in section 2, I'll lay out my view on when discovering a disagreement provides a defeater and when it doesn't. In the final section, I'll consider an important objection to my answer to The Question.

1. ANSWERING *THE QUESTION*

1.1. Internal Rationality

Let me spell out the scenario I have in mind in support of an affirmative answer to The Question (where the rationality in question is internal rationality). Consider a disagreement between two women, S1 and S2, each of whom is intellectually virtuous and recognizes that the other is roughly equal to herself in intellectual virtue. They disagree about the truth value of p, where p is some fairly narrow claim such as *capital punishment is an appropriate governmental response to certain crimes* or *God exists* or *lying is always morally wrong*. S1 thinks p is true and S2 thinks p is false. S1 and S2 also differ in their broader perspectives, which contain p or ~p as a part. S1 holds outlook O1 containing p whereas S2 holds O2 containing ~p. (If p is a claim like the one about capital punishment, we can think of O1 as being some broader *political* outlook; if p is a claim like *God exists*, we can think of O1 as being some broader *religious* outlook;[4] and if p is a claim like the one about lying, we can think of O1 as being some broader *moral* outlook.) We can fill out O1 and O2 a little further as follows:

O1 contains as key ingredients:

- p
- a theory of error (applied to those roughly equal in intellectual virtue who believe the key ingredients of O2) according to which the apparent insight that the key ingredients of O2 are true is not a genuine insight

O2 contains as key ingredients:

- ~p
- a theory of error (applied to those roughly equal in intellectual virtue who believe the key ingredients of O1) according to which the apparent insight that the key ingredients of O1 are true is not a genuine insight

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In this scenario, S1 and S2 have each done their best to share with each other all of the evidence they have in support of p and ~p respectively. This includes reporting on the apparent insights that S1 has in support of the key ingredients of O1 and that S2 has in support of the key ingredients of O2.[5] These beliefs – of S1 in p and the theory of error in O1 and of S2 in ~p and the theory of error in O2 – are each partially based on an apparent insight that the propositional content of the belief so based is true.[6] If there are no defeaters, the rational response to a strong apparent insight that p – like the rational response to a strong apparent memory that p – is to believe p. I will argue that in this scenario, both S1 and S2 are internally rational in continuing to take the attitude they do toward p (belief in one case, disbelief in the other) *and also* in thinking that the other may well be internally rational in taking the contrary attitude toward p.

The first thing to notice is that, even after full disclosure, S1 and S2 don't have the same evidence. Reporting their apparent insights to each other is not the same as giving those apparent insights to each other. Whereas S2 *has* the apparent insight that ~p, S1 merely has the belief that S2 has the apparent insight that ~p.[7] The second thing to consider is why S1's recognition that S2 believes ~p doesn't count as an undercutting defeater for S1's belief that p.[8] After all, sometimes when we learn that another person disagrees with us about some proposition, this gives us a reason to think our belief wasn't reliably formed. The reason S1 doesn't have a defeater for her belief that p has to do with how strongly justified[9] her belief that p is (independently of her discovery of her disagreement with S2) and how strongly S1 doubts or questions (or should doubt or question) the reliability of her belief that p (in response to S1's discovery of her disagreement with S2). (In section 2 of the paper I say more about when discovery of a disagreement gives a defeater and when it doesn't.)

Let's consider our scenario, first before and then after S1 learns of S2's disagreement with her about p. Before S1 learns of this disagreement, she has apparent insights that p and that the theory of error in O1 is true. The right response downstream from those experiences (i.e., the experiences of having those apparent insights) is to believe p and the theory of error in O1. Thus, S1's beliefs that p and that the theory of error in O1 is true are internally rational. In fact, we can stipulate that, given the strength of the apparent insights in support of these beliefs, S1's beliefs in p and in the theory of error in O1 are *very strongly* justified: the right response for S1 to these apparent insights is to have a very high degree of confidence that both p and the theory of error in O1 are true. Now what happens when S1 learns that S2, whom S1 rightly thinks is roughly on a par with her in terms of intellectual virtue, believes that ~p? (Let's assume that the only *new* evidence S2 provides is the report of her apparent insight in support of ~p and her consequent belief that ~p.) Given S1's rational high confidence that p, we know it will take a fairly powerful potential defeater to actually defeat S1's belief that p. And given S1's rational high confidence in her theory of error for those roughly equal in intellectual virtue who (like S2) reject p, her recognition that *S2*

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believes ∼*p* doesn't count as a "fairly powerful potential defeater" for S1's belief that p. Instead, it fits nicely with her rational endorsement of her broader outlook, O1, which includes both p and the theory of error for those (like S2, she now discovers) who believe ∼p. As a result, S1 remains internally rational in her belief that p despite her recognition that S2, whom S1 rightly views as roughly on a par with herself in terms of intellectual virtue, believes ∼p. (Is there any problem with thinking that the theory of error S1 adopts explaining S2's error doesn't assume that S2 is inferior in terms of intellectual virtue? No. For S1 and S2 to realize correctly that there is a rough equality in intellectual virtue between them doesn't imply that either S1 or S2 thinks of the other as being roughly on a par with herself in terms of having reliable apparent insights with respect to p; nor does it imply that S1 and S2 *are* roughly equal in terms of the reliability of their apparent insights.[10])

The same points can be made with respect to S2's belief that ∼p. She, after all, has apparent insights that S1 lacks, namely, apparent insights that ∼p and that the theory of error in O2 is true. (Additionally, she lacks apparent insights S1 has, namely, that p and that the theory of error in O1 is true.) As a result of these insights she has, S2 has a very strongly justified belief that ∼p. And S2's rational high confidence in her theory of error for those who (like S1) reject ∼p has the result that S2's recognition that *S1 believes p* doesn't count as a very powerful potential defeater for S2's belief that ∼p. Consequently, S2 remains internally rational in her belief that ∼p despite her recognition that S1, whom S2 rightly views as roughly on a par with herself in terms of intellectual virtue, believes p. Moreover, S1 can recognize (in light of what I've said so far in this paragraph) that S2 is internally rational in believing ∼p even though S1 is internally rational in believing p. Similarly, S2 can recognize (in light of the remarks in the previous paragraph) that S1 is internally rational despite their disagreement.

For these reasons, we may conclude that the answer to The Question is affirmative when the rationality in question is internal.

1.2. External Rationality

My affirmative answer to The Question in subsection 1.2 commits me to the following three theses:

> I1: In a case where two people of roughly equal intellectual virtue (who recognize this equality) continue knowingly to disagree even after full disclosure, it is possible that *one* of them is internally rational in continuing to disagree.
>
> I2: In a case where two people of roughly equal intellectual virtue (who recognize this equality) continue knowingly to disagree even after full disclosure, it is possible that *both* parties are internally rational in continuing to disagree.
>
> I3: In a case where two people of roughly equal intellectual virtue (who recognize this equality) continue knowingly to disagree even after full disclosure, it is possible that both parties are internally rational in continuing to disagree *and* in thinking that the other may well be internally rational in continuing to disagree.

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But in light of I3, one wonders: if you are internally rational in disagreeing with someone and in thinking she is internally rational in continuing to disagree, how do you account for her believing what you think is false?

I will consider three explanations. The most natural one is that, although the other person is internally rational in holding her contrary belief, she isn't externally rational in holding it. Perhaps she is subject to some cognitive malfunction upstream from experience, something that produces in her the experience of a misleading apparent insight in support of her contrary belief (it's that misleading apparent insight that makes her belief internally rational). A second explanation is that, although the other person's belief is externally rational, it isn't formed in an epistemically appropriate environment.[11] I'm thinking here of cases like the one in the movie *The Truman Show*, where the main character, Truman, is the victim of a massive coordinated deception involving all the people he knows. Here the problem has nothing to do with Truman's cognitive functioning (upstream or downstream from experience) but with the deceptiveness of his environment, including the people in it. A third explanation is that, although the other person's belief is externally rational and formed in an epistemically appropriate environment, that guarantees only that it is *likely* to be true, not that it is true. Suppose you believe you own a car and that this belief is externally rational and formed in an epistemically appropriate environment. If, a few seconds ago, unbeknownst to you, a stray meteorite destroyed your only car, then your belief is false. Here the explanation is that the reliability of externally rational beliefs formed in an epistemically appropriate environment is combined with unlikely falsehood.

In light of these possible explanations for the falsity of an internally rational belief, consider these three theses, parallel to I1–I3, but applying to external rationality:

> E1: In a case where two people of roughly equal intellectual virtue (who recognize this equality) continue to knowingly disagree even after full disclosure, it is possible that *one* of them is externally rational in continuing to disagree.

> E2: In a case where two people of roughly equal intellectual virtue (who recognize this equality) continue to knowingly disagree even after full disclosure, it is possible that *both* parties are externally rational in continuing to disagree.

> E3: In a case where two people of roughly equal intellectual virtue (who recognize this equality) continue to knowingly disagree even after full disclosure, it is possible that both parties are externally rational in continuing to disagree *and* in thinking that the other may well be externally rational in continuing to disagree.

Given I1, E1 seems true. There is no reason the person who is internally rationally couldn't also be externally rational. But what about E2? Could both parties to

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a disagreement be externally rational? The second and third explanations from the previous paragraph suggest ways that a person could have a false belief while still being externally rational: she could be in an epistemically inappropriate environment or the reliability of an externally rational belief formed in an epistemically appropriate environment could be combined with unlikely falsehood. If only one of the parties to the disagreement were in an epistemically inappropriate environment[12] or subject to unlikely error despite reliability, then both might be externally rational even though they hold contrary beliefs. Thus, it seems that E2 is true too.

Consider finally E3. What matters here is the phrase "may well be" in E3. If that just means that it's possible that the other is externally rational, then the reasons given in the previous paragraph for E2 would enable an externally rational person to think that someone holding a contrary belief "may well be" externally rational. So on that reading of "may well be", E3 seems true too.

But despite what I've just said in support of E3, I think the most natural outcome of a case where both parties to a disagreement sensibly believe the other is internally rational but mistaken is that both parties will also sensibly think the other's belief is *probably* externally irrational – i.e., the other probably has some cognitive processing problem that has resulted in her having misleading experiential evidence for a false proposition. That seems more likely than the possibility that the other has a reliably formed belief that is, improbably, false (especially if you are explaining systematic disagreement between two people across a large number of topics). It also seems more plausible than thinking the two of you are in different epistemic environments (which you'll have to think if you believe the other is in an epistemically inappropriate environment – after all, you won't be rational in continuing to hold your belief if you think you formed it in an epistemically inappropriate environment). Thus, given that these are the three most likely explanations for the error of the other, each person will, if sensible, think the other is probably externally irrational. (Indeed, with regard to persistent moral, religious, and political disagreements, I find it difficult to take seriously the other two explanations.) But at most one of the parties to the dispute will be basing her belief in the disputed proposition (and in the probable external irrationality of the other) on *nonmisleading* evidence. And at most one of them will have knowledge of the disputed proposition.

But can one sensibly think that another person, (rightly) viewed as roughly on a par with oneself in terms of intellectual virtue, is externally irrational in her beliefs? Yes. For, as I already indicated above, in thinking that one's friend is roughly on a par with oneself in terms of intellectual virtue, one needn't think that the apparent insights of one's friend are produced in a cognitively healthy and fitting way. It might be claimed that it's an intellectual virtue to have your apparent insights produced in a cognitively healthy and epistemically fitting way. But that's not how I'm using the term 'intellectual virtue' in this paper. I'm using that term to refer to intelligence, thoughtfulness, and sincerity in seeking the truth.

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2. WHEN DOES DISAGREEMENT GIVE A DEFEATER?

In the previous section I've argued that recognized disagreement about p with someone you view as roughly equal to you in intellectual virtue *needn't* give you a defeater for your belief that p. But I've acknowledged that such disagreement *can* give you a defeater for your belief that p. Under what conditions does such disagreement give you a defeater for your belief that p? The answer I endorse is given by the following principle:

> D: If in response to recognizing that S disagrees with you about p (which you believe), you either do or epistemically should disbelieve or seriously[13] question or doubt the claim that you are, on this occasion, more trustworthy than S with respect to p, then your belief that p is defeated by this recognition; otherwise, not.

D identifies two circumstances in which discovering disagreement results in a defeater: when you *do* disbelieve or seriously question or doubt that:

> C: you are, on this occasion, more trustworthy than S (who disagrees with you about p) with respect to p;

and when you epistemically *should* (but perhaps don't) disbelieve or seriously question or doubt that C.[14] In what follows I'll be ignoring the first of these circumstances and focusing on the second.[15]

When *should* you disbelieve or seriously question or doubt C? When is that the epistemically appropriate response to recognizing that S disagrees with you about p? It depends on whether disbelieving or seriously questioning or doubting C is the epistemically appropriate response to your mental states – states which include your newly acquired recognition that S disagrees with you about p. In virtue of what is your continued belief that p an epistemically appropriate or epistemically inappropriate response to your mental states? Unfortunately there are many different answers to this question in the literature. Some will say it depends on whether your mental states are a reliable indicator of the belief's truth. Others will say it depends on whether the belief fits your evidence. Still others will say it depends on whether holding that belief in response to your mental states is in accord with the proper functioning of your cognitive faculties. But when exactly is a response of belief or doubt in accord with the proper functioning of your cognitive faculties – or when exactly does a belief or doubt fit your evidence? Here I don't think there are many uncontroversial answers available. We have to look at specific cases. And when we do, I think we'll find disagreement in at least some of the cases about what we should do – disagreement about whether or not the belief or doubt in question is a fitting or properly functioning response to the subject's mental states. It's unfortunate that, even after full disclosure of evidence among people seemingly equal in intellectual virtue, disagreement persists about precisely when disagreement provides a defeater. But I think that's what we'll find.

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3. AN OBJECTION

In this final section, I want to address an objection to my claim that recognized disagreement about p (after full disclosure) with someone you view as roughly equal to you in intellectual virtue *needn't* give you a defeater for your belief that p.

Consider a case of the sort described in section I, where S1 recognizes that S2 is in an exactly parallel position to S1 – viewing S1 the way S1 views S2. It's true that, on the basis of her apparent insights, S1 has a high degree of confidence that p, a high degree of confidence in the genuineness of her own insights, and also a high degree of confidence in her theory of error both for S2's contrary belief and for S2's theory of error that accompanies it. But there's this relevant factor: S1 can easily see that it's a live possibility for someone with roughly her degree of intellectual virtue to be highly confident in the ways just mentioned and yet be mistaken. After all, S1 thinks that S2 is just such a person – highly confident in exactly parallel ways and yet mistaken. Shouldn't this give S1 pause? Doesn't this imply that S1 epistemically *should* give up her high confidence in p and the theory of error in O1? For she can see that confidence just like hers can be misleading, as she thinks it is in the case of S2's high confidence in ~p and the theory of error in O2.[16]

The objection here is that if you can easily see how someone in a parallel situation is mistakenly confident in her views, you should have significant doubts (significant enough to withhold judgment) about whether you are right in your confidence in your views. And upon having such doubts, you have an undercutting defeater for your beliefs. (If you are explicitly withholding judgment about whether your confidence in p is mistaken, then it seems you have an undercutting defeater for your belief that p.) If this were true, then both S1 and S2 should – after full mutual disclosure of all the evidence they can think of and reflection on their persistent disagreement – withhold p. To put it another way, in cases of persistent disagreement after full disclosure with someone you view as equal to yourself in intellectual virtue, recognizing that the other disagrees with you about p should lead you to seriously question or doubt:

> C: you are, on this occasion, more trustworthy than S (who disagrees with you about p) with respect to p.

That's the objection.

But is it correct? Let's formulate this question a little more carefully. Suppose S1 believes p and that her evidence is E, where:

> *E is the evidence S1 has in virtue of the following being true*: On the basis of apparent insights, S1 has a high degree of confidence that p, a high degree of confidence in the genuineness of her own insights, and also a high degree of confidence in her theory of error both for S2's contrary belief that ~p and for S2's theory of error for those believing p. After full mutual disclosure of evidence with S2 (whom S1 views as roughly equal to herself in intellectual virtue), S1 believes that S2 is in a parallel position with respect to her: she believes that S2 has a high degree of confidence that ~p, a high degree of confidence in

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> the genuineness of her own insights, and also a high degree of confidence in her theory of error both for S1's contrary belief that p and for S1's theory of error for S2. As a result, S1 believes that a person of roughly equal intellectual virtue can be – and in fact is – highly confident in the sorts of ways S1 is and yet mistaken.

The question is whether it is internally rational for S1 to continue believing p in response to E. The objector says it isn't. She thinks internal rationality requires S1 to withhold p in response to E; she thinks this because E includes the recognition of persistent disagreement about p with someone of equal intellectual virtue and the objector thinks that that gives you a defeater for your belief that p.

I disagree. I think that the rational response for S1 to E is to continue believing p. However, I don't have an argument for that conclusion, just as I don't have an argument for the conclusion that the rational response for us to a tactile experience like the one we typically have when grabbing a billiard ball is to believe something like "that's a small hard spherical object". I can see, in the case of the billiard ball, that that belief *is* a rational response to the tactile experience in question. But I don't have an argument for why that is so. Likewise, I don't have an argument for the view that the rational response for S1 to E is to continue believing p. Nevertheless, I will mention two examples that I think help us to see that this is so. Moreover, I will offer a reason for the objector to give up her objection.

3.1. Two Examples

The first example I'll offer in place of an argument is the response most of us have to external world skepticism. We realize that it's possible for things to seem to us perceptually just as they do now even though we are mistaken (e.g., if we were the victims of an evil demon or hooked up to the Matrix). And yet we think it's rational (internally and externally) for us to believe that there is an external world, though we can't prove it to the satisfaction of a skeptical opponent. The point of this example is that the possibility that we could have evidence of just the sort we have now and yet be mistaken in our perceptual beliefs doesn't automatically mean that we should seriously question or doubt the reliability of our perceptual beliefs (thereby getting an undercutting defeater for our perceptual beliefs). Likewise, the fact that we think someone is mistaken (in a moral or religious or political disagreement with us) despite her being confident in ways similar to the ways in which we are confident doesn't automatically mean that we should seriously question or doubt the reliability of our beliefs in which we're so confident. It's true that in the disagreement case, we're talking about an actual person we know, not a mere possibility as in the case of external world skepticism. But the lesson is the same nevertheless, as the next example is intended to show.

Consider, as our second example, a case of moral disagreement about how to evaluate the following very disturbing behavior of Jack. Jack takes great pleasure in slowly killing young children by torturing them while forcing their parents and

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siblings to watch. He has devised a way to do this often, without fear of getting caught. I assume that you think this behavior of Jack's is morally wrong – extremely so. (Although it's unpleasant, it's helpful for the purposes of my argument to imagine such a case in some detail; it's helpful because the imagining increases one's confidence that Jack's behavior is morally wrong.) But you have two friends – both of whom seem to you to be about as intellectually virtuous as you – who disagree. One is an ethical egoist who thinks this behavior of Jack's is morally right since it maximizes Jack's self-interest; the other is a moral nihilist who thinks it's not the case that Jack's behavior is morally wrong since there are no moral facts and nothing is either morally wrong or morally right. All three of you feel disgusted by Jack's behavior and very strongly wish that Jack wouldn't engage in it. But only you think it is morally wrong. Now, each of you lays before the others all of the relevant considerations you can think of for your respective views on Jack's behavior, including arguments for and against moral nihilism and ethical egoism. And each of you has a theory of error explaining why the other two mistakenly think as they do about the morality of Jack's behavior.[17] Moreover, each of you believes that the other two have strong apparent insights in support of their own views, including the theories of error they have. The result is that, because of what you discover about these friends of yours, you think that people with confidence in some moral proposition p and in a theory of error for those who reject p can base that confidence on untrustworthy apparent insights. Now, consider this question: should you, in light of all this, have significant doubts about the reliability of your *own* apparent insight that Jack's behavior is morally wrong? Is this what internal rationality requires?

It seems that this is *not* what internal rationality requires. And this is so even when we re-emphasize that you believe that the other two feel as strongly about their moral views and theories of error as you do about yours – and yet they are mistaken. What makes this reaction plausible, I think, has something to do with the extremely high confidence we have that Jack's behavior is morally wrong, that our belief about the morality of Jack's behavior is reliably formed, and that those who don't see that Jack's behavior is morally wrong lack some genuine insight had by the rest of us.[18] Instead of being moved to doubt the reliability of our own beliefs on the topic, we are moved to feel badly for the ones with whom we disagree and to be glad that we are fortunate enough not to lack the insight we have or to have the misleading apparent insights that they have. The intuitive support for your own reliability on the topic of the morality of Jack's behavior[19] significantly outweighs any reason to doubt that reliability that is provided by your recognition that someone equal to you in intellectual virtue could have your same level of confidence for parallel views (opposing yours) and yet be mistaken. Those who (like me) don't take seriously the view that Jack's behavior is not morally wrong are *internally* rational in continuing to think as they do, despite the fact that they are aware of others with parallel apparent insights and beliefs in support of their alternative views. And if the apparent insights of those who think Jack's behavior

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is morally wrong are genuine insights, then it seems their continued endorsement of this view about Jack's behavior is *externally* rational too.

What should we say about the rationality of the moral nihilist and the ethical egoist in continuing to hold their views? Given that we've stipulated that they have the same kind of confidence, based on their apparent insights, in support of their moral views and theories of error for their opponents as you have in support of yours, it seems that the sensible thing to say is the following. Each of them is internally rational in continuing to hold their views, since that is the right response to the strong apparent insights the three of you have, respectively, in support of your own moral views and theories of error. But it can't be that all three of you have nonmisleading apparent insights about the moral status of Jack's behavior. The natural conclusion for you, for reasons I explained near the end of section 1, is that the apparent insights of your two friends are misleading and that they are probably not externally rational in believing that it's not the case that Jack's behavior is morally wrong. (Your two friends will hold a similar view about you. But – given the plausible assumption that your insight is genuine – it is they rather than you who are mistaken.)

We can succinctly summarize my use, in this context, of the second example if we describe your evidence – in disagreeing with your moral nihilist and ethical egoist friends about the wrongness of Jack's behavior – in the way evidence E was described above (substituting you for S1, your moral nihilist and ethical egoist friends for S2, and the claim that Jack's behavior is wrong for p):

> *E* is the evidence you have in virtue of the following being true*: On the basis of apparent insights, you have a high degree of confidence that Jack's behavior is morally wrong, a high degree of confidence in the genuineness of your own insights on this matter, and no significant support for the view that your friends are reliable on this topic. After full mutual disclosure with your friends (whom you view as roughly equal to yourself in intellectual virtue), you believe that they are in a parallel position with respect to you: you believe that they have a high degree of confidence that Jack's behavior is not morally wrong, a high degree of confidence in the genuineness of their own insights, and no significant support for the view that you are reliable on this topic. As a result, you believe that people roughly equal to you in intellectual virtue can be – and in fact are – highly confident in the sorts of ways you are and yet mistaken.

In thinking about the example of your disagreement with the moral nihilist and the ethical egoist, it seems that the rational response for you to E* is to continue believing that Jack's behavior is morally wrong. My hope is that thinking about this particular case and the reaction to it that I just described will help the objector to see why it's plausible to think that the rational response for S1 to E is to believe p (in which case, recognition of disagreement doesn't automatically give you a defeater, because it's not always the case that you epistemically should disbelieve or seriously question or doubt C).

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3.2. Disagreement about Disagreement

But suppose the objector isn't persuaded by these examples – suppose instead that the objector thinks that both of the following are false:

> A: The rational response for S1 to E is to *believe* p.
> B: The rational response for you to E* is to *believe* that Jack's behavior is morally wrong.

and that both of these are true:

> A*: The rational response for S1 to E is to *withhold* p.
> B*: The rational response for you to E* is to *withhold* the claim that Jack's behavior is morally wrong.

What then? It seems that all I can say is that, unlike the objector, I have an apparent insight that A is true and an apparent insight that B is true.[20] But I can't get the objector to also have those apparent insights. I can only report to her my apparent insights on this topic. That won't be very persuasive. And it's unsatisfying for a disagreement (about what the rational response to disagreement is) to end in this way. However, as I noted earlier, I also have a reason to offer to the objector that I hope will persuade her to give up her view that A and B are false and that A* and B* are true. I'll make the point in connection with the objector's view that B is false, but the same thing could be said about her view that A is false or about her view that A* and B* are true.

How should the objector react to a person equal to her in intellectual virtue who persists in holding B – the view that the rational response for you to E* is to continue believing that Jack's behavior is morally wrong? If after full disclosure with such a person, where that person and the objector both try to share all their relevant evidence with each other, neither is persuaded to accept the other's view about B's truth value (and if the objector views the person holding B as roughly equal to herself in intellectual virtue and sees that such a person views the objector in parallel ways), then the objector seems forced, on pain of inconsistency, to give up her view that B is false. If she thinks it's fine for her in such a circumstance to continue to thinking B is false, then she loses her complaint about S1 continuing to hold p in response to E.[21] By contrast, the person who *endorses* B is not forced, on pain of inconsistency, to give up B in such a circumstance. So at least B has the advantage of being a view one can consistently hold.

To this point, I've been responding to this objection mainly by appealing to examples that I think count against A* and lend support to A – the view that the rational response to E is to believe p. But it's also worth pointing out that it may often be that, in cases of serious disagreement (about moral or political or religious matters), we don't have evidence like E. In particular, it might often be the case that we don't have reason to think that those with whom we disagree have in support of their opposing view apparent insights that are *exactly parallel* to

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our own in support of our views. Suppose you have extremely high confidence in your apparent insight that Jack's behavior is morally wrong and your two friends tell you that they have extremely high confidence in their apparent insights that Jack's behavior isn't wrong. As we noted earlier, they can't pass on these insights or their confidence in them to you. In fact they can't even really let you know what their precise confidence level is. Nor can they know what your precise confidence level is like. So it seems that none of you is able to compare, in an informed way, the strengths of the insights on both sides of this disagreement. But then it seems that you don't have very good reason for thinking that your ethical egoist and moral nihilist friends have evidence and responses that are exactly parallel to yours. And this might make you sensibly suspect that the apparent insights they have in support of the conclusion that it's false that Jack's behavior is wrong are (unbeknownst to them) *significantly weaker* than the apparent insights you have in support of the conclusion that Jack's behavior is wrong. Given how strong your apparent insights are and how surprising it would be to learn that others (your equals in intellectual virtue) have equally strong apparent insights in support of an opposing view, the hypothesis that their apparent insights are (unbeknownst to them) significantly weaker than yours might seem to you to be the most plausible account of what's going on in this case of disagreement. Thus, although you might still acknowledge that it's *possible* for someone to have evidence and responses that are exactly parallel to yours (for an opposite conclusion), you don't think it's *actual* that someone has parallel evidence and responses – instead, you think they may well have weaker evidence. (So this won't be a case where a person has evidence E for p – for E includes the thought that those with whom one disagrees have *equally* strong apparent insights for ~p.) And that makes this case a lot more similar to the case where, although you don't think it's actual, you acknowledge that it's *possible* for someone to have exactly your perceptual experiences while being a brain in a vat or a demon victim.

To sum up my response to this objection: I disagree with the main intuition behind it, namely, that it is not rational for S1 to continue believing p in response to E. It seems to me, on the contrary, that it *is* rational for S1 to continue believing p in response to E. In support of that I gave two examples where something similar seems to be true: first, it seems rational for us to believe what we do about the external world even when we know things seem to us just as they would to the victim of a powerful deceiver (such as a Cartesian demon); second, it seems that you are rational to continue believing, in response to E*, that Jack's behavior is morally wrong. For those sympathetic to this objection who don't find these two examples convincing, I pointed out that the fact that others they view as roughly equal in intellectual virtue *do* find those two examples convincing (assuming there are others like this whom they view in this way) should lead supporters of this objection to suspend judgment about whether it is rational for S1 to continue believing p in response to E. As a result, this objector is committed, given the circumstances, to retracting the main intuition in support of the objection, whereas

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I'm not committed to any retraction of my own views given here in response to this objection. Finally, I pointed out that you might say, in response to the objector, that we don't have evidence such as E for p; instead, we have something that differs from E insofar as it doesn't include the thought that the other person's apparent insights supporting ~p are as strong as our own insights supporting p.[22]

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NOTES

1 Throughout the paper I'll be focusing on contradicting disagreement, where one person holds p and the other holds ~p. This is to be distinguished from dissenting disagreement, where one person holds p and the other withholds p.

2 Christensen (2007), Elga (2007), Feldman (2006), White (2005).

3 Note that those who think the epistemic appropriateness of a response is determined by factors such as reliability or proper function are externalists about internal rationality.

4 I'm calling a broader outlook that affirms or denies theism a 'religious outlook'. So atheistic views will count as religious outlooks according to this terminology.

5 An insight that p is an instance of "seeing" that p. An *apparent* insight that p is something that feels to a person the way an instance of her seeing that p feels to her. A *genuine* insight that p – an instance of genuinely seeing that p – is a direct noninferential awareness of p's truth that results from considering p (either at length or only briefly, either in the context of extensive reflection on matters relevant to p or in the context of focusing only on p itself).

6 We could describe the case so that the apparent insight is not in support of the theory of error itself but rather in support of some key assumption that makes it reasonable to accept that theory of error. For simplicity's sake, I'll speak as if the apparent insight supports the theory of error.

7 Some who write on the rationality of disagreement focus on cases of disagreement between those who view each other as "epistemic peers," where being an epistemic peer involves having the same evidence and being equally reliable at responding

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to that evidence. It's in part because I think that the most interesting cases of disagreement rarely involve sharing the *same* evidence that I won't be focusing on cases of disagreement between those who view each other as epistemic peers. Instead, I'll be focusing on cases of disagreement between people who view each other as roughly equal in intellectual virtue and who have tried to share all the relevant evidence they can think of with each other.

8 A defeater, as I'll be understanding it in this paper, is something that makes an internally rational belief of yours cease to be internally rational. A rebutting defeater provides a reason to think the belief is false; an undercutting defeater provides a reason for doubting or denying that the belief was reliably formed. See Bergmann (2006, ch. 6) for further discussion of defeaters.

9 Justification, as I understand it, is equivalent to internal rationality (applied to beliefs). In Bergmann (2006, ch. 5) I treated justification as if it were distinct from internal rationality. To correct that, I need to replace the following account of justification given in Bergmann (2006, 133):

> J_{PF}: S's belief B is justified iff (i) S does not take B to be defeated and (ii) the cognitive faculties producing B are (a) functioning properly, (b) truth-aimed and (c) reliable in the environments for which they were "designed".

In its place, I offer this slightly altered and (I hope) improved account:

> J_{PF}*: S's belief B is justified iff (i) S does not take B to be defeated and (ii) the cognitive faculties producing B are (a) functioning properly *in response to all of S's mental states*, (b) truth-aimed, and (c) reliable in the environments for which they were "designed".

In Bergmann (unpublished), I say more about what it means for a belief to be an epistemically appropriate response to all of a subject's mental states.

10 As I mentioned in note 7, some who write on the rationality of disagreement focus on cases of disagreement between those who view each other as epistemic peers, where being an epistemic peer involves having the same evidence and being equally reliable at responding to that evidence. It's in part because I think that many interesting cases of disagreement, like the one just described in the text, don't involve viewing the other as equally reliable with respect to the disputed proposition that I won't be focusing on cases of disagreement between those who view each other as epistemic peers. Instead, as I also said in note 7, I'll be focusing on cases of disagreement between people who view each other as roughly equal in intellectual virtue and who have tried to share all the relevant evidence they can think of with each other. (To be clear, I should note that it doesn't follow from the fact that the parties to the dispute don't view each other as being equally reliable on the topic in question that each views the other as being more reliable or as less reliable. It may be that each person holds no views at all about how reliable the other is on the issue.)

11 I don't have the space to give a careful analysis of an "epistemically appropriate environment". I hope the basic idea is clear enough for my purposes here.

12 "*Wouldn't both parties to the disagreement be in the same epistemic environment?*" To address this properly would require a fuller discussion of epistemically appropriate environments than I have space for here. It's enough, though, that one of these explanations works – namely, subject to unlikely error despite reliability.

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13 To *seriously* question or doubt p is to question or doubt p to the point where you withhold p.

14 Notice that D doesn't require (for avoiding defeat) that S *believes* C but only that it's false that S does or should disbelieve or seriously question or doubt C (which can be the case if S doesn't even consider C).

15 Some will think that it isn't sufficient for having a defeater that you *do* disbelieve or seriously question or doubt C. I don't have the space here to discuss this objection. For a defense of the view that thinking a belief is epistemically inappropriate is sufficient for making it epistemically inappropriate, see Bergmann (2006, 163–8).

16 Richard Feldman (2006, 233–5) presses this sort of objection.

17 This example would work just as well (and would perhaps be more realistic) if some or all of those involved in the disagreement had no theory of error explaining the mistake of the others (other than the suggestion that something must have gone wrong in their coming to have the apparent insights they do). The main reason I say they have theories of error for each other is to make this example more like the case of S1 who believes p in response to E (where E includes both a theory of error for S2 and a recognition of S2's theory of error for S1).

18 Tolhurst mentions something that helps to explain what's going on here. He speaks of a felt veridicality, which is a component of seemings. This felt veridicality is "the feel of truth, the feel of a state whose content reveals how things really are" (1998, 298–9). Apparent insights will produce seemings or intuitions, along with their accompanying felt veridicality. Tolhurst goes on to note that there can also be second-order seemings when one reflects on the felt veridicality component of a seeming: "When we become self-consciously aware of a seeming it seems to us that the seeming is veridical. This second-order seeming is grounded in our awareness of the feel of veridicality" (299). So when I speak, in the text, of a person's high confidence that p, we can think of the seeming on which that confident belief that p is based as involving a very strong feeling of veridicality. And the reason that high confidence that p tends to be accompanied by a high confidence that the belief that p is reliably formed is that, when one reflects on the strong felt veridicality of the seeming that p, it seems strongly to one that that seeming that p is veridical.

19 Here I have in mind the second-order seeming about the veridicality of the first order seeming about Jack's behavior. See the previous note.

20 It's not that I have an apparent insight in some general principle of rationality according to which these claims are true. Rather, I have an apparent insight that A and B are true. And I think that a general principle of rationality will be more plausible insofar as it in accords with A and B. In the same way I think that a general principle of rationality will be more plausible insofar as it accords with the view that *the rational response to E** is to believe that there's a hard smooth spherical object in my hand* (where E** is a tactile experience of the sort we typically have upon grabbing a billiard ball).

21 The objector's favored policy for dealing with persistent disagreement after full disclosure among equals in intellectual virtue requires her to withhold judgment about her favored policy itself given that it is the subject of such disagreement.

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