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Some Reluctant Skepticism about Rational Insight

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Abstract

There is much to admire in John Pittard's recent book on the epistemology of disagreement. But here we develop one concern about the role that rational insight plays in his project. Pittard develops and defends a view on which a party to peer disagreement can show substantial partiality to his own view, so long as he enjoys even moderate rational insight into the truth of his view or the cogency of his reasoning for his view. Pittard argues that this may happen in ordinary cases of religious disagreement—cases in which it's a live skeptical possibility that one is misdescribing his insight, or not having insight at all—and therefore one need not be strongly conciliatory even in the face of peer disagreement. Yet Pittard agrees that one *should* be strongly conciliatory in cases of disagreement involving, e.g., visual perception and dim rational insight, since the sort of fallible, corrigible evidence involved in such cases may be counterbalanced by symmetrical evidence on the part of one's disagreeing peer. We worry that there's an inconsistency here. If it's unreasonable to show partiality to one's visual experience (or dim rational insight) in cases like “Horse Race” and “Restaurant Check,” it's likewise unreasonable to show partiality in religious disagreements to one's moderate rational insight, fallible and corrigible as it is.

Keywords

epistemology – conciliationism – religious belief – philosophy of religion – religious disagreement

1 Introduction to Pittard's Project

John Pittard has done a great service to the epistemology of disagreement literature with his recent book. Reading through this important contribution, one cannot help but get the impression that, even after all these years of a sprawling literature, significant and conversation-changing progress can still be made. We believe Pittard has made that sort of progress. In this section, we'll briefly lay out the structure of Pittard's book and his main thesis. We find very much to agree with in Pittard's book; virtually everything, to be honest. But, given the nature of the paper we were invited to write, in subsequent sections we will develop one of the very few concerns that we had about Pittard's project, concerning the nature and scope of rational insight, and the degree to which rational insight might rescue us from the strong conciliation that disagreement can seem to require.

Pittard structures his book as a response to a puzzle. Here's that puzzle in the form of an argument for religious skepticism (Pittard 2020: 19):

The Master Argument for Disagreement-Motivated Religious Skepticism

1. S's religious outlook is justified only if S has justification for believing that most of her religious beliefs are the result of a reliable process.
2. In light of S's knowledge of systematic religious disagreement, S should believe that the processes that (otherwise) epistemically qualified people rely on to form religious beliefs are, taken as a whole, very unreliable.
3. S lacks justification for believing that her process of religious belief formation is significantly more reliable than the collective reliability of the processes that (otherwise) epistemically qualified people use to form religious beliefs.
4. If (2) and (3), then S lacks justification for believing that most of her religious beliefs are the result of a reliable process.
5. Thus, S lacks justification for believing that most of her religious beliefs are the result of a reliable process. (From [2], [3], and [4].)
6. Therefore, S's religious outlook is not justified. (From [1] and [5].)

Pittard is admirably clear about which step of this argument he rejects: premise (3). He believes that, at least sometimes, at least some people may have justification for thinking that they're in a superior position than otherwise epistemically qualified people when it comes to religious belief formation. Pittard (2019: 28) introduces a label for the proposition that, according to (3), S does not have justification to believe: "SUPERIOR." Again, Pittard rejects that, for any S, S lacks justification to believe SUPERIOR.

This is not a popular position in the literature, as it flies in the face of what Pittard (2019: 46) calls “the reasons impartiality constraint”: a subject *S* has a good agent-neutral internal reason for believing SUPERIOR only if *S* has a good *dispute-independent* agent-neutral internal reason for believing SUPERIOR.¹ As Adam Elga put it many years ago (2007: 489–490) your credence in a disputed claim should equal your conditional probability in that claim *setting aside* “your detailed reasoning (and what you know of your friend’s reasoning) about the disputed issue.” And, as David Christensen (2007: 199) famously put it, “I should assess explanations for the disagreement in a way that’s independent of my reasoning on the matter under dispute.”² That is, Christensen and Elga agree that, upon learning of the disagreement, you are meant to conditionalize on a proper subset of your evidence—a subset that includes what you know of the circumstances of disagreement, but excludes the particular contents of your assessments *and any reasoning by which you arrived at them*.

This, Pittard rejects. To explain why and how, we will next consider two cases: Restaurant Check and Extreme Restaurant Check. After that, we’ll explain Pittard’s optimism about extending his view to run-of-the-mill cases of religious disagreement. Finally, we’ll end on a skeptical note, a reason to doubt that Pittard’s insight can rescue very much of our confidence in disputed religious questions.

2 Two Cases

To see how Pittard’s view departs from those of Elga, Christensen, and others, consider this now-classic case from the disagreement literature, tracing back to Christensen (2007: 193). Here’s how Pittard characterizes it (2019: 52):

Restaurant Check

[T]wo individuals who are sharing a dinner at a restaurant with several friends both calculate in their heads what each person’s share of the total

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- 1 An “internal reason” or piece of evidence is “internally accessible to that person, which is to say reasons and evidence that are discernible from that person’s cognitive perspective” (2019: 34). An internal reason is “a reason that gives *S* justification ... that does not depend for its justificatory adequacy on any purely external factor that distinguishes *S* from her disputants (2019: 35). Agent-neutral considerations are those that are “reasonable when assessing matters from a third- person perspective” (2019: 37). Basically, an agent-neutral constraint would forbid me from giving any extra weight to a consideration because it is *mine*.
 - 2 See also his later formulation (2011: 2): “In evaluating the epistemic credentials of another’s expressed belief about *p*, in order to determine how (or whether) to modify my own belief about *p*, I should do so in a way that doesn’t rely on the reasoning behind my initial belief about *p*.”

bill is. They agree to add 20% of the posttax total for the tip and to split the check evenly among all the members of the party. Both friends do this sort of calculation often and know that the other person is no more or less reliable than they are. They usually agree on the answer in such cases. But in those instances when they do reach different answers, neither of them has proven more likely than the other to be the one who has made an error. While nothing is out of the ordinary in this case (neither friend is especially distracted or extra alert, for example), upon finishing their mental calculations they discover that their answers differ: one has arrived at an answer of \$43, and the other at \$45.

It strikes many people as obvious that, in a case like this, each friend should be conciliatory, i.e., each friend should become significantly less confident in his own answer. The view Pittard calls “strong conciliationism” would support an “equal weight” verdict in cases like this, i.e., that each friend should give the other’s answer the same weight as his own.

Some philosophers (e.g., Christensen 2007) argue from cases like Restaurant Check for agent-neutral and dispute-independent “impartiality constraints.” That is, Christensen thinks that the reason it would be wrong for either friend to remain steadfast in his answer is that, in doing so, the friend would be recklessly valuing his own answer because it is *his*, or appealing to his own disputed reasoning in a question-begging way, or both.

This is the principal strength of strong conciliationism: it provides a neat and tidy explanation of cases like Restaurant Check. But the view struggles to explain extreme extensions of such cases. Consider, for example:

Extreme Restaurant Check

Consider an (admittedly unrealistic) variant on the restaurant case, in which my friend becomes confident that our shares of the check are \$450—quite a bit over the whole tab.

CHRISTENSEN 2007: 199

In this case, it strikes many people as obvious that one needn’t be conciliatory, that one needn’t give one’s friend’s answer the same weight as his own.

Many years ago, one of us (Bogardus 2009) tried to explain why Christensen’s and Elga’s early explanations of how steadfastness in Extreme Restaurant Check is consistent with a conciliatory view fail, and offered an alternative explanation in terms of rational intuition. One very nice feature of Pittard’s project (2019: 57–61) is that he explains how a conciliatory verdict in Restaurant Check doesn’t entail Christensen’s principle of Independence. Pittard offers a

Bayesian explanation, which is essentially this (2019: 57–58): if, on my view, the fact of disagreement in Restaurant Check is more likely on the supposition that my answer is wrong than it is on the supposition that my answer is right, then upon learning of the fact of disagreement, I should reduce my credence in my answer. This explanation alone is worth the price of admission, we think, and is an important and plausible contribution to the literature.

But what's especially intriguing is Pittard's diagnosis of Extreme Restaurant Check. From the Bayesian framework that Pittard uses in his explanation of Restaurant Check, it follows that if I am *maximally* confident that my friend's answer is impossible before learning of the disagreement, then I could not rationally think the fact of disagreement is more likely on the supposition that my friend's answer is right—this would be impossible, from my perspective—than on the supposition that my answer is right. So, in the case where I'm maximally certain that my friend's answer is wrong, the fact of disagreement does not rationally require me to lower my confidence in my answer. And this is what seems to be happening when my friend answers that each of our shares of the check is clearly, obviously greater than the total bill itself.

But *why* should I be so confident that my friend's answer is wrong? We agree with Pittard's answer: rational insight. Pittard defends what he calls "weak conciliationism," a view that "rejects sweeping epistemic impartiality requirements" (2019: 95). And he gives a rationalist account of partisan justification. "According to this account ... you are sometimes justified in confidently believing that *p* in virtue of having *rational insight* into the truth or epistemic probability of *p*, or into the cogency of some argument that entails or strongly supports *p*" (2019: 120). And this is what's going on in Extreme Restaurant Check. Though Pittard (2019: 68) says this about a different case, we believe he'd say the same about Extreme Restaurant Check: "it seems that if one of the thinkers has some degree of insight into the correctness of her way of thinking about the matter (and/ or some degree of insight into the wrongness of her friend's way of thinking about the matter), then she thereby does have reason to put more trust in her own view on the matter." Yes, just so.

And, of course, Pittard (2019: 64) has something to say about why the same doesn't go in the ordinary case of Restaurant Check: "The reason why it would be wrong for [one] to appeal to the cogency of his mathematical reasoning is arguably not that this would be question-begging but that the cogency of this reasoning is no longer cognitively discernible and therefore cannot be a determinant of justification." In Restaurant Check, the cogency of one's reasoning is not "presently discernible" Pittard says on that same page. As one of us (Bogardus 2009) might have put it, while one cannot "just see" the falsity of his friend's answer when that answer is "\$45," one *can* "just see" the falsity

of his friend's answer when that answer is "\$450." And that, for Pittard, is the difference between these two cases.

So far, so good, as far as we can tell. If a party to an apparent peer disagreement does "just see" the truth of his view, it's fairly obvious that he need not be conciliatory (cf. Bogardus 2013: 15). But Pittard wishes to extend these thoughts about rational insight even to cases where one is not *maximally certain* of the truth of his own answer, or the falsity of his interlocutor's answer. We are far less sanguine about Pittard's ability to thread this needle. To explain why, we'll next consider the culmination of Pittard's view, as it applies to the case of a religious believer Mary. We'll see how Pittard envisions a kind of *moderate* rational insight giving Mary good grounds for partiality, in an ordinary case of religious disagreement.

3 Mary's Case

Pittard presents a specific example concerning a religious believer named Mary (2019: 224–227), who encounters religious disagreement in which no single party to the disagreement can claim any clear advantage in what he calls "*p*-neutral credentials."³ The point of Mary's case is to illustrate what, on his view, would be one reasonable response to religious disagreement on the part of someone who holds the view he defends in his book: rationalist weak conciliationist. This illustration is meant to show how such a person, who enjoys moderate religious insight, may end up with a substantially higher credence in his religious beliefs upon learning of disagreement than would a strong conciliationist. This is, to our minds, the payoff of Pittard's project in this book. So, it's worth taking a careful look at how it's meant to work.

Mary lives in a simplified world with only five religious outlooks, R₁–R₅, which are mutually exclusive. Mary enjoys "moderately clear insight" (2019: 222) into considerations that strongly support R₁ over its competitors: while Mary's insight is genuine, it is "not so clear as to effectively rule out the possibility that she actually lacks insight on the matter, or that the insight she has does not support R₁ as decisively as she thinks" (2019: 223). As a result, Mary's credence on this basis, prior to learning of any disagreement, would be 0.8. And this would be rational, Pittard stipulates.

3 Pittard (2019: 112) explains: "P-neutral considerations are those considerations whose force can be appreciated independently of any particular view on *p* and independently of any particular opinion regarding the merits of (potentially controversial) lines of reasoning that might be offered in support of *p* or its negation."

Now, suppose she learns that “either there is a strong consensus in favor of whatever view she happens to favor or opinion is evenly divided across R₁–R₅” (2019: 224). So, there are three possibilities she must consider, and (supposing she’s rational) distribute her credence over. Here’s how Pittard (2019: 224) explains these possibilities:

[F]irst, that there is consensus in favor of her view (which happens to be R₁); second, that there is disagreement but one religious group contains members who have genuine insight into the greater rational merits of their perspective; and third, that there is disagreement and none of the five groups contains members who have insight into the greater rational merits of their view.

Pittard imagines Mary distributing her credences in the following way:

Mary’s credences before knowledge of disagreement

	Consensus	Disagreement but one group has insight	Disagreement and no group has insight
R ₁	0.63	0.16	0.02
~R ₁	0.07	0.04	0.08

Supposing she thinks it 10% percent likely that, given this religious disagreement, no group has insight, then rationalist weak conciliationism agrees with strong conciliationism here: Mary must show perfect impartiality. So, she should distribute her 0.1 credence in this possibility evenly among R₁–R₅, giving only 0.02 to R₁, and the rest to the other religions (in the row labeled “~R₁”).

Consider next the middle column, and suppose she thinks it 20% likely that, given this religious disagreement, one group has insight. Here, rationalist weak conciliationism and strong conciliationism issue different verdicts. Strong conciliationism still calls for perfect impartiality, in which case Mary ought to distribute her 0.2 credence evenly among R₁–R₅, which would result in a 0.04 credence in R₁, and a 0.16 credence for the other religions in row ~R₁. By contrast, rationalist weak conciliationism allows Mary to show her own view partiality, in light of her insight. As Pittard (2019: 225) puts it, “the clarity of Mary’s insight into considerations favoring R₁ gives her reason to think it more likely that the R₁ group is the group with genuine insight and that R₁ is true.” This is why, in the table, Mary allots 4/5 of her 20% credence to R₁, and 1/5 to ~R₁.

The first column represents the possibility where there is consensus favoring R₁, Mary’s view. In that case, Mary can appeal not only to her rational insight,

but also to her impartial reasons in favor of R_1 —while Pittard thinks these should be bracketed off in the case of disagreement, they need not be on the supposition that there’s consensus. And, in that case, Pittard imagines Mary assigning 90% of her remaining 0.7 credence to R_1 , and 10% to $\sim R_1$. Notice that her total credence in R_1 is the sum of the first row: 0.81.⁴

Now, suppose that Mary learns there is religious disagreement concerning R_1 – R_5 , and not consensus in favor of R_1 . Pittard imagines Mary conditionalizing on this information like a good Bayesian, “adjusting her credences in columns 2 and 3 in a manner such that they add up to 1 without any changes in their ratios to one another” (2019: 226). Mary’s final credences are reflected in the following table:

Mary’s credences after conditionalizing

	Disagreement but one group has insight	Disagreement and no group has insight
R_1	0.533	0.067
$\sim R_1$	0.133	0.267

Her new credence in R_1 —the sum of the top row—is 0.6. What explains this? What she has learned is that she lacks any *impartial* reasons in favor of R_1 , given the reality of religious pluralism. These reasons are now disputed, and therefore must be bracketed off. And she has also encountered some degree of evidence that no one enjoys religious insight: the distribution of opinion is more surprising on the hypothesis of genuine insight than on the hypothesis that nobody enjoys insight into any of R_1 – R_5 . So, her credence in R_1 has dropped significantly in the face of religious pluralism, from 0.81 to 0.6.

But—and here’s the upshot of this whole discussion—this is significantly higher than the credence that would be recommended by strong conciliationism. Strong conciliationism would require that Mary be strictly impartial among R_1 – R_5 , and therefore have a final credence of 0.2 in R_1 . That is, Mary shows partiality to R_1 , in light of her insight, in the column labeled “Disagreement but one group has insight.” If that column had not been there, then when the “Consensus” column was eliminated, Mary would have been forced to

4 Notice how all the cells of this table sum to 1. What explains the probabilities assigned to each of the columns? Pittard explains (2019: 226): “there is no general principle that will determine these values. Mary’s views on human cognitive capacities, both in general and in the religious domain in particular, will inform the probability that she assigns to consensus and to the disagreement possibilities.”

distribute the values in that column to the only remaining column—“Disagreement and no group has insight”—without changing any ratios. And the result would have been a credence of 0.2 in R_1 .

Mary’s case can be a little bewildering, since it is just one possible way a rationalist weak conciliationist might assign credences to the various possibilities, and one possible way in which he might show partiality to his own view. So, one wonders how else things might have been, and to just what degree rationalist weak conciliationism offers a benefit over strong conciliationism. To see the general principle at work here, we’ll present the general case of n -view disagreement explicitly, where “ R_1 ” represents the subject’s view, and “ $\sim R_1$ ” represents the other of the n views. To do this, consider that Mary’s original table was three cells by two cells, with six nonzero, real values. We’ll label each cell of the table (1,1) to (2,3), the first number indicating the row, the second indicating the column. The values represent the subject’s credence distribution on the question, and so they sum to 1.

Credences before knowledge of disagreement

	Consensus	Disagreement but one group has insight	Disagreement and no group has insight
R_1	(1, 1)	(1, 2)	(1, 3)
$\sim R_1$	(2, 1)	(2, 2)	(2, 3)

One additional requirement is that the value (2,3) is exactly $n-1$ times the value (1,3), i.e., the one in the first row, third column. This is just to say that the third column exhibits *impartiality*: if we were to eliminate the all possibilities except those of the third column, Mary’s view being correct is just as likely as any of the other views being correct. And, so, Mary’s view being *incorrect* is $n-1$ times as likely as the alternative, *because there are n total views under consideration*. The second additional requirement is that the value (2,2) is *less than* $n-1$ times the value (1,2). This is just to say that the second column exhibits *partiality*. Mary’s view being correct is *more* likely than chance, were the possibilities of this column the only ones.

This, of course, entails that, once one eliminates the possibilities of the first column, the sum of the conditionalized values of the first row must be greater than $1/n$.⁵ And this is why, so long as Mary shows *any* degree of partiality to R_1 in light of her rational insight, her final credence in R_1 will be higher than what strong conciliationism recommends.

5 If $(n-1)a > b$, then $(a+c)/((n-1)c+b+a+c) = (a+c)/(nc+b+a) > 1/n$, as one can verify.

This is the promise of Pittard's rationalist weak conciliationism: even in light of a moderate degree of rational insight, one needn't lower one's confidence in his view nearly so much as strong conciliationism recommends in the face of disagreement. But can the promise be fulfilled? In the next section, we will raise a dilemma for Pittard's picture, and express our reluctant skepticism about rational insight.

4 The "Cognitive Discernibility" Dilemma

The problem for Pittard, in a nutshell, is this: why treat moderate rational insight differently from other kinds of evidence, e.g., visual evidence? Consider a visual analogue to Restaurant Check, a case which traces back to Adam Elga (2007), and which is considered by Pittard (2019: 97–98):

Horse Race

Horse A and Horse B are neck and neck as they approach the finish line in a thrilling race. I see that Horse A beats Horse B by a nose. After I judge that Horse A won by a nose, my friend Beth reports that it looked to her like Horse B edged out Horse A.

Given reasonable assumptions of peerhood regarding Beth, Pittard agrees that in easy "toy" cases like Horse Race and Restaurant Check, "it is fairly obvious that equal-weighting is the right thing to do" (2019: 115). We agree.

But we think a tension arises when we consider again Pittard's diagnosis of the difference between Restaurant Check and Extreme Restaurant Check. Why must one be strictly impartial and conciliatory in Restaurant Check, but not in Extreme Restaurant Check? Recall that, for Pittard, rational insight is present in both cases, but there is a difference in the "cognitive discernibility" of the rational insight in the two cases. In Restaurant Check, the cogency of the correct friend's mathematical reasoning is no longer "cognitively discernible" to him, according to Pittard. In Extreme Restaurant Check, it is. This is why, on Pittard's view, the correct friend has license to show partiality to his own view in Extreme Restaurant Check, but not in Restaurant Check. In Restaurant Check, "all of the cognitively accessible evidential factors" that support the correct friend's answer "will be counterbalanced by relevantly similar evidential factors" on the other side (2019: 64). Without a legitimate tie-breaker, strong conciliation is called for, according to Pittard. And, presumably, Pittard would think something similar of Horse Race, since in that case there is no rational insight at all, but only a visual experience. This sort of evidence, no matter how

vivid and impressive, must be bracketed off in the face disagreement with a peer who has counterbalancing visual evidence.

Here's our concern, in the form of a dilemma for Pittard. What is it for the cogency of one's reasoning to be "cognitively discernible"? Is one's rational insight cognitively discernible if and only if one may be introspectively *aware* of the insight? Or is it rather that one's rational insight is cognitively discernible if and only if one may be *certain* that one is having genuine insight? Suppose "cognitive discernibility" requires merely introspective awareness. Then, since the correct friend is *aware* of the cogency of his reasoning in Restaurant Check, that cogency is, contrary to what Pittard says, cognitively discernible to the correct friend, just as it is in Extreme Restaurant Check. But, in that case, Pittard's rational weak conciliationism would in fact allow the correct friend to show partiality in Restaurant Check. But, as Pittard agrees, that seems like the wrong result. The subject should be strongly conciliatory in Restaurant Check.

So, consider the other horn of the dilemma, that cognitive discernibility requires *certainty*, a kind of direct, unmediated access to the truth, and *noted by the subject as such*. In that case, we get the right result in Restaurant Check, since the subject can't be *certain* of the cogency of his reasoning. It is beyond the reach of his cognitive abilities to note that the insight he's having is genuine, that he really does enjoy direct, unmediated access to the truth. In Extreme Restaurant Check, however, even we mathematical mid-wits could notice that the insight we're having into the falsity of our friend's answer is genuine. There, it is easy to notice one's direct access to the falsity of his friend's answer. Similarly, in Horse Race, it is beyond the reach of the correct friend to note that the visual experience he's having is genuine, since visual experience does not give us direct, unmediated access to the truth. As part of the human condition, we must rely on representations, reports from our eyes, and these may always err. Our senses may misreport, they may misrepresent, and so, in such a disagreement, all the "cognitively accessible evidential factors" will be "counterbalanced by relevantly similar evidential factors," as Pittard says. So far, this all sounds exactly correct.

But: it looks like Mary's case will be more like Restaurant Check and Horse Race than it is like Extreme Restaurant Check. And that's because, as Pittard characterizes rational insight, the kind of moderate rational insight that Mary enjoys is more like the visual experience in Horse Race or the dim mathematical awareness in Restaurant Check, than it is like the direct, unmediated access to the truth that one can easily notice in Extreme Restaurant Check. According to Pittard, rational insight has a phenomenal character (2019: 162). It can be mistaken (2019: 161). We're not infallible about whether we're having an insight (2019: 165). Pittard says one can misdescribe or misconceptualize

one's insight: "One might have insight into considerations that rationally support p , even though these considerations are ultimately misleading; or one might have insight into the truth of some proposition that is very much like p and mistake this as being insight into p itself" (2019: 161). Pittard also says insight can outstrip our ability to articulate it (2019: 192). He says there can be inchoate insights, which could be misarticulated (2019: 190). All this contrasts with other cases (e.g., 2019: 194), where he speaks of "conclusive" and "perfectly clear" insight, which he admits is rare.

If cases like Mary's count as involving rational insight, then rational insight is a fallible, fragile thing, and it's hard to see how it could bear the weight that Pittard means to put on it. As Pittard understands rational insight, it looks very much like perception and memory, operating by means of a certain kind of experience, a certain kind of representation, which has a certain phenomenology. But where there's representation and phenomenology, there is the possibility of illusion and hallucination, just as we recognize when it comes to vision and memory. But if moderate rational insight is so very much like visual perception, why can Mary reasonably show partiality to her rational-insight evidence, but one cannot show partiality to his visual-perception evidence in Horse Race? Why does Beth's fallible, corrigible visual experience counterbalance one's own in Horse Race, so that both must be set aside, but Mary's fallible, corrigible rational insight is not counterbalanced by exactly symmetrical evidential considerations on the parts of those who disagree with her?

Let's put it another way. As we've noted, Pittard accepts a symmetry argument when it comes to Restaurant Check: "all of the cognitively accessible evidential factors" that support the correct friend's answer "will be counterbalanced by relevantly similar evidential factors" on the other side (2019: 64). In Restaurant check, the correct friend is, by hypothesis, having a rational insight. His reasoning is correct, it's cogent. And it is introspectively accessible to him. What's not "cognitively discernible" to him is *that* this is a genuine insight. His contact with the truth is tenuous; it's a live skeptical possibility that he is misdescribing his insight, or not having insight at all. This is why, it seems to us, a rationalist weak conciliationist like Pittard would *not* allow the correct friend to show partiality to his answer. Though the correct friend is having an insight, it's too dim to serve as a symmetry breaker. It must be bracketed off, set aside. Just as we demand of the visual experience had by the correct friend in Horse Race.

But why mustn't Mary do the same? She, too, is having a genuine insight, by hypothesis. Her reasoning in support of her religious views is correct, it's cogent. And it is introspectively accessible to her. But, just as in Restaurant Check, what's not "cognitively discernible" to her is *that* this is a genuine insight. Her contact with the truth is tenuous; it's a live skeptical possibility that she is

misdescribing her insight, or not having insight at all. It's a "moderately clear insight," as Pittard says (2019: 222), which is why her credence in her religious views is less than certain. It seems, then, that Mary can show partiality to her position if and only if the correct friend can show partiality to his position in Restaurant Check and Horse Race. Which is to say, she cannot. If this is right, it's a rather bothersome fly in the ointment for Pittard, since Mary's case was meant to be a paradigm by which we religious believers might avoid strong conciliation in the face of religious pluralism.

One may be tempted to think that a solution for Pittard is near to hand. Namely, perhaps Pittard should say that we can be steadfast *to the degree that* we discern our insight as genuine. Perhaps Mary may not be *as* steadfast as the correct friend in Extreme Restaurant Check, who clearly discerns his insight as genuine, but she may be *more* steadfast than the correct friend in Restaurant Check, who discerns his insight as genuine not at all, or at least very little. Perhaps, as Mary fills out those tables above, the degree of partiality she shows to her own view is constrained by the degree to which she discerns her insight as genuine. But the problem is this: if our ability to discern our insight is mediated, corrigible, and fallible just like vision, why treat the cases of vision and moderate insight differently at all? If one should be strongly conciliatory even when it's moderately clear to him that he (visually) sees Horse A win the race, why may Mary do otherwise when it's moderately clear to her that she (intellectually) sees the truth of her religious view, or the cogency of the reasoning that led her to it?

We call this a "reluctant skepticism about rational insight," since frankly we'd prefer that Pittard be correct about rational weak conciliationism as a response to religious pluralism. But in the absence of an account of why Mary's moderate rational insight can break the symmetry in a way that the rational insight involved in Restaurant Check and the visual experience involved in Horse Race cannot, we tentatively conclude that a stricter conception of rational insight is called for. The rationalist weak conciliationist should appeal only to the sort of direct, unmediated access to truth, noted as such, that features in Extreme Restaurant Check in order to break the symmetry of a peer disagreement. Unfortunately, as one of us has noted earlier (Bogardus 2013), these sorts of disagreements will be relatively rare. But nobody promised that the human condition would be easy.

5 Pittard's Responses to Related Objections

Pittard comes within an inch of these concerns about rational insight, as he considers the worry (2019: 164) that "if one's awareness of rational insight is

mediated by some feeling of insight, then obviously this feeling can sometimes be mistaken.” He agrees that one’s awareness of rational insight *is* mediated, and worries whether this would “undercut the principal motivation for rationalism” (2019: 163). In response, Pittard says that it’s doubtful that some type of state is directly apprehended only if one is always able to accurately determine whether such a state holds. And he goes so far as to suggest that even in an ideal case of direct apprehension—my introspective awareness that I’m *not* having a visual experience as of uniform blackness—even here there is the possibility of error. Even on the occasion of having kaleidoscopic, technicolor visual experiences, Pittard asserts that I could be unable to determine whether I am having any visual experiences at all. For “one can imagine a case where a devious neuroscientist ensures that some subject has no visual impressions other than complete blackness while also causing that subject to confidently believe that she is having colorful and variegated visual impressions” (2019: 165).

We’re not so sure about this. It reminds us of David Chalmers’ well-known argument concerning Fading Qualia (1996: 253ff). There, Chalmers uses the radical hyperfallibility of introspection as the *absurdum* in a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against the possibility of absent qualia. Chalmers appeals to this principle: “In every case with which we are familiar, conscious beings are generally capable of forming accurate judgments about their experience, in the absence of distraction and irrationality” (1996: 257). Perhaps a neuroscientist (or God) could implant in me the belief that I’m not currently conscious right now, that I’m not having colorful visual experiences at all, but these are beliefs I would quickly and easily revise, given my direct introspective access to my visual experiences. So, at least in the case Pittard considers, direct apprehension does seem to entail the ability to accurately determine whether the state holds. We may be moderately mistaken about the contents of our visual experiences, but it’s hard to believe we could be quite so *radically* mistaken as Pittard suggests.

Yet moderate fallibility is enough for Pittard’s purposes here. He needn’t insist on hyperfallibility of direct apprehension. And surely it’s possible for introspection—and rational insight—to err, perhaps due to insufficient attention, or misconceptualization, etc. So there’s no need to nitpick about Pittard’s particular example. But our larger concern is that Pittard’s purpose here isn’t quite to the point, or at least not quite to the most *pressing* point, from our perspective. Pittard here is concerned to rebut the charge that the possibility of error when it comes to rational insight “undercut[s] the motivation for rationalism” (2019: 165). And he understands the objection as hinging on this premise: if there’s a possibility of error, *then one cannot*

really be enjoying direct apprehension. That premise does seem doubtful. But we believe the more pressing concern involves this premise: if there's a possibility of error, then *one cannot really be enjoying the certainty that would license partiality in cases of peer disagreement.* We laid out our reasons for this concern in the previous section, and we regret that, though Pittard came within a hair's breadth of considering it, he offers here no response.

In the same section, Pittard (2019: 163–164) also considers a second concern about rational insight: that it is objectionably mysterious and unscientific. “Since it would seem that such abstract facts do not causally interact with people or their environments, it is difficult to explain how one could manage to reliably form true beliefs on such matters” (2019: 163). In response, Pittard concedes that rational insight is mysterious, but that “this would constitute a severe worry for rationalism only if philosophers had perspicuous and illuminating accounts of the cognitive acts and states that are uncontroversially possible” (2019: 164). The mysteriousness of insight, he says, is not sufficient to dismiss insight as illusory.

Sure, that seems right. But here again we regret that Pittard did not consider what we take to be a more serious worry, lurking in the immediate vicinity. He seems to construe the objection as involving this premise: if we cannot see how a faculty fits in with our scientific picture of the world, then we should dismiss that faculty as illusory. He gives plausible counterexamples to this premise, counterexamples that even the most zealous science-lover would grant. But we believe the more pressing concern involves this premise: if we can see that a faculty does not fit in with our scientific picture of the world, then we should dismiss that faculty as illusory.

The difference is subtle, but important. The classic concern on the part of science-enjoyers isn't that *we can't see how* rational insight fits into a physical world. It's rather that we seem to be able to see that it *cannot* fit into a physical world. And that's because, apparently, if physicalism is true, then rational insight would have to be a physical process, a causal series of events extended in time, and at least partly realized by our brains. But, if that's right, then it sure looks like rational insight could *never* deliver direct, unmediated access to the truth of various mathematical, logical, and metaphysical propositions. If rational insight is a causal series, and any causal series could always go awry, then a faculty like rational insight looks to be a non-starter. Rational insight is meant to give us the ability to be absolutely certain of some propositions, at least sometimes. That sort of certainty looks to require unmediated, non-representational contact with the truth. But the brain is a representational engine. And, so, it looks like there's simply no place for rational insight in a physical

world.⁶ This, we believe, is a more threatening way to understand the charge that rational insight is mysterious and unscientific. And we regret that, though Pittard came close to considering it, he offers here no response.

6 Conclusion

We repeat that there is much to praise and admire in John Pittard's recent book. We recommend without reservation that you pick it up and give it a read; you will surely profit from it. But objections are the gifts that philosophers give to those they respect, and we developed here one reason to be reluctant about the hope that Pittard places in rational insight. In the case of Horse Race, one may be very well positioned with regard to the proposition that Horse A won. One saw it happen, in good light, of sound mind, and so on. Yet given the possibility of error in one's visual contact with the world, one cannot be *certain* that he saw Horse A win. And, in the event that a similarly well-positioned peer has symmetrical evidence that favors Horse B's winning, one must be strongly conciliatory here. Pittard agrees with all this, we take it. Yet Pittard thinks things are otherwise in ordinary cases of religious disagreement, in which one enjoys moderate rational insight. There, Pittard thinks one *can* show partiality to one's own view, in light of one's insight.

We're not so sure. In such cases of moderate rational insight, there exists the possibility of error in one's intellectual contact with the truth. One may be mistaken about the content of his rational insight, or even that he's enjoying genuine insight. So, one cannot be certain that he's having direct, unmediated access to the truth. And, in the event that a similarly well-positioned peer has symmetrical evidence that points in another direction, mustn't one be strongly conciliatory here, just as in the Horse Race case? If the cases are not on a par, one should like to know why. We're hopeful that Pittard can offer a satisfying explanation, but until then it seems that one must press pause on Pittard's project.

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⁶ See also Bogardus (2012) for a development of this sort of argument from certainty.

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