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### INTRODUCTION: THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF DISAGREEMENT

One of the most salient features of forming beliefs in a social context is that people end up disagreeing with one another. This is not just an obvious fact about belief-formation; it raises interesting normative questions, especially when people become aware of the opinions of others. How should my beliefs be affected by the knowledge that others hold contrary beliefs? In some cases, the answer seems easy. If I have reason to think that my friend is much better informed than I am, her dissent will often require substantial revision in my belief. If I have reason to think she's mentally deranged, her dissent may require no revision at all. But other cases are more difficult. For example, how confident should I be about my views in epistemology, knowing that they are denied by philosophers at least as intelligent, sane, knowledgeable, diligent and honest as I am?

In the larger social context, these questions are complicated by considerations such as the numbers of people holding different views and the extent to which their views were reached independently. But most of the recent discussion has focused on simplified two-person cases where (1) one has good reason to believe that the other person is, in some sense, one's "epistemic peer" – one's (at least rough) equal in evidence and intellectual virtue, and (2) one has no special evidence (such as evidence of one party's drunkenness or emotional attachments) that would introduce clearly relevant asymmetries in the specific case. The hope is that by studying this sort of artificially simple socio-epistemic interaction, we will test general principles that could be extended to more complicated and realistic situations, such as the ones encountered by all of us who have views – perhaps strongly held ones – in areas where smart, honest, well-informed opinion is deeply divided. Most of the papers here also concentrate mainly on the two-person case (Conee's paper is the exception, focusing explicitly on long-running disputes among communities of experts).

Discussions of the epistemic significance of disagreement are often shot through with expressions of the venerable epistemic tension between skepticism and dogmatism (the latter taken in its good old-fashioned pejorative sense).

Philosophers who take relatively "conciliatory" positions – ones on which disagreement often requires diminished confidence in one's views – risk accusations of excessive skepticism. Some philosophers find implausible any position entailing that they cannot be rationally confident of their carefully considered position on, e.g., compatibilism about free will. Perhaps more troublingly for the conciliatory position, general principles that yield concessive

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responses in cases where concession seems appropriate may seem also to mandate giving up beliefs on matters where all agree that skepticism is unwarranted.

Philosophers who take relatively “steadfast” positions—ones on which disagreement rarely requires adjustment in one’s confidence—run the opposite risk. If I discover that my friend disagrees with my belief that P, and I have ample evidence that she’s my epistemic peer in such matters, why think that I’m the one who got it right this time? One way of supporting my belief that I’m the one who got it right would simply rely on the reasoning behind my original belief that P (if P is true, after all, it’s my friend who is wrong this time). But this can seem to beg the question raised by my friend’s dissent. It can seem like a dogmatic refusal to take her epistemic competence sufficiently seriously.

Clearly, the opposition between skepticism and dogmatism occurs primarily in contexts having nothing to do with social epistemology. But the disagreement problem encounters this opposition in a way that can seem compelling for us, even when the Cartesian or Humean problems do not. For most epistemologists, it is a given that, somehow, it must be rational for me to be confident that I’m seated in front of a fire, or that the sun will rise tomorrow. But it’s very much an open question whether, in the present social context, it’s rational for any of us to be confident in our opinions on, say, externalism about epistemic justification. Readers will notice this tension between skepticism and dogmatism showing through in many of the papers here.

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