

# Disagreement, Significance, and Revision

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## 1 Introduction and overview

MASTER QUESTION: *What should we do when we discover a disagreement with an epistemic peer about a proposition  $p$ ?*

What I am calling here the MASTER QUESTION is one of the most disputed questions epistemologists have been wrestling with for the last ten years or so. This paper is devoted to develop a new answer to the MASTER QUESTION. Before articulating, motivating and defending such a new answer, a few introductory remarks are in order.

To begin with, let us say two individuals are epistemic peers if and only if they are equally well positioned evidentially with respect to  $p$  and they are equals with respect to general intellectual virtues, such as thoughtfulness, carefulness, honesty, and so on. Secondly, notice that we will be focusing on doxastic disagreements, viz. disagreements stemming from a certain incompatibility relation between *doxastic attitudes*, such as beliefs. It must be kept in mind, however, that most parties in the peer disagreement debate adopt a finer-grained approach to doxastic attitudes to the effect that an individual has infinitely many doxastic options – called credences or degrees of belief - with respect to a proposition  $p$  which are mathematically represented by real-valued functions. Henceforth, I will use credence talk and belief talk interchangeably, and I will explain later, in section 5.1, why this is harmless.

Let us turn now to take unpack the MASTER QUESTION a little.

I propose to read the MASTER QUESTION as asking what kind of conduct one should follow from an epistemic point of view after the discovery of disagreement with an acknowledged epistemic peer. To clarify the “conduct to follow” bit, we might avail ourselves of Kolodny’s distinction between *state requirements* and *process requirements* (Kolodny 2007: 371): “State requirements require that you *be* a certain way at a given time. Process requirements require you to *do* something over time, where ‘do’ is understood broadly, so as to include forming and revising beliefs”. In my view, the MASTER QUESTION asks us to supply a process requirement rather than a state requirement. To clarify the “epistemic” bit of the MASTER QUESTION, let us

also say that a fact is an *epistemic normative reason* for agent A to  $\varphi$  only if it is something on the basis of which A can establish whether  $\varphi$ -ing when A's goal is truth. Of course, epistemic reasons are not the only normative reasons we have. However it may be, I think that we had better set aside the complications involved in the relation between epistemic reasons and other reasons focus on the MASTER QUESTION in its starkest form by stipulating away cases where one has strong (pragmatic or prudential) reasons not to do what one has most epistemic reason to do in the face of a disagreement with an acknowledged peer. The support normative reasons give to a certain action or mental state can be understood in either a *pro tanto* or a *pro toto* sense: that is to say, either facts can provide partial support for  $\varphi$ -ing, or they can provide support for  $\varphi$ -ing on balance. By (interchangeably) using expressions such as 'should' and 'requirement', I refer to the *pro-toto* sense.

## **2 *Desiderata***

Before launching ourselves into a discussion of how to respond to the MASTER QUESTION, it is useful to reflect on how to establish which answer to the MASTER QUESTION is the correct one. As a rule of thumb, we can say the correct answer to the MASTER QUESTION is the one that best explains the crucial features of the phenomenon of epistemic peer disagreement. Let us therefore move on to identify such features, which will in turn give rise to some *desiderata* that should be met by any answer to the MASTER QUESTION.

On closer inspection, what makes the phenomenon of peer disagreement so puzzling is that it seems to exhibit conflicting features that cannot be easily vindicated together. The first feature is what I am going to call SIGNIFICANCE:

### SIGNIFICANCE

There is a *prima facie* difference between acknowledged peer disagreements and acknowledged cases of disagreement with epistemic superiors or inferiors. Suppose that we both acknowledge that you are in a better epistemic position than I am: e.g. we both know that you have more evidence than I have regarding  $p$ , and we also acknowledge that my judgment is impaired due to some cognitive malfunction. In this case, it seems clear that you should simply ignore my beliefs and stick to your guns. This response to our disagreement would be epistemically legitimate in virtue of our different epistemic statuses. By contrast, if we both acknowledged that we are

epistemic peers, you could not simply disregard my opinion on the contested matter by saying that I am less well positioned epistemically vis-à-vis the matter than you are. Hence, these two kinds of disagreements cannot be resolved in the same way. This seems to indicate that acknowledged peer disagreements have an epistemic significance that unacknowledged peer disagreements don't have.

To be clear, this is an *appearance* of significance: it might be the case that, upon extensive reflection, there are good reasons not to take peer disagreement epistemically to be significant at all. Yet, I contend that both endorsers and non-endorsers of the appearance of significance have to make sense of it. That is to say, an explanation of why peer disagreements strike us as *prima facie* epistemically significant has to be provided.

However, there is another feature exhibited by some peer disagreement cases that seems to clash with SIGNIFICANCE. Here it is:

#### ANTI-SPINELESSNESS

The idea that we should change our opinion just because somebody we respect epistemically disagrees with us is somehow unsettling. Consider cases where we are pretty sure that we are right and our opponent wrong; or else, consider cases where we disagree about things that matter a lot to us (e.g. controversial political, ethical, religious disagreements). In these cases, it seems that the disagreement with an opponent, even though we took her to be an epistemic peer, should not to have so much epistemic significance as to lead us to change our beliefs in a heartbeat, as it were. For instance, if we had to change a moral belief that matters to us greatly just because a peer disagrees with us, we would too easily give up a belief which contribute to shaping our sense of identity. Such a spinelessness is inadmissible, or so it seems.

This is but an appearance: hence, an answer to the MASTER QUESTION can either endorse it or explain it away. Either way, such an appearance has to be accounted for. So, I submit that a second *desideratum* is that of making sense of ANTI-SPINELESSNESS.

The final noteworthy feature of the phenomenon can be described as follows:

#### VARIABILITY

A quick look at our current disagreements tell us that there are certain disagreements where just one individual got things right, other cases where both individuals got things wrong, yet other cases where it is far from clear who got things right and who botched things epistemically. In light

of this, it is reasonable to expect that there might be cases where just one individual should revise her initial doxastic attitude, other cases where both should, yet other cases where the question is much more complex. More generally, an explanation of why it seems reasonable to expect various verdicts in various cases has to be provided. Hence, a final *desideratum* for a good answer to the MASTER QUESTION is that it must make sense of this variability. Again, this can be done in two ways: either we vindicate this feature of the phenomenon of peer disagreement, or we explain it away.

Before going on, let me notice the aim of this paper is not negative. So, I will not review all the extant answers to the MASTER QUESTION, nor will I comment on the many objections, both formal and informal, that have started to crop up when various answers to the MASTER QUESTION have been offered. So, the remainder of this paper is almost entirely devoted to developing my own answer to the MASTER QUESTION. However, I will touch on some of the answers already proposed in the literature to contrast them with mine and emphasise what I take to be the advantages of the answer I will put forward.

### **3 The epistemic significance of peer disagreement**

In order to offer an answer to the MASTER QUESTION, epistemologists investigate whether the discovery of a disagreement with an epistemic peer is so epistemically relevant as to provide peers with an epistemic reason to revise their initial attitudes. As far as I can see, the debate about the disagreement's epistemic significance has been so far operating – either implicitly or explicitly – under the idea that epistemic reasons are *evidential*. It is commonplace in the literature to assume that, in order for the discovery of peer disagreement to be epistemically significant in any robust and interesting sense, it should be evidence. For instance, in his 2009 survey of the debate, David Christensen says that the disagreement's epistemic significance can be spelled out by saying that one learns that one's peer reaches an opposite conclusion on the basis of the same evidence *E*, one acquires evidence that one has mistakenly interpreted the shared first-order evidence.<sup>1</sup> That is to say, disagreement is evidence of the character of the first-order shared evidence. Or, to put it differently, disagreement is *higher-order defeating evidence*.<sup>2</sup> I can afford to remain neutral about

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<sup>1</sup> See Christensen (2009). For other textual evidence, see Christensen (2007), Feldman (2006), Kelly (2005, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> The expression is Kelly's (see Kelly 2005).

the ontological status of defeaters, but it is important to stress how a defeater – independently of its ontological nature – acts. Defeasibility is a property of our beliefs which consists of their being liable to lose their positive epistemic status, say justification, either entirely (a belief that  $p$  can go from being justified to unjustified) or partially (a belief that  $p$  can go from being justified to degree  $d$  to justified to degree  $c$ ). An epistemic defeater is something - a mental state, or a proposition - which realises the potential defeasibility of a belief thereby making it the case that the target belief loses (perhaps just some of) its positive epistemic status.

Having clarified this, my aim now is to argue that the epistemic significance of peer disagreement can be spelled out without taking disagreement to act as a defeater.<sup>3</sup>

To illustrate the view, let us take the most disputed peer disagreement case in the epistemology of disagreement literature, due to Christensen (2007):

(RESTAURANT)

Suppose that Allison is dining with her friend Marc. After having looked at the bill, Allison asserts with confidence that she has carefully calculated in her head that they each owe \$43, while Marc says with the same degree of confidence that he has calculated in his head that they each owe \$45.

Suppose that both Allison and Marc have deliberated about  $p$  (i.e. what the shares of the bill are) by gathering evidence, assessing its probative force and the support it may provide to the various attitudes one might have towards  $p$ . At the end of this deliberative process,<sup>4</sup> they reached two conclusions. Let us assume that their respective doxastic attitudes have a certain positive epistemic status; more specifically, I am interested in what epistemologists usually call *doxastic justification*. To unpack this little, let me firstly introduce the distinction between *propositional* and *doxastic* justification. Roughly put, this is the distinction between having a justification to believe that  $p$  and being justified in believing that  $p$ . More generally, propositional justification is a property

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<sup>3</sup> I need not go into the question of what kind of defeater (undercutting, opposing, or something in the middle) disagreement is, for my aim is to argue that the disagreement's epistemic significance is such that it does not meet the necessary condition for being a defeater, viz. that of actualising the potential defeasibility of peers' doxastic attitudes.

<sup>4</sup> A clarification is in order. The term "deliberation", as used here, is not meant to suggest that our beliefs (or our attitudes of suspended judgment) are formed voluntarily. Rather, when we deliberate about  $p$ , we want to make up our mind about  $p$  by weighing all those items that seem relevant to the inquiry into  $p$ 's truth-value (e.g. evidential items).

possessed by a proposition relative to a body of evidence. By contrast, doxastic justification is a property possessed by an individual's mental state in virtue of its being formed in the epistemically proper way. The relation between propositional and doxastic justification is controversial, yet it is worth noting that the source of controversy lies in how to understand exactly the distinction and which of the two notions enjoys some sort of epistemological or conceptual priority over the other.<sup>5</sup> That is to say, the existence of the distinction is not put into question.

My claim is that the discovery of her disagreement with an epistemic peer makes some error-possibilities concerning the doxastic justification of one's doxastic attitude more salient than they were before. Here is a (possibly incomplete) list of error-possibilities which can be made more salient:

- one didn't really form the belief on the basis of the evidence due e.g. to some deviant causal link between evidence and belief;
- one formed the belief on the basis of the evidence in an improper way, e.g. by using an invalid rule of inference;<sup>6</sup>
- as a matter of fact, the body of evidence doesn't support  $p$ ;
- as a matter of fact, the evidence is not sufficient to conclude anything about  $p$ 's truth;
- one took oneself to have the same evidence one's opponent has while, in fact, this is not the case.

Let me stress that the question of which error-possibilities become more live depends on the case of disagreement we are focusing on. That is to say, it is not the case that all cases of peer disagreement are such that they make salient the same error-possibilities, including far-fetched ones involving evil demons, brains in a vat, and the like. To unpack this a little, let us focus on the restaurant case.

Suppose that Allison has come to the correct answer, i.e. \$43. More specifically, let us assume that the first-order evidence does not merely support one particular answer, viz. \$43, but entails it. Granting all of this, however, does not jeopardise the idea that discovery of disagreement with Marc makes some error-possibilities more salient than they were before. For Allison could have

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<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Turri (2010) for critical discussion.

<sup>6</sup> See Turri (2010) for examples.

mistakenly formed the belief on the basis of the evidence; or else, she may have formed the belief on the basis of the evidence in an improper way. These errors are compatible with the believed proposition *that we* (i.e. Allison and Marc) *each owe \$43* being justified, for they may occur at the doxastic rather propositional level, that is, they target the justificatory status of Allison's doxastic attitude towards the proposition rather than the justificatory status of the proposition itself.

Be that as it may, it might be observed that the foregoing considerations fly in the face of a glaring asymmetry that is exhibited by cases of disagreement where one individual has formed the correct doxastic attitude. I have indeed stipulated that, in the restaurant case, the shared body of evidence is such that it entails Allison's belief. Therefore, since the question of how to split evenly the cost of the bill is such that it admits of a uniquely correct answer, Allison entertains the correct doxastic attitude while Marc does not. Kelly underscores this asymmetry thusly:

First, let us observe the unobvious point that, when one correctly responds to a body of evidence, one typically has some justification for thinking that one has responded correctly. In paradigmatic cases in which one takes up the view that is best supported by one's evidence, it is no mere accident that one has done so...Rather, one takes up the belief in question precisely because it is supported by one's evidence. Indeed, in a given case, one might very well take up the belief because one recognizes that this is what one's evidence supports. Plausibly, *recognizing that p* entails *knowing that p*. Assuming that that is so, then any case in which one recognizes that one's evidence supports a given belief is a case in which one knows that one's evidence supports that belief. Clearly, if one knows that one's evidence supports a given belief, then one is *justified* in thinking that one's evidence supports that belief; if one were not justified, one would not know. But even if recognizing that *p* does *not* entail knowing that *p*, one would in any case not be able to recognize that *p* if one were unjustified in thinking that *p*. It follows immediately from this that, whenever one recognizes that one's evidence supports such-and-such a conclusion, one is justified in thinking that one's evidence supports that conclusion.

[Kelly 2010: 156]

Kelly's idea, as I understand it, is that the individual who has correctly responded to the body of evidence, e.g. by forming the belief that *p*, has the second-order belief *that believing that p is the*

*attitude that is supported by the evidence.* This second-order belief is a recognition that believing that  $p$  is the attitude that is supported by the evidence. Since recognizing entails knowing, the individual in question knows *that the belief that  $p$  is the attitude that is supported by the evidence.* One might therefore ask: ‘If one had such a knowledge, why couldn’t one simply stick to one’s guns and ignore one’s peer’s opinion?’

I grant that *recognizing that  $p$*  entails *knowing that  $p$* , and I also grant, for the sake of the argument, that the individual in question, say Allison, knows *that the belief that  $p$  is the attitude that is supported by the evidence.* However, in order for a knowledge ascription such as ‘I know that the belief that  $p$  is the attitude that is supported by the evidence’ to be true, a given epistemic standard has to be met. As far as I can see, there is no principled reason to maintain the account of the epistemic significance of peer disagreement I have sketched so far does not carry over to Kelly’s proposal. That is to say, once Allison discovers her disagreement with Marc, new error-possibilities concerning the epistemic status of one’s belief that  $p$  becomes more salient. If we accept the plausible claim that the truth of ascription such as ‘I know that the belief that  $p$  is the attitude that is supported by the evidence’ depends on an epistemic standard, it is equally plausible to claim that the fact that these error-possibilities come to light induces a higher standard for the truth of the knowledge ascription under scrutiny. Unless Allison is able error-possibilities are ruled out, she could no longer claim something like ‘I know that the belief that  $p$  is the attitude that is supported by the evidence’. In light of this, I submit that acknowledging the asymmetry between Allison’s and Marc’s epistemic situation does not jeopardise my account of the epistemic significance of peer disagreement.

To sum up my account of SIGNIFICANCE. The discovery of a disagreement with an epistemic peer about a proposition  $p$  is such that makes some error-possibilities concerning the positive justificatory status of one’s belief more salient than they were before. It is important to notice that this does not equate the discovery of disagreement to the acquisition of a defeater. If a defeater is something that actualises the potential defeasibility of one’s doxastic attitude thereby reducing its positive epistemic status, on the view I am offering discovering a disagreement with an epistemic peer does not make it the case that one’s doxastic attitude becomes less justified (or unjustified altogether), for the discovery of a disagreement makes more salient the *possibility* that one has made a mistake in the formation of one’s doxastic attitude rather than *actualising* this possibility. The fact that a possibility becomes more live, as it were, does not mean that that possibility is actual. So, after the discovery of their disagreement, peers do not learn that they made a mistake in

the formation of their respective attitudes which undermines the epistemic pedigree of their attitudes: rather, they learn that the possibility that a mistake has been made is very live.

I have clarified why, on my view, disagreement does not provide peers with a defeater. Two further details need to be added. First, is disagreement evidence? Secondly: why is learning that the possibility that one has made a mistake is more live than before epistemically significant?

I suspect that the first question cannot receive an ecumenical answer, in that different epistemologists mean very different things by evidence. However, if we accept a broadly functionalist approach to evidence, it is plausible to maintain that what at least partly characterises the functional profile of evidence is its raising the probability of a proposition. That is to say, something is evidence for a proposition if and only if the probability of a proposition conditional on the evidence is higher than the prior probability of the proposition (see e.g. Kelly 2006, Williamson 2000). However, if disagreement were to be conceived of as evidence, we would need to factor in the probabilistic platitude e.g. in this way:  $\Pr(P|E \wedge \text{Dis}) < \Pr(P|E)$ , where E stand for the shared first-order evidence. And yet, this comes very close to equate disagreement to an undercutting defeater, something which is clearly rejected by my account of the epistemic significance of peer disagreement. So, to avoid misunderstanding, I will not conceive of the discovery of a disagreement with an epistemic peer as the acquisition of new evidence.

These considerations are also preparatory for answering the second question raised before, that is, why is learning that the possibility that one has made a mistake is live epistemically significant?

This question becomes more pressing since I have just claimed that learning the discovery of a disagreement with an epistemic peer should not be regarded as defeating evidence. But since evidence is that which has an impact on the updating or retention of our doxastic attitudes, it seems that disagreement is not epistemically significant in the sense of requiring of peers to update their doxastic states by e.g. decreasing or increasing their degrees of confidence towards the relevant proposition.

True, my account of the epistemic significance of peer disagreement is such that its discovery doesn't give rise to an evidential change, as it were. Yet, in recent times epistemologists have started to acknowledge that not all the features that are relevant to determining the good epistemic status of a mental state (or action/process/activity) that is liable to epistemic evaluation must be reduced to evidential features. This basic point has been made in very different ways in the debate about external world scepticism (see e.g. Wright 2004 and his notion of epistemic entitlement) and

in the debate on evidentialism about belief (see e.g. Reisner 2007, Talbot 2014). Here, I want to show that the same general point can be plausibly made in the context of peer disagreement.

On my account, the epistemic change brought about by the discovery of a disagreement with an epistemic peer is the following. Given that the error-possibilities concerning the positive epistemic status of one's doxastic attitude on the contested issue becomes more salient that they were before the discovery, it seems that a peer could not easily and non-dogmatically demote the opponent's opinion, ignore it and stick to her guns. This point has already emerged while discussing Kelly's proposal. Even if Allison is the one who got it right and she also knows that the evidence entails a given answer, in order for her knowledge self-ascription 'I know that the belief that  $p$  is supported by the evidence' to justify her sticking to her guns and ignoring Marc's belief, that ascription has to be true. Yet, it is plausible to think that if error-possibilities concerning the doxastic justification are more salient, these error-possibilities threaten the truth of Allison's ascription, for the possibility that the evidence does not support  $p$ , or that there is not enough evidence regarding  $p$ , and so on and so forth. Unless Allison rules these possibilities out, she should not self-ascribe knowledge of the positive epistemic status of her belief. But if she should not do so, she has no further reason to demote Marc's opinion and stick to her guns.<sup>7</sup>

The foregoing discussion enables us to establish two points. First, since disagreement does not act as a defeating evidence, it does not require of peers to update their doxastic states by becoming less confident of the truth and falsity (respectively) of the target proposition. Yet, since disagreement makes some error-possibilities concerning the epistemic positive status (understood in terms of doxastic justification) of one's belief, this fact is epistemically significant, in that it prevents peers from demoting their opponent's belief and stick to their guns in an epistemically proper way. Therefore this leaves peers in an *impasse*: since the discovery of their disagreement does not tell us to decrease their respective levels of confidence, but it prevents them from simply sticking to their guns, what should they do?

#### **4 The epistemic response to peer disagreement**

I contend that, to get out of the *impasse*, peers should engage themselves with the new error-

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<sup>7</sup> Allison could, of course, demote Marc's epistemic credentials in a dogmatic way just in virtue of the fact that he disagrees with her. Many (Christensen 2011, Elga, 2007, Lackey 2010) contend, rightly in my view, that the dogmatic move is epistemically fishy. More on this in section 6.

possibilities and check which ones (if any) are to be ruled out, which ones (if any) are to be taken to be actual. The reason is the following: if one rules out the relevant error-possibilities concerning the epistemic status of her belief that  $p$ , one has epistemic reasons to maintain that one is justified in believing that  $p$ ; these reasons allow one to demote one's opponent epistemic credentials and stick to one's guns. By contrast, if one finds out that one or more error-possibilities are actual, then one has epistemic reasons to maintain that one is not justified in believing that  $p$ . If one is rational, one should thereby update one's doxastic state vis-à-vis  $p$  accordingly.

This line of thought can be honed in different ways. To illustrate but one of them, let us consider the considerations deployed by Kelly cited above and apply them to (RESTAURANT). If Allison rules out the relevant error-possibilities, then her knowledge self-ascription 'I know that the belief that  $p$  is supported by the evidence' meets the new and higher epistemic standard induced by the relevant error-possibilities being salient. This means that even after the discovery of her disagreement with Marc she is in a position to claim 'I know that the belief that  $p$  is supported by the evidence', and this enables her to demote Marc's epistemic credentials and stick to her guns.

This explains that engaging with the relevant error-possibilities (either by accepting some of them as actual or ruling them out) is significant since doing so is what enables peers to establish whether they should retain their original doxastic attitudes or whether they should decrease them.

I will now introduce a new piece of terminology and say in order for peers to engage with the error-possibilities, they should *re-open the question whether  $p$* .<sup>8</sup> To re-open the question whether  $p$  is to perform certain tasks, such as going over the shared body of evidence by re-evaluating its extension (i.e. whether a given item counts as a piece of evidence or not), carefully re-assess its probative force, double-check the reasoning by means of which one put all the evidential items together to get to a conclusion about its support to a specific attitude, make sure that one's general epistemic and cognitive conditions were normal. Or else, as we shall see more extensively below, re-opening the question whether  $p$  may require of individuals to look for new evidence and arguments to come to a verdict about the truth of  $p$ .

To unpack this a little, let us play again with our toy example. Allison and Marc, I maintain, should re-open the question of what their shares are for truth either by going over the present body of evidence (e.g. by rechecking the price of each course on the menu, recalculating carefully the tip with a calculator, checking whether there is a cover charge to pay) or, if they still disagree, by

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<sup>8</sup> Some of the terminology I will employ is borrowed from Shah and Velleman (2005).

looking for new evidence (they might ask the waiter, and so on). This re-opening activity will enable them to find out who got it right. Assume, as we did before, that Allison got it right. I submit that the re-opening activity allows her to rule out all the salient error-possibilities.

To put it more generally, re-opening the question of the truth of a proposition is a cognitive and inquisitive activity whereby peers determine whether (and which) the error-possibilities made salient by the discovery of disagreement should be ruled out or accepted as actual. For the reassessment of evidence, reasoning, and epistemic credentials is meant to unmask different or misleading ways of weighing certain evidential items, the insufficiency of the present body of evidence, and/or the need of looking for new evidential items, a flaw in the reasoning from evidence to the doxastic attitude, a deficient general epistemic status (e.g. the presence of some bias which impaired the judgment), and so on and so forth.

However plausible the foregoing may be, one might doubt that re-opening the question whether  $p$  really provides us with an *epistemic* response to peer disagreement. For one might indeed agree that re-opening the question whether a proposition is true could be a good thing to do only in a *prudential* sense, while, at the same time, questioning the epistemic nature of such an activity.

It must be noticed, however, that the activity of re-opening the question of the truth of a proposition is, eminently, a *truth-promoting* activity, that is, an activity we engage ourselves in when our goal is to find out the truth. To see why, let us look at the cognitive tasks undertaken during this activity I specified above. A moment of reflection shows that they are relevant to ascertaining a proposition's truth-value. For instance, if during the re-opening activity one discovered that one has mistakenly assessed the probative force of some evidential item by taking it to support that not- $p$  rather than  $p$ , acknowledging such a mistake would likely improve one's chances of getting  $p$ 's truth-value right. And similar considerations hold for all the other tasks involved in the activity of re-opening the question whether  $p$ , i.e. collecting new evidence, reassessing the reasoning, and so on and so forth. It seems therefore safe to claim that re-opening the question whether  $p$  for it is a truth-promoting conduct. In this sense, re-opening the question of the truth of the contested is an *epistemic* response to the discovery of peer disagreement.

Summing up, my answer to the MASTER QUESTION is the following: given that the discovery of disagreement makes some error-possibilities more salient, peers should re-open the question whether  $p$ , for doing so is conducive to ruling out or accepting such possibilities.

To complete this answer, however, one need be clarified. To put it roughly: 'What does it happen to the peers' original doxastic attitudes?'.

This question is motivated by the fact that while the other answers to the MASTER QUESTION say something about what doxastic state epistemic peers should be in after the discovery of disagreement: so-called steadfast views (Kelly 2005, Wedgwood 2010) maintain that no doxastic change need to take place before and after the discovery of disagreement since the relevant process requirement says that peers should stick to their guns, while so-called conciliationist views (Christensen 2007, 2011, Elga 2007) have it that a doxastic change in the form of decreasing or increasing one's credences towards  $p$  takes place since the relevant process requirement says that peers should decrease (increase) their respective credences towards  $p$ .<sup>9</sup> The requirement I am proposing, viz. peers are required to re-open the question whether  $p$ , by contrast, is silent on the question whether a doxastic change has to take place after the discovery of a disagreement with an epistemic peer.

To address this issue, I believe that a prior matter needs to be settled. I have characterised re-opening the question whether  $p$  as a cognitive inquisitive activity: What is the mental state we are in while being engaged in such an activity?

By answering this question first I will be able to complete my answer to the MASTER QUESTION by explaining what happens to the peers' initial doxastic attitudes.

## **5 Re-opening the question and doxastic attitudes**

I will answer the previous question in two steps. First, I will survey the plurality of doxastic attitudes by singling out a distinctive kind of propositional doxastic attitude, what I shall call an attitude held in the hypothesis mode. Secondly, I will argue that the functional and normative profile of this attitude is what fits best some descriptive and normative aspects of the activity of re-opening the question whether  $p$  which are at odds with attitudes of suspended judgement and belief.

### *5.1 A plurality of doxastic attitudes*

I want to begin with focusing on what I take to be part of the phenomenology our cognitive lives and epistemic practices. Suppose we want to know whether a given proposition  $p$  is true. We

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, conciliationist and steadfast theories are more complex than that, and these requirements are taken to be in place if certain conditions are met. However, a careful analysis of these alternative proposals will not be pursued here.

therefore start wondering about  $p$ , and by doing so we try to collect any datum that might provide us with a clue to  $p$ 's truth-value. At this stage, then, we are pursuing our first inquiry into  $p$ 's truth-value. Surely, there are cases where the matter we wonder about is pretty easy to settle. We find sufficient evidence in favour of  $p$ 's truth, and we believe that  $p$ . However, there are cases in which we do not immediately turn an inquisitive attitude such as wondering about  $p$ , into settled doxastic states, such as e.g. believing that  $p$ . Often, when we have gathered enough evidence and deliberated for a while about  $p$ , we move from an inquisitive attitude to a more committed state of mind which does not yet qualify as a belief state: even though we are not yet ready to believe/disbelieve  $p$ , we can nonetheless express our cognitive inclinations regarding  $p$ 's truth-value by putting forward an *hypothesis*, say, the hypothesis that  $p$  is true. When we hypothesise that  $p$ , we express our tentative take on  $p$ 's truth-value while, at the same time, being open to the fact that the question whether  $p$  is not yet settled.

This intuitive picture seems to warrant the idea that there are different ways of regarding a proposition as true. To systematise this idea, let us say that there are different *cognitive modes* whereby we regard a proposition  $p$  as true. Specifically, I want to argue that besides regarding  $p$  as true in the *belief mode*, we can regard  $p$  as true in what I shall call the *hypothesis mode*. In light of this distinction, I will claim that, in order for peers to re-open the question whether  $p$ , they should stop entertaining attitudes in the belief mode and start to hold them in what I shall call the *hypothesis mode*. If both claims are correct, they will afford the means to offer a new answer to the MASTER QUESTION.

All this is taking us rather ahead of ourselves, so let us proceed carefully. First off, let me introduce a piece of terminology which will prove useful for subsequent discussion. Let us use the term *acceptance* to cover the cognitive genus of propositional attitudes, and let us say, following the lead of Nishi Shah and David J. Velleman (2005), that to accept a proposition is to treat it as true, and to ignore (for some reason and at least temporarily) that it is false. On this view, acceptance encompasses various attitudes, such as believing, assuming, hypothesising, and so on. I shall therefore say that we accept propositions under different *cognitive modes*: the hypothesis mode, the belief mode, the assumption mode, and so on and so forth.

In order to characterise the hypothesis mode I deem instructive to contrast it with the belief mode. There are many views on what kind of thing a belief is. I cannot here take up the task of showing, for each of them, that attitudes held in the hypothesis mode differ from attitudes held in the belief

mode.<sup>10</sup> However, by way of illustration, take the liberal version of the classical dispositional account of belief defended by Eric Schwitzgebel (2002). It is worth quoting the relevant passage in full:

Consider a favorite belief of philosophers: the belief that there is beer in the fridge. Some of the dispositions associated with this belief include: the disposition to say, in appropriate circumstances, sentences like ‘There’s beer in my fridge’; the disposition to look in the fridge if one wants a beer; a readiness to offer beer to a thirsty guest; the disposition to utter silently to oneself, in appropriate contexts, ‘There’s beer in my fridge’; an aptness to feel surprise should one go to the fridge and find no beer; the disposition to draw conclusions entailed by the proposition that there is beer in the fridge (e.g., that there is something in the fridge, that there is beer in the house); and so forth.

[Schwitzgebel 2002: 251]

Let us briefly compare these dispositions with those that can be plausibly associated with the state of hypothesising that there is beer in the fridge.

Suppose that you believe that there is coke in the fridge, hypothesise that there is beer in the fridge, and you have a thirsty guest. You would undoubtedly be less surprised if you found no beer than if you found no coke. This indicates that the *phenomenal* dispositions associated with the attitude held in the hypothesis mode would be less *vivid* than the dispositions associated with the attitude held in the belief mode.

Consider now *behavioural* dispositions. Suppose that you have two fridges. You believe that there is beer in fridge A and you hypothesise that there is beer in fridge B. They are equally distant from you. It seems plausible to have that your disposition to go to fridge A if you want a beer is stronger than the disposition to go to fridge B. Or, to put it differently, you are more disposed to go to fridge A than to fridge B. As for *verbal* behavioural dispositions, such as the dispositions of uttering, in the relevant circumstances, sentences such as ‘There is beer in the fridge’, things are more complex. It is far from clear what must be the case in order for an utterance of this sentence to belong to a certain kind of speech act rather than another. Assertion, which we can minimally

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<sup>10</sup> I am using the plural “attitudes” since I refer to both belief and disbelief.

characterise as the speech act whereby we communicate our beliefs about the world,<sup>11</sup> is the most debated speech act through which we communicate how things are in the world. Yet, it is widely accepted it is not *the unique* speech act through which we communicate our cognitive propositional attitudes.<sup>12</sup> So, it is possible to conceive of two utterances of the same sentence as having different illocutionary forces, depending on whether they are meant to communicate the belief or the hypothesis that *p*.

Finally, Schwitzgebel acknowledges the existence of *hybrid* dispositions, such as “the disposition to search anxiously through the fridge if the beer seems unexpectedly to have run out” (Schwitzgebel 2002: 252). It seems safe to say that it would be inappropriate if you started to search anxiously through the fridge if the beer seems to have run out once you hypothesise that there is beer in the fridge. Some could indeed say to you, in a perfectly felicitous way: ‘C’mon pal, don’t make a fuss. You didn’t believe that there’s beer in the fridge’. By contrast, searching anxiously through the fridge would be more appropriate if you believed that there was beer in the fridge.

The foregoing discussion suggests that, if we adopt a dispositional account of cognitive propositional attitudes, there is enough room to distinguish between attitudes held in the belief mode and attitudes held in the hypothesis mode.

That being said, we can deepen our understanding of the differences between these two cognitive modes by reflecting on how they relate, both descriptively and normatively, to truth. As far as the descriptive side of the relation is concerned, we often read in philosophical papers that *belief aims at truth*. For the purposes of this paper, we can rest content with a minimal understanding of this metaphor to the effect that beliefs are actually regulated for truth, that is, one believes that *p* just in case one regards *p* as true for the sake of getting *p*’s truth-value right, as it were.<sup>13</sup> By contrast, I maintain that one accepts *p* in the hypothesis mode just in case one regards *p* as true for the sake of the inquiry into *p*’s truth-value. That is to say, one entertains a cognitive propositional attitude in the hypothesis mode towards *p* for the purpose of pursuing an inquiry into *p*’s truth-value (by assessing the evidential support *p* enjoys, its strength, and the possibility of finding new availing

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<sup>11</sup> For simplicity’s sake I abstract away from the question whether the belief amounts to knowledge, or is warranted, or true, or rationally credible.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Searle and Vanderveken (1985) for a classical and extensive treatment of this issue.

<sup>13</sup> I borrow this piece of terminology from Shah and Velleman (2005).

or countervailing evidence for its truth) while having a cognitive inclination towards the proposition's truth or falsity.

On the normative side, it is commonplace to take truth to be the standard of correctness for belief. This idea is expressed via the so-called truth norm of belief:

(B-Norm) For all  $p$ , one ought to believe  $p$  only if  $p$ .

On the contrary, attitudes held in the hypothesis mode are governed by the following norm:

(H-Norm) One may accept  $p$  in the hypothesis mode if this allows one to make progress with the inquiry into  $p$ 's truth-value.

This norm is less stringent than that governing attitudes held in the belief mode. From (B-Norm) it follows that it is impermissible to accept a false proposition, whereas (H-Norm) makes room for the permissibility of accepting a false proposition. It is indeed possible that during the inquiry into  $p$ , one holds an attitude in the hypothesis mode which, after having run some tests and carefully assessed the evidence, turns out to be false. However, holding that attitude in the hypothesis mode allowed us to make progress with the inquiry into  $p$ 's truth-value, for it is the analysis of the hypothesis that  $p$  that allowed us to discover that evidence points to  $p$ 's falsity. Hence, if accepting a false attitude in the hypothesis mode contributes to the progress of the inquiry into  $p$ 's truth-value, such an acceptance is epistemically permissible.

However it may be, one might acknowledge that there is such a thing as hypothesising that  $p$  and that it should be distinguished from full believing that  $p$  while, at the same time, contending that attitudes in the hypothesis mode can be reduced to more familiar doxastic attitudes. The first, somewhat natural reductionist option is the following.

Since hypothesising that  $p$  signals a more tentative cognitive attitude towards  $p$  than believing (fully) that  $p$ , it seems natural to wonder whether they can be reduced to some set of low credences towards  $p$ . Three remarks are in order.

First, this reductionist proposal would conflict with the popular *Lockean Thesis* which says that if the individual's credence in  $p$  is sufficiently high (but not necessarily 1), the individual's opinion falls in the area of belief, whereas when the credence is low (but not necessarily 0), the

individual's opinion falls in the area of disbelief.<sup>14</sup> Hence, it seems that if one wanted to identify hypothesising that  $p$  with an assignment of low credences to  $p$ , one should also commit oneself to the falsity of the Lockean Thesis. Surely the Lockean Thesis is not controversy-free, and there are other accounts of the relation between belief and credences on the market one may avail oneself of. For this reason, I content myself with simply flagging this potentially worrisome consequence and move on.

Secondly, identifying attitudes of hypothesis with low credences would have the consequence of committing us to the following intuitively awkward picture. If low credences will play the role of candidate reductions for attitudes of hypothesis, either high credences are candidate reductions for attitudes of full belief, or they are not. If they are, a consequence is that the attitudes of belief and full disbelief would be reduced to (sets of) high credences. And yet, it is intuitively controversial to say that, say, having .6 credence in the proposition  $p$  is disbelieving that  $p$ . So, if high credences are candidate reductions for attitudes of full belief, we have counterintuitive reductionist results. However, if high credences are not candidate reductions, then it is not clear what kind of role they play in our cognitive architecture. For this gives rise to an asymmetry between low credences, which play the role of being attitudes of hypothesis, and high credences, which play no specific role. This asymmetry strikes me as mysterious and, at first glance, unwarranted.

Thirdly, if we do not want to reduce attitudes held in the belief mode to credences, we can keep on treating full belief (and disbelief), hypothesis and credences as three different kinds of doxastic attitudes in a dispositional sense. First, we stick to the differences between states of full belief and states of hypothesis pointed out earlier; secondly, we accept the usual gloss to the effect that credences are betting dispositions, which are a very specific kind of behavioural dispositions. Betting dispositions are not part of the liberal dispositional account of belief proposed by Schwitzgel (2002), nor have I deployed them to distinguish the dispositions associated with attitudes of hypothesis from those associated with attitudes of full belief.

I believe that these observations strongly suggest that we had better not reduce attitudes held in the hypothesis mode to credences.

Another option might consist in reducing attitudes held in the hypothesis mode to attitudes of suspended judgement. Right off, this is far from illuminating, since we do not have a clear account of the attitude of suspended judgement. Recently, Jane Friedman has devoted a great deal attention

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<sup>14</sup> See e.g. Foley (1992). Notice that, in Foley's view, the Lockean Thesis is meant to bridge the gap between *rational* credences and *rational* belief.

to this problem, and she has proposed two versions of the same idea. Her main contention (Friedman 2013, 2015) is that suspended judgement is a *bona fide* doxastic attitude whose role in a thinker's cognitive architecture is that of signalling, as it were, the thinker's epistemic indecision or neutrality regarding a given matter. In Friedman (2013), suspended judgment is characterised as a propositional attitude that is closed under negation, that is, one is suspended about  $p$  and its negation; in Friedman (2015), on the contrary, it is characterised as a nonpropositional doxastic attitude whose content is a question.<sup>15</sup>

This other reductionist attempt won't do either, though. Attitudes of hypothesis are not attitudes of epistemic indecision or neutrality. As has emerged previously, when we hypothesise that  $p$  we are tentatively cognitively inclinations towards  $p$ 's truth, as it were. It follows that when we hypothesise that  $p$  we are still testing  $p$  for truth without *ipso facto* hypothesising that it is false. Thus, attitudes held in the hypothesis mode are not closed under negation, nor do they take questions as contents, for they are *bona fide* propositional attitudes.<sup>16</sup> This indicates that we had better set attitudes of suspended judgement and attitudes held in the hypothesis mode apart.

## 5.2 Re-Opening and The Hypothesis Mode

I have argued that there is room for the introduction of a new distinctive cognitive mode of regarding a proposition as true, i.e. the hypothesis mode, which should arguably kept distinct from both the belief mode and the attitude of suspended judgment. This means that we can equally make room for a new way of revising our doxastic attitudes: besides revising via decreasing or increasing one's credence towards a proposition, and revising via suspending judgment about the matter at hand, one can revise one's attitudes by turning them into attitudes held in the hypothesis mode.

It is important to bear in mind that in order for my new answer to the MASTER QUESTION to be complete, we should specify the mental state we are in while we are engaged in the cognitive activity of re-opening the question whether  $p$ . Mindful of the discussion of the normative and

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<sup>15</sup> Friedman (2015) identifies several attitudes of suspended judgement, such as being curious, wondering, and so on. These form the class of *interrogative attitudes*.

<sup>16</sup> I trust that the characterisation of the hypothesis mode offered in this section will enable the reader to distinguish such a mode from yet other cognitive modes, such as for instance imagining that  $p$  and assuming that  $p$ . Reasons of space prevent me from making these distinctions explicit.

functional profiles of attitudes held in the belief mode, attitudes held in the hypothesis mode and attitudes of suspended judgement pursued in the previous subsection, we can now answer this question. More specifically, I will argue that neither attitudes of suspended judgement nor attitudes of belief are those attitudes we entertain while being engaged in the activity of re-opening the question whether  $p$ . By contrast, attitudes of hypothesis seem to square better with some descriptive and normative aspects of this activity, or so I shall contend.

Let us begin with attitudes of suspended judgement. If we accept Friedman's characterisation of attitudes of suspended judgement, it follows that these attitudes are plausibly held at the very first stage of our inquiries into the truth of a proposition, when we start gathering all the pieces of evidence, initially assessing their respective probative force, and we haven't yet made up our mind about the truth or falsity of the proposition. So, it is plausible to contend that attitudes of suspended judgement are those attitudes we entertain when we *open* the question whether  $p$ . However, the activity of *re*-opening the question whether  $p$  is such that we engage ourselves in to, for instance, double-check our assessment of evidence and the proper formation of the belief on its basis. That is to say, before re-opening the question whether  $p$  we have already some deliberative work about  $p$ 's truth and we are reviewing, as it were, the quality of that work to find out which error-possibilities must be ruled out or accepted (if any). Since nothing in this re-opening activity seems to require us to do *tabula rasa* of our cognitive inclinations towards settling a question in a way rather than another by becoming completely epistemically neutral about the question at hand, I contend that two epistemic peers should not turn their initial doxastic attitudes into attitudes of suspended judgement.<sup>17</sup>

I turn now to argue that attitudes held in the belief mode are not the optimal attitudes to entertain while being engaged in the cognitive activity of re-opening the question whether  $p$ . To be upfront about it, I don't have a knockdown argument in favour of these two points. However, I want to point to some descriptive and normative aspects of the activity of re-opening the question which, to my mind, should lead us to accept that the mental state we are in while engaging in this activity is best characterised as an attitude of hypothesis rather than an attitude of belief.

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<sup>17</sup> This point will be indirectly reinforced by some of the considerations I will offer in section 6 about complex and longstanding disagreements about important matters. To anticipate, however, the idea is that it would be too spineless to being completely neutral after the discovery of a disagreement about a question that matters to us. This intuitive thought is what mainly motivates the ANTI-SPINELESSNESS *desideratum*.

As has emerged previously, a liberal dispositional account of belief has it that belief is the mental state associated with different kinds of dispositions. I want now to suggest that some of these dispositions are absent when one re-opens the question whether  $p$ . First, it seems plausible to maintain that when one re-opens the question whether  $p$  one is not disposed to assert that  $p$ . To see why, let us accept, for the sake of the argument, that assertion is the kind of speech act one performs when one (overtly) undertakes a commitment to authorise the hearer to assert  $p$  and all that logically follows from it, to take up the challenge of vindicating the assertion by offering considerations that justify it, and to retract it if certain conditions are met (see e.g. MacFarlane 2011 for a presentation of the view). However, since the process of re-opening is also supposed to establish whether  $p$  is supported by the evidence, then it seems that during this process one would not recommend the hearer to assert  $p$ , for one is exactly checking whether  $p$  is the right thing to assert, as it were. Moreover, while re-opening the question it seems that one is not so much vindicating what one has said before the discovery of disagreement; rather, one is making sure whether what one has said is epistemically correct. More to the point, being in a position to vindicate one's assertion requires having ruled out the error-possibilities made salient by the discovery of disagreement. These observations seem to point to the fact that while re-opening the question whether  $p$ , one is not disposed to assert  $p$ . Rather, one is disposed to perform a different speech act that we may call, following a suggestion by Williamson (2000: chapter 11), conjecturing  $p$ . I take it to be plausible to say that by performing the speech act of conjecturing  $p$ , we are thereby linguistically conveying our attitude held in the hypothesis mode towards  $p$ , even though a proper articulation of this point cannot be proposed here.

Secondly, it seems plausible to contend that if while re-opening the question whether  $p$  you found out that  $p$  is not the case, you would not be dismayed. This is so because the discovery of a disagreement with an epistemic peer has made some error-possibilities more salient than they were before, so you are in some sense more aware of the fact that you might have made a mistake that you were before the discovery of the disagreement. But if we accept Schwitzgebel's point that belief is associated with particularly vivid phenomenal dispositions, this seems to speak against the fact that while re-opening the question whether  $p$  we believe that  $p$ . As I mentioned before, attitudes held in the hypothesis mode are associated with not particularly vivid phenomenal dispositions. This means, roughly, that when one hypothesises that  $p$ , one would not be completely surprised if it turns out that  $p$  is false and not well supported by the evidence.

Finally, let me focus on a normative feature of re-opening the question. It is far from clear that attitudes held in the belief mode are sufficient to taking the question whether  $p$  to be settled. However, it seems plausible to contend that they are necessary by establishing a link between taking the question whether  $p$  to be settled and knowing that  $p$ : If you know that  $p$ , then you take the question whether  $p$  to be settled in the affirmative. In light of this, there is a tension between knowing that  $p$  and re-opening the question whether  $p$ ; if you know that  $p$ , then it seems epistemically infelicitous or inappropriate to re-open the question whether  $p$ . This tension can be accounted for by noticing that while knowledge entails belief, re-opening the question entails a different doxastic attitude from belief. So, if we re-opened the question whether  $p$  while, at the same time, knowing that  $p$  we would be doing something epistemically inappropriate because it is epistemically appropriate to entertain different doxastic attitudes towards  $p$  at the same time. Since attitudes held in the hypothesis mode are distinct from attitudes held in the belief mode, we can instantiate this pattern of argument by saying that since it is epistemically fishy to both believe and hypothesise that  $p$  at the same time, this is what explains the epistemic fishiness of re-opening the question whether  $p$  while knowing that  $p$ .<sup>18</sup>

The foregoing discussion motivates the contention that the attitude we are in while re-opening the question whether  $p$  is best conceived of as an attitude of hypothesis rather than either an attitude of suspended judgement or an attitude of belief. Since at the beginning of this section I have argued for the existence of such a distinctive kind of doxastic attitude, this allows me to complete my answer to the MASTER QUESTION as follows.

The disagreement's epistemic significance requires of peers to perform a *qualitative* rather than *quantitative* act of revision, as it were: Once peers acknowledge their disagreement, they should stop entertaining their respective attitudes held in the belief mode in towards  $p$  and start entertaining contrasting attitudes held in the *hypothesis mode* about the truth and falsity of  $p$ . To give it a proper formulation, my answer reads as follows:

Epistemic norms require of two epistemic peers that, if they begin with doxastic attitudes  $d_1$  and  $d_2$  and they discover their disagreement, they re-open the question whether  $p$  and revise their cognitions from the belief mode to the hypothesis mode.

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<sup>18</sup> I articulate the details of this picture in AUTHOR. This pattern of argument is originally due to Friedman (2015).

## 6 Testing the new answer

In the previous sections, I have articulated a new answer to the MASTER QUESTION. This answer relies on a new way of accounting for SIGNIFICANCE. It is time now to test it against the other two *desiderata*, viz. ANTI-SPINELESSNESS and VARIABILITY, thereby providing a complete overall assessment of the answer.

Let me firstly explain how my answer to the MASTER QUESTION copes with VARIABILITY. The point I want to defend is that, depending on the outcome of the re-opening activity, in the vast majority of cases peers will be able to settle the question of who got it right thereby settling the question of what they should believe. What peers should believe after the discovery of disagreement will thereby vary depending on the outcome of the specific re-opening activity. This seems to square nicely with the driving thought of VARIABILITY to the effect that in certain cases we are right in other cases we are wrong, and yet other cases the question of who is right is harder to answer. Thus, it is compatible with my answer that, in some cases, re-opening the question whether  $p$  reveals that just one individual has botched things epistemically. For instance an individual A has misunderstood the probative force of certain evidential items. In such cases, A should revise her own initial attitude in the belief mode: for instance, if A believed that  $p$ , after the outcome of the re-opening activity, A should disbelieve that  $p$ . In other cases, however, the re-opening will reveal that both peers have botched things epistemically and that they should radically different attitudes from those they held before discovering the disagreement, for they now acknowledge that they both made a mistake in the assessment of the evidence.

In light of this, it seems safe to contend that my answer to the MASTER QUESTION has the resources to vindicate VARIABILITY. Of course, making good on this claim comes down to a case-by-case analysis which cannot be undertaken here.

Let us turn now to ANTI-SPINLESSNESS and consider the following train of thought. One might grant that it is *prima facie* plausible to hold that the discovery of disagreement with an epistemic peer should lead us to reassess the probative force of evidence, the various arguments, reasoning, and so on, the view on offer has it that in all cases of peer disagreement we should stop entertaining any attitude in the belief mode and entertaining attitudes in the hypothesis mode. This kind of response to peer disagreement seems to propagate the idea that after the discovery of disagreement we are no longer entitled to have attitudes in the belief mode. Therefore, after the discovery of a disagreement with an epistemic peer, we should not believe many of the

propositions we currently believe. This suggests that the view on offer does not satisfy ANTI-SPINELESSNESS, or so the objection goes.

To address this objection, let us focus on a different family of disagreements. We are familiar with disagreements in which the body of evidence (and reasons) is fairly complicated and somewhat hard to fully disclose; evidence can sometimes be inscrutable,<sup>19</sup> or it can be stretched in one direction or the other. The cases I have in mind here are, primarily, philosophical or moral disagreements about complicated matters, such as the definition of knowledge, the free will problem, the permissibility of abortion and so on and so forth. Plausibly, in at least some of these cases individuals take themselves to be epistemic peers; arguably, they are not in a condition of total ignorance about the issue under scrutiny, nor is it a plain fact that the evidence supports to the same extent  $p$  and its negation. Moreover, these disagreements are often about topics we deeply care about. So, these are the instances of the phenomenon of peer disagreement where a good answer to the MASTER QUESTION has to vindicate ANTI-SPINELESSNESS.

Surely, in these cases the process of re-opening might be quite demanding, and its outcome is far from obvious, for complex disagreements about delicate matters come in many varieties. To unpack this a little, take moral disagreements. For some of them, I hold out the hope that we'll make genuine progress. Bear in mind that until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, people (philosophers included) used to disagree about whether slavery is morally permissible. Since then, we have made considerably progress with regard to such an issue, and disagreements about the moral permissibility of slavery no longer require a complex re-opening activity to find out which error-possibilities are actual. So, it is likely that some of our currently heated moral disagreements will be easily resolvable in a similar way.

It is also plausible to think that some moral disagreements are not even in principle resolvable since they do not admit of a uniquely correct answer. We could disagree and our assessment of the shared first-order evidence could be driven by different sets of incommensurable considerations each of which is objectively valuable.<sup>20</sup> In such cases, after re-opening the question whether  $p$  and finding out that the assessment of the shared first-order evidence is guided by such incommensurable considerations, both peers should bring the re-opening activity to a close and keep on believing what they used to believe before the discovery of their disagreement. This is evidence that my answer to the MASTER QUESTION is in a position to vindicate the intuition

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<sup>19</sup> This expression is Sosa's (Sosa 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Here I am borrowing from Brink (1989: 202).

that in certain peer disagreements bearing on topics that matter a lot to us, such as moral questions, we should not give up our original beliefs. Thus, my answer has the resources to cope with ANTI-SPINELESSNESS.

Be that as it may, there are other complex disagreements in which that re-opening the question whether  $p$  will not guarantee that a clear, let alone conclusive, outcome about the contested proposition's truth-value is likely to be forthcoming. Undoubtedly, philosophers are familiar with this phenomenon. Even after re-opening the question of a proposition's truth for a long time and with great attention, it will be far from clear who is guilty of a mistake, whether the philosophical proposition under assessment is true or not; or else, whether the two parties rely on incommensurable yet equally objectively valuable principles. Hence, it is likely that in many cases re-opening the question of  $p$ 's truth-value will not allow peers to take any attitude in the belief mode towards the contested philosophical proposition, nor to suspend judgment about it. So, what two disagreeing philosophers taking themselves to be epistemic peers should do in such cases?

I cannot here discuss these cases in detail, but the general strategy I propose is as follows: peers involved in such complex disagreements should keep on treating their cognitions as contrasting hypotheses about the proposition under scrutiny and look for new evidence, reasons, arguments, and so on that may help settle the question. So, I contend that in these cases two individuals should sustain their oppositions by entertaining incompatible cognitive attitudes held in the hypothesis mode. It is worth bearing in mind that hypothesising that  $p$  is the cognitive attitude whereby an individual manifests her cognitive inclination towards  $p$ 's truth without yet holding a more committal attitude towards it, such as a belief. So, there is a sense in which, by keeping on hypothesising that  $p$  and that not- $p$ , the two peers are not giving up their regarding  $p$  as true and false altogether. And, in this sense, they are not spineless.

Of course, one might retort that, in these cases, we do not end up having a full satisfaction of ANTI-SPINELESSNESS. In reply, two things must be stressed. First, it is very hard to come up with an answer to the MASTER QUESTION which vindicates the three *desiderata* in a full way. Secondly, and most importantly, it is far from clear to what extent, if any, the idea that, in some cases, peers should keep entertaining different hypotheses about  $p$  would be a problem, let alone a fatal one. We must indeed be open to the possibility that, in certain cases, we should exercise some epistemic humility while looking for new ways to settle a complex question.

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