Disagreement, Peerhood, and Three Paradoxes of Conciliationism

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Thomas Mulligan

Tulane University

According to some philosophers, one's confidence in a belief should be revised downward in the face of disagreement from one's epistemic peers.[1] That is to say, if I believe that *p*, and I discover that an epistemic peer believes that ~*p*, I ought, rationally, to be less confident that *p* is true. Following Adam Elga (2010), I call this view "Conciliationism".

There have been worries—articulated by, for example, Elga and David Christensen (2009 and 2013)—that Conciliationism is self-defeating; to wit, it's puzzling to see how one can rationally maintain confidence in Conciliationism itself given that many smart philosophers (*i.e.* epistemic peers) believe that it is not the correct theory to deal with the epistemological problem of disagreement. In this paper, I describe another way that Conciliationism appears to undermine itself, by identifying three apparent paradoxes which arise when Conciliationism tries to deal with disagreement over epistemic peerhood.

My primary purpose here is not to argue that Conciliationism yields the wrong results in certain cases (although I think that this is true for the first paradox that I describe), but rather to show that Conciliationism produces odd, incoherent, or downright paradoxical results when it is applied to a class of propositions related to epistemic peerhood. Since these propositions, I shall argue, are no different (in any important way) from the archetypical propositions in the disagreement debate, Conciliationism faces a significant theoretical challenge.

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1 *E.g.* Christensen (2007, 2009, and 2013), Elga (2007), Feldman (2006 and 2007), and Kornblith (2010).

The paper is organized as follows: In §1 I describe a paradox that arises when a trusted third party disagrees with me about one of my epistemic peer relationships. Under certain conditions, this will lead me to downgrade my confidence in the underlying proposition when the proper Conciliatory response is to *gain* confidence. I discuss how this paradox might be resolved through expansion of the higher-order evidence approach to disagreement. The second paradox is presented in §2. I argue there that we ought to lose confidence in an ability as a result of making mistakes when exercising that ability. One such ability is assessment of epistemic peerhood. And that leads to a circularity: I lose confidence in my ability to judge my peer relationships as a result of disagreement over a peerhood judgment, but that loss of confidence, in turn, undermines the peer status of the person disagreeing with me. In §3 I discuss the third and final paradox, which arises when a putative epistemic peer disagrees with me about his peerhood status. By taking his opinion about his epistemic inferiority seriously, I paradoxically lose confidence in his opinions, including his opinions about our epistemic parity.

I raise these problems for Conciliationism as one of its supporters; I think that Conciliationism is, despite the problems presented in this paper, the correct approach to disagreement. Although I do not have good answers to the second or third paradoxes at this point, I am hopeful that a deeper analysis of the concept of epistemic peerhood might bear fruit. I conclude by discussing this prospect in §4.

I want to make two preliminary comments. First, I follow Christensen in defining an epistemic peer as a person who is approximately an "equal in terms of exposure to the evidence, intelligence, [and] freedom from bias" (2009, p. 756).[2] Put differently, two people are epistemic peers just in case they are (1) of equal intelligence (where "intelligence" is broadly construed to include relevant education, freedom from bias, *etc.*) and (2) in possession of the same evidence

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2   The term "epistemic peer" is due to Gutting (1982).

weighing on the question at hand.[3] While there has been some debate about the correctness of this definition in the literature (see, *e.g.*, Elga 2007, p. 499 n. 21), philosophers have seemed largely content to assume that the matter of giving a definition for epistemic peerhood is unproblematic, preferring instead to argue over what results from the *fact* of peerhood. As Axel Gelfert rightly puts it, "comparatively little attention has been paid to a systematic analysis of what makes someone an *epistemic peer* in the first place" (2011, p. 508).[4] For reasons which I hope will become clear over the course of this paper, I do not believe that we can continue under such an assumption if we want to make sense of Conciliationism.

Second, epistemic peerhood is not an *a priori* matter; to establish that a person is our epistemic peer we must do some empirical investigation into her exposure to the evidence, intelligence, and freedom from bias. Generally speaking, we do not consciously qualify someone as an epistemic peer; that is, we do not explicitly review someone's epistemic credentials and only then, after that conscious process, allow our beliefs to be shaken by her disagreement. Rather, we seem to rely on an intuitive faculty to tell us if she is thoughtful enough to be taken seriously. But that is not to say that we do not hold beliefs about our epistemic peers; quite the opposite, these beliefs are myriad—we believe things like *she's my intellectual equal*, *the jury is still out on so-and-so*, *that critic of mine is not as familiar with the problem as I am*, and so on.

1.   Paradox one: when one peer undermines another

Assume Conciliationism is true. We then have a straightforward way to epistemically adjudicate

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3   *Cf.* Kelly 2005: "Let us say that two individuals are **epistemic peers** with respect to some question if and only if they satisfy the following two conditions: (i) they are equals with respect to their familiarity with the evidence and arguments which bear on that question, and (ii) they are equals with respect to general epistemic virtues such as intelligence, thoughtfulness, and freedom from bias." (pp. 174–175).

4   In addition to Gelfert's informative analysis of epistemic peerhood, see Konigsberg 2013 for a consideration of whether the definition of epistemic peerhood remains constant across domains.

cases of disagreement. If I believe that *p*, and I learn that an epistemic peer believes that ~*p*, then I lose confidence that *p* is true. If instead I learn that my epistemic peer holds *p* as well, then my confidence in *p* does not drop and may in fact go up.[5]

Imagine that I disagree with my friend Francis about the truth of some proposition *p*. I believe that *p* is true and Francis believes that *p* is false. Since I regard Francis as my epistemic peer with respect to *p*, I revise my confidence in *p* downward as Conciliationism demands.

I subsequently hear something distressing from another friend, Richard, though: He believes that I erred when I judged Francis to be my epistemic peer. In Richard's opinion, Francis is not my epistemic peer. This is problematic because I take Richard's opinions seriously on many matters, including his opinions about my epistemic peer relationships. I believe, that is, that Richard is my epistemic peer with respect to assessments of epistemic peerhood.

Put schematically, the following beliefs are at play in this scenario:

(1)   I believe that *p*;

(2)   Francis believes that ~*p*;

(3)   I believe that Francis is my epistemic peer with respect to *p*;

(4)   Richard believes that Francis is not my epistemic peer with respect to *p*; and

(5)   I believe that Richard is my epistemic peer with respect to peerhood assessment.[6]

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5   The specifics here will depend on the individual Conciliatory theory and the degrees of confidence that we hold in our beliefs. These specifics are irrelevant for the arguments that I give in this paper.

6   Belief (5) could be put more precisely but more awkwardly as "I believe that Richard is my epistemic peer with respect to *Francis is my epistemic peer with respect to* p." For reasons of economy, I abbreviate this by simply saying that Richard is my epistemic peer with respect to "peerhood assessment". Here are two interesting questions related to assessments of epistemic peer relationships which I will not explore in this paper: First, is Richard is my epistemic peer *simpliciter* with respect to my epistemic peer relationships, or is his peer status contingent upon the content of the underlying *p*? That is, if Richard is capable of judging who my epistemic peers are with respect to, say, auto repair, is he capable of judging who my epistemic peers are in all domains? Second: How much does Richard have to know about *p* to be able to judge my epistemic peer relationships with

Given this set of beliefs, the first question that confronts us is this: How confident should I be in my belief that Francis is my epistemic peer in light of Richard's disagreement with me on the matter? Conciliationism is unequivocal: I should be less confident that Francis is, in fact, my epistemic peer. I had a belief that Francis was my epistemic peer, but that belief was challenged by Richard, whom I believe to be my epistemic peer with respect to my epistemic peer relationships. Therefore, my confidence in the belief at issue (*viz. Francis is my epistemic peer with respect to* p) must be revised downward.

But now consider a second and more puzzling question: What does the downward revision to my confidence in *Francis is my epistemic peer with respect to* p say about my original belief that *p*? According to Conciliationism, my confidence in *p* (which took a hit after I learned of Francis's disagreement) *should go up* when I learn of Richard's views on Francis's exposure to the evidence, intelligence, and freedom from bias. Now it seems like the man who undermined my original judgment about *p* should not be listened to after all.

But for many instances of *p* this does not make sense. After all, I have just discovered that my judgment is more flawed than I thought. I have discovered that I committed two (connected) errors, the first being my judgment that Francis was my epistemic peer, and the second being my downward revision in my confidence that *p*. Given those two errors, and what that suggests about my epistemic faculties generally, why should I now be more confident that I have got it right about *p*? These errors suggest that my epistemic faculties, as they relate to *p*, are less capable than I thought that they were at the beginning of my deliberations. My confidence in *p* should therefore be downgraded. It should not go up as Conciliationism

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respect to *p*? Can Richard judge who my epistemic peers are with respect to the disagreement debate if Richard does not know any epistemology?

suggests.

In considering this scenario, there are three points to keep in mind. First, to elicit the paradoxical result, a p must be chosen such that mistakes in assessing peerhood clearly cast doubt on my ability to get p right. When there is a clear connection between p and my ability to assess my epistemic peer relationships, the rational response is to call into question my own epistemic faculties and downgrade my confidence in p. A good example for p here is *Vanessa will get an "A" on her philosophy exam*. If I discover that I am worse at assessing exposure to the evidence, intelligence, and freedom from bias than I thought that I was, then I am worse at assessing Vanessa's ability to get an "A" (because assessing Vanessa's philosophical ability just *is*, in important part, assessing her exposure to the evidence, intelligence, and freedom from bias).

It may be true that for some instances of p the paradox will not arise; one might argue, for example, that I can make mistakes in assessing the epistemic credentials of auto mechanics all day long without undermining my confidence in my ability to change my brake pads and rotors. Even if that is true it does not imperil the argument that I give here, since my conclusion is only that Conciliationism appears to be self-defeating when it tries to deal with a special class of disagreements about epistemic peerhood—not with all disagreements, nor even with all disagreements about epistemic peerhood.

Second, when I say that Richard is my epistemic peer with respect to peerhood assessment I make no claims about Richard's expertise on p. I leave aside the interesting question of how much Richard needs to know about p to render him qualified to judge my epistemic peer relationships with respect to p (see n. 6). What does seem clear, however, is that Richard does not need to be my epistemic peer with respect to p to weigh in on the quality of my

epistemic peer relationships (with respect to p). I don't know much about mathematical analysis, but it seems like I am being reasonable and trustworthy when I judge that Fields Medal winners Martin Hairer and Terence Tao are epistemic peers with respect to analysis, and when I judge that my mechanic is not their epistemic peer.

Third, when I say that I committed "errors" when I assessed Francis to be my epistemic peer and initially downgraded my confidence in p, I do not mean that I responded irrationally to the evidence or deserve epistemic censure. We can stipulate that I assessed Francis's epistemic credentials in a conscientious way, correctly responding to the evidence that I had on his intelligence, freedom from bias, and so on. I mean only that subsequent disagreements with my epistemic peers revealed inaccuracies in my initial judgments.

One tempting way to try to resolve this paradox—which, as theory currently stands, does not work—is to say that my confidence in p goes up because I am acquiring additional, higher-order evidence that p from Richard.[7] Many philosophers (*e.g.* Thomas Kelly (2005 and 2010)) understand peer disagreement in this general way—if I believe that p on the basis of (first-order) evidence E, and then come to find out that an epistemic peer believes that $\sim p$ on the basis of E, then my total evidence on p consists of both E and *my peer believes that $\sim$p on the basis of* E, the latter of which counts as the "higher-order" evidence.[8] Now, whatever the merits of the higher-order evidence approach are, I want to stress an important difference with the scenario that I have just described.[9] In my scenario, Richard has made *no judgment whatsoever* about p; not that p is true, not that it is false, nor anything else. Given that, it would be odd to say that Richard's disagreement about Francis's peerhood should count as evidence of any sort *about p*.

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7   I thank two anonymous reviewers for suggesting this approach to me.
8   Christensen gives a detailed analysis of higher-order evidence in his 2010.
9   I happen to be doubtful of the higher-order evidence approach. I'm especially doubtful of the idea that my own psychological response to some first-order evidence E about p could count as *additional* evidence about p; that is, evidence above and beyond E. *Cf.* Kelly 2010, p. 129.

The higher-order evidence that I have on *p* is limited to Francis's belief that ~*p*. Indeed, as described above, Richard may not even be my epistemic peer with respect to *p*; he might not, for example, have access to the evidence *E* that weighs on *p*.[10] And if that is the case then his opinions cannot count as higher-order evidence on *p* within the current theoretical framework. Nevertheless, it appears that Richard exercises an indirect influence on my confidence that *p* by undermining Francis's status as my epistemic peer. As things stand now, the higher-order evidence approach cannot account for this influence.

How might our theory be expanded to meet the challenge posed by this paradox? Although a complete answer to this question is outside of the scope of this paper, I want to offer some tentative thoughts on how to proceed. First, a terminological change is necessary. We can no longer refer to Francis's opinion about *p* as "higher-order evidence" *simpliciter*, since we now must take into account the even-higher-order evidence that weighs on Francis's opinion (*viz.* Richard's views on the epistemic peer relationship between Francis and me). If Francis's opinion about *p* is the second-order evidence, then Richard's opinion about my epistemic parity with Francis is the third-order evidence.

Second, there is an obvious regress issue here. Someone might come along and impeach the epistemic peer relationship that exists between Richard and me (someone, that is, whom I regard as my epistemic peer with respect to this peer relationship). Our theory would have to be capable of contending with *fourth-order* evidence about *p*. The paradox tells me that I can no longer simply revise my confidence in *p* in light of the opinions of people who disagree with me about *p*. I must also consider the disagreement about the value of the opinions of people who disagree with me about *p*. But even that is insufficient; I must revise my confidence in *p* in light of disagreement over the value of the opinions of people who disagree with me over the value of

10 I thank an anonymous reviewer for several helpful comments along these lines.

the opinions of people who disagree with me about *p*. And so on, *ad infinitum*.

Third, just like all other propositions about which we disagree, people can have different degrees of confidence in propositions about epistemic peerhood. An expanded theory of higher-order evidence will have to accurately account for these distinctions. In the scenario that we have been considering in this section, Francis's belief that ~*p* is the second-order evidence and Richard's belief that Francis is not my epistemic peer is the third-order evidence. But I only care about Richard's opinion in the first place because I believe that he is my epistemic peer (this is belief (5)). But I can hold different degrees of confidence in *this* belief, with different consequences for my final confidence in *p*. If I am very confident that Richard is my epistemic peer with respect to peerhood assessment, then Francis's peerhood status will be downgraded severely and my confidence in *p* will be relatively high. But if I am only marginally confident that Richard is my epistemic peer, then Francis's peerhood status does not take too much of a hit and my confidence in *p* will be relatively low. A new-and-improved theory of higher-order evidence will have to accurately account for how my confidence in *p* changes in proportion to my confidence in *Richard is my epistemic peer with respect to peerhood assessment*.

In sum, while I think that expanding the higher-order evidence approach to disagreement holds promise, its expansion will not be a simple matter. We will have to develop a calculus that is able to (1) avoid the problem of regress,[11] and (2) deal with the many ways in which my confidence in *p* can be affected by my interlocutors' opinions about *p and* about the many propositions comprising the network of peer relationships.

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11 The problem of regress is even more acute if it is the case that once I qualify someone as an epistemic peer with respect to some peerhood assessment, I perforce qualify him as an epistemic peer with respect to *all* my peerhood assessments (see n. 6), or if, as I will discuss in §4, epistemic peerhood satisfies a closure principle.

2.   Paradox two: when one's ability to assess peerhood is shaken by error

Again consider the scenario described in §1: Francis and I disagree about *p*; I believe that Francis is my epistemic peer with respect to *p*; Richard believes that Francis is not my epistemic peer with respect to *p*; and I believe that Richard is my epistemic peer with respect to peerhood assessment.

A second paradox arises out of this scenario because it is a consequence of Conciliationism that I lose confidence in my ability to judge epistemic peerhood when faced with disagreement about my epistemic peerhood judgments. This is paradoxical because that loss of confidence threatens the epistemic status of the person undermining my confidence in the first place.

When I learn of Richard's disagreement about the proposition *Francis is my epistemic peer with respect to* p, Conciliationism tells me three things. First, I ought to be less confident that *Francis is my epistemic peer with respect to* p is true. Second, I ought to be more confident in *p*. And third, I am not as good at assessing epistemic peerhood as I thought. But given this third consideration, why should I have unchanged confidence that Richard is, in fact, my epistemic peer? I ought to be *less* confident that Richard is my epistemic peer and thus *more* confident that Francis is my epistemic peer (since Francis's peerhood was undermined by Richard's opinion). When I learn of Richard's disagreement about the proposition *Francis is my epistemic peer with respect to* p, Conciliationism simultaneously demands that (1) I lose confidence in *Francis is my epistemic peer with respect to* p, and (2) I lose confidence that I am a good judge of peerhood, thus losing confidence that Richard is my epistemic peer and *gaining* confidence in the proposition *Francis is my epistemic peer with respect to* p, which contradicts (1).

It might be objected here that Conciliationism does not require that when faced with disagreement about epistemic peerhood we must lose confidence in our *general* ability to assess peerhood (we need only lose confidence in that *particular* assessment). If this objection were correct then the second paradox would indeed dissolve. The paradox persists, however, if *any* loss of confidence in our general ability to assess peerhood is warranted, no matter how small. And it strikes me that such a loss of confidence *is* warranted; we ought to downgrade our confidence in our ability to judge peerhood when we learn of disagreement over our peerhood judgments. We ought, more generally, to downgrade our confidence in our ability to operate within some domain as a result of making mistakes in that domain. Imagine, for example, that I believe that I have excellent eyesight. I see a person walking across the quad, and I form the belief, with confidence c, that it is the Dean.[12] An epistemic peer disagrees with me about this identification, however, and so I revise my confidence downward. What should I think the following day when from the same vantage point I see a person walking on the quad who appears to me to be the Provost? The rational response is to be less confident that I am correctly identifying the Provost than I was the day before when I "identified" the Dean; that is, c' ought to be less than c, where c' is my confidence in *the Provost is walking on the quad*. This inequality between c and c' can only be accounted for by a downgrade in my confidence in my visual perception as a result of misidentifying the Dean. After all, no one disagrees with me that that is the Provost and I have never made mistakes in identifying the Provost. But surely $c' < c$; surely the fact that I made a mistake in identifying the Dean yesterday should cause me to be less confident in my general ability to identify persons walking across the quad. This is best explained by the natural idea that when we make a mistake in some domain we ought to lose confidence, if just a little confidence, in our abilities in that domain. That idea, moreover, sits

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12 This example is due to Feldman (2007).

squarely in the Conciliatory spirit.

The intuition can be evoked a bit more sharply by considering the case in which my confidence that it is the Dean walking on the quad crosses the line from belief to disbelief as a result of disagreement. Suppose that my confidence in *the Dean is walking on the quad* is 0.6 while my interlocutor's confidence in that proposition is 0.1 (where a confidence of 1 in *p* represents perfect certainty that *p* is true, and 0 perfect certainty that *p* is false). Conciliationism leads me to a revised confidence of 0.35 (we assume an equal weight theory here). I thus have three doxastic attitudes over the course of the day: (1) my initial, "pro" attitude—*the Dean is walking on the quad*; (2) my post-conciliation, "con" attitude—*it is not the case that the Dean is walking on the quad*; and (3) an attitude which straightforwardly follows from (1) and (2)—*I made a mistake today in identifying the person walking on the quad*. Switching from a "pro" attitude to a "con" attitude is tantamount to recognizing that my visual perception was in error. And it is hard for me to see how that knowledge of perceptual error could fail to affect my confidence in subsequent perceptual judgments. When I look at the person walking across the quad who appears to me to be the Provost, rationality demands that I incorporate my recent history of perceptual error in reckoning my confidence this time around. And there is nothing special about crossing the line of perfect uncertainty (that is, the 0.5 confidence line). The same result obtains if I revise my confidence in *the Dean is walking on the quad* from 0.9 to 0.6 as a result of disagreement; it would be irrational, with that revision in mind, to insist upon a confidence of 0.9 in *the Provost is walking on the quad*.

Consider also the case of repeated mistake-making. If I made perceptual errors of the sort that I have described every day for the past week, then today I ought to be significantly less confident in my visual perception than I was a week ago. The errors accumulate, and while there

may not be a linear relationship between perceptual error and loss of confidence in perceptual

ability (*i.e.* perhaps as I make more and more errors the hit to my confidence in my perception

becomes larger and larger) it seems that *any* error entails a loss of confidence. And if there is

any loss of confidence—no matter how small—then the paradox obtains.

I should note, however, that mistake-making within some domain (such as the domain of

visual perception) should not lead us to doubt our overall intellectual capabilities, or our ability

to reason, *etc.* The loss of confidence only attaches to the faculties that were employed in the

mistaken judgment. In this example, I should lose confidence in my visual perception but

nothing more.

The complexities presented thus far are born out of the fact that often in cases of

disagreement there is not just one proposition at stake but multiple. We disagree about the point

of dispute *p*, but we may also disagree about who among us should qualify as an epistemic peer.

Nested in questions about disagreement are judgments about whether the dissenters are, in fact,

epistemic peers. And when there is disagreement over *those* judgments, Conciliationism

threatens to undermine itself for the reasons described.

3.   Paradox three: a self-proclaimed epistemic inferior

For the third and final paradox, the underlying question is this: How should I deal with a putative

epistemic peer who thinks that I am not his peer but his epistemic superior?[13] Let's imagine that

I am, following Conciliationism, factoring in the opinion of Jimmy, whom I believe to be my

epistemic peer on some matter *p* about which we disagree.[14] What is the rational response upon

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13 Bruce Brower raised this question to me.
14 To put it explicitly, I regard Jimmy as my epistemic peer on both *p* and peerhood assessment. It would be
   unusual—but by no means impossible—to regard someone as a peer on, say, a theoretical moral matter but not
   as a peer on assessing peerhood.

discovering that Jimmy disagrees about our epistemic parity? Imagine that Jimmy says this: "Tom, I know that I disagree with you about all kinds of things, including *p*, but I'm not your intellectual equal. You have good reason to ignore my opinions and stick to your guns." In this scenario there again appears to be an impossible tension. On the one hand, when someone whom I regard as my epistemic peer disagrees with me about some proposition, I ought to lose confidence in it according to Conciliationism. So my confidence in *Jimmy is my epistemic peer* (with respect to our epistemic parity) ought to go down. On the other hand, when my confidence in *Jimmy is my epistemic peer* goes down I have reason to his discount his opinions, including his opinions about epistemic peerhood, and so my confidence in my original judgment, *Jimmy is my epistemic peer*, goes up. This is a paradox.

I want to forestall one potential objection to this scenario—namely, that it violates the Independence Principle (endorsed by, *e.g.*, Christensen (2007, 2009, and 2011), Elga (2007), and Hilary Kornblith (2010)). Christensen formulates the principle in this way:

> In evaluating the epistemic credentials of another person's belief about *P*, to determine how (if at all) to modify one's own belief about *P*, one should do so in a way that is independent of the reasoning behind one's own initial belief about *P*. (2009, p. 758)

According to the Independence Principle, I must "bracket off" my initial reasoning when evaluating my interlocutor's epistemic credentials. It would not do, the principle tells us, to demote my interlocutor from his status as an epistemic peer merely on the grounds that we disagree about *p*. That would be begging the question.

I first note that the Independence Principle is contentious. It is "an extremely strong principle" (Kelly 2013, p. 40), and as a result has been criticized by a number of philosophers (*e.g.* Kelly, Jennifer Lackey (2010), and Ernest Sosa (2010)). It is also the subject of a recent, focused attack by Errol Lord (2014). So for these philosophers, and for others who are inclined to the principle but in a weaker form—as I am—this is not a genuine worry about the potency of the third paradox.

Second, compare the motivation for the Independence Principle to what is going on in the scenario underlying the third paradox. Christensen says that the Independence Principle is

> intended to prevent blatantly question-begging dismissals of the evidence provided by the disagreement of others. It attempts to capture what would be wrong with a P-believer saying, *e.g.*, "Well, so-and-so disagrees with me about P. But since P is true, she's wrong about P. So however reliable she may generally be, I needn't take her disagreement about P as any reason at all to question my belief." (2011, p. 2)

In the scenario described, however, I am *not* dismissing Jimmy's opinion about our epistemic parity on the grounds that we disagree. It's quite the opposite, in fact: The paradox arises *because* I have positively and independently evaluated Jimmy's ability to assess peerhood. After deciding that we are roughly equally good at judging epistemic peer relationships, I find out that we disagree about one such relationship. And so, following Conciliationism, I downgrade my confidence in it. This is precisely what does not happen in the scenario that Christensen describes, where the interlocutor is demoted from her epistemic peer status merely because she

disagrees.

I am not begging the question about Jimmy's peerhood. The paradox arises *as a result of* regarding Jimmy as my epistemic peer and conciliating with him. It arises when I am faced with reconciling my positive belief about our epistemic parity with his negative belief. It does not seem, as explained above, that I can coherently incorporate Jimmy's negative belief as Conciliationism demands. For when I downgrade my confidence in *Jimmy is my epistemic peer* I undermine the very thing causing the downgrading. So the Independence Principle is unmotivated in this scenario. Perhaps that should be regarded as further evidence that the principle, at least in the strong form given here, is overbroad.

4.   **Conclusion**

Despite the foregoing remarks, I still believe that Conciliationism is the correct theory for dealing with disagreement. By my lights, it is both intuitive and correct upon reflection to say that when someone thoughtful disagrees with me about something, I ought, rationally, to be less confident that I am correct (if only a little less confident) than I was before learning of the disagreement. Simple epistemic modesty demands no less.[15] But if Conciliationism is right then it must resolve the paradoxes presented in this paper.

One potential Conciliatory reply is to say that we should erect a firewall around our beliefs about our epistemic peers. On this strategy, while one's confidence in most beliefs can be shaken in the face of disagreement from epistemic peers, beliefs *about* one's epistemic peers are immune. This reply follows the strategy adopted by Elga (2010) to deal with the self-undermining danger for Conciliationism that I mentioned at the beginning of this paper.[16]

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15 The nice term "epistemic modesty" is due to Christensen (2013).

16 Pittard (manuscript) argues that although Elga's defense of Conciliationism fails, we *can* remain resolute about our theory, and thus avoid the danger of self-defeat, by distinguishing conciliation at the epistemic level of

Nevertheless, replying to the paradoxes in this way seems wrong to me both because it would be an *ad hoc* attempt to evade a theoretical worry and because I see no good reason to think that beliefs about our epistemic peers should count for any more or any less than our beliefs about the archetypical propositions that generate disagreement. Sometimes we are right and sometimes we are wrong about these propositions, but so too are we sometimes right and sometimes wrong about our epistemic peers; we trust persons we should not and we are skeptical of some who deserve our trust. Indeed, if anything, our beliefs about our epistemic peers are even more prone to error than beliefs about, for example, theoretical moral and political matters, since the emotions associated with personal relationships can easily distort our reason. Many people have a sort of epistemic malfunction when it comes to certain acquaintances—we trust them more than we should. We sometimes hear things like, "Why do you have a soft spot for that guy? Why do you continue to listen to him when the rest of us know better?" Judgments about epistemic peers can go awry just as easily as our judgments about other matters. It does not make sense to exclude the class of propositions about one's epistemic peers just to get Conciliationism to work.

The lesson to take away from the argument that I have given here is that further work needs to be done on the concept of epistemic peerhood. It may not be enough to have a intuitive grasp of what it means to be an epistemic peer; satisfactorily resolving questions about disagreement may require a fully developed theory of peerhood. Indeed, it seems to me that there are a range of interesting questions related to peerhood which we are currently ill-equipped to address. For example: Does epistemic peerhood satisfy a closure principle? That is, if I regard S as an epistemic peer, and I know that S regards T as an epistemic peer, ought I, rationally, to regard T as an epistemic peer? I am inclined to say "no", but the answer is not

credence from conciliation at the level of *reasoning*.

obvious.

If the considerations that I have advanced in this paper are correct then Conciliationism faces potentially fatal paradoxes. The theory, which is otherwise compelling, needs to provide a conceptual analysis of epistemic peerhood that resolves these apparent paradoxes to our satisfaction. That would go some ways toward establishing that Conciliationism's plea for epistemic modesty is on a sound conceptual footing.

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