Chapter 2: Conceptual Work on Epistemic Peers

In the first chapter I did conceptual work on the notion of disagreement. After considering and rejecting a number of potential analyses, I settled on Disagreement. For any two individuals S1 and S2, any proposition p, and any time t, S1 and S2 disagree over p at t if and only if S1 and S2 take different doxastic attitudes toward p at t.

In this chapter, my aim is to do two things: (1) to do some much needed conceptual work on the concept of epistemic peers, and (2) to consider the use of epistemic peers in the current epistemology of peer disagreement literature. I begin with (1) and then move to (2). Before we move to (1), though, there are a couple of things to note up front.

First, this chapter invokes two key ideas about epistemic peerhood. One is that epistemic credentials seem crucial to epistemic peerhood. In short, it seems that epistemic peers are persons who have equally impressive epistemic credentials. Of course, there will be much more on this in just a bit. The second key idea about epistemic peerhood is that it clearly plays a certain role in the current epistemology of peer disagreement literature. Specifically, being in a known disagreement with an epistemic peer is supposed to raise an interesting epistemological question about justification for the parties involved, and it’s supposed to do so in an especially compelling way. So, the function of epistemic peers is to raise just that
epistemological question. After the conceptual work on *epistemic peers*, there will be much more on that as well.

Now, carrying out the first aim of this chapter, doing the conceptual work on *epistemic peer*, will develop that first key idea about peerhood. Carrying out the second aim of this chapter, doing the literature review regarding the use of *epistemic peers*, will touch on that second key idea. What we’ll see is that nearly all of the usages of *epistemic peers* in the literature fail to allow the concept of *epistemic peers* to play that role in such a compelling way.

The second thing to note up front is that, unlike *disagreement* (and its cognates), *epistemic peers* seems to be a term of art. Consequently, it may be that any account of *epistemic peers* found in the literature will be partly (or largely) stipulative. However, that doesn’t prevent us from making some progress here on clarifying how we think about (and might use) the concept, particularly since (as we’ve already noted) the concept is intended to play a certain role in motivating an epistemological question about justification within the epistemology of peer disagreement literature. With that in mind, let’s proceed.

There are lots of ways two individuals could be regarded as peers, but only some of those ways are of any interest here (as in the epistemology of disagreement literature).\(^{48}\) That two individuals share (roughly) the same body dimensions,

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\(^{48}\) And since we are interested in the *epistemology* of disagreement, we are interested in *epistemic peers* only (though we could almost surely extend the notion of *peer* into other domains as well, e.g., *moral peers*). This is not to suggest that factors relevant to two individuals being, say, moral peers are necessarily distinct from those same individuals being epistemic peers. For example, suppose the issue at hand is some complicated moral matter. It might be that having certain moral virtues is not only a factor in being moral peers in this case, but also a factor in being epistemic peers in this case since one
birthplace, birthday, hair color, number of toes, taste in music, number of friends, or hometown, for example, is of no interest at all in this conversation, unless—and this is the key idea—those things somehow make one’s *epistemic credentials* on the matter at hand more or less impressive. Taking this last thought, we might unpack the notion of a peer as follows:

(7) For any two individuals \( S_1 \) and \( S_2 \) and any time \( t \), \( S_1 \) and \( S_2 \) are *epistemic peers* at \( t \) if and only if \( S_1 \) and \( S_2 \) have equally impressive epistemic credentials at \( t \).

It seems to me that this is the basic idea behind peerhood. Much more needs to be said, though. We need to have something to say about what it means to have *equally impressive epistemic credentials*.

A brief word about ‘equal’ (and its cognates) is called for here. Tom Kelly says this:

It is a familiar fact that, outside of a purely mathematical context, the standards which must be met in order for two things to count as *equal* along some dimension are highly context-sensitive. Thus, inasmuch as classes of epistemic peers with respect to a given issue consist of individuals who are ‘epistemic equals’ with respect to that issue, whether two individuals count as epistemic peers will depend on how liberal the standards for epistemic peerhood are within a given context. That is, whether two individuals count as epistemic peers will depend

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might think that possessing those moral virtues better situates one to get at the truth of the moral matter. I won’t argue for that possibility here, but I don’t mean to rule it out either.
on how much of a difference something must be in order to count as a genuine difference, according to the operative standards. In the same way, whether two individuals count as ‘the same height’ will depend on the precision of the standards of measurement that are in play.\textsuperscript{49}

This all seems right. But there’s a more general worry. When we’re talking about the epistemic properties (credentials) of individuals, it is implausible to think that we will have anything like precise, discrete units of measurement to match with some identifiable, context-specific standard. This is particularly so when thinking about epistemic virtues like care, thoughtfulness, attentiveness, creativity, and the like. Consequently, it’s not at all clear that we can think of equality here in anything like a straightforward mathematical sense, as though we’re counting units of attentiveness, say, and comparing them to determine equality (as we would with height).

One might counter that we still can make sense of quantity talk when it comes to epistemic properties, even properties like care, thoughtfulness, attentiveness, and creativity. After all, we do talk about some people as being more careful, thoughtful, attentive, and creative than others, as we talk of others as being more justified, responsible, and intelligent than others. Nothing said here is meant to deny this. That is, denying that there are precise, discrete epistemic units to be measured hardly commits us to the view that more than/less than/same as talk is nonsense. It’s just that much of our epistemic talk will more closely resemble talk like “that lecturer was

\textsuperscript{49} See his (2005) fn. 12.
more than/less than/just as boring than the last” than it will “that lecturer is taller than/shorter than/the same height as the last”.

So much for ‘equal’ as used above. Now, we might begin by thinking of epistemic credentials as the sort of thing that might appear on an individual’s comprehensive *epistemic résumé*. That is, these epistemic credentials are properties of the individual or relations that the individual bears to other things that make that individual particularly fit for future epistemic success.

While this might be the right way to think about epistemic credentials, matters are much more complicated now. We have introduced another notion: *epistemic success*. But success at what? ‘Epistemic success’ here may refer to any one of a number of different things since individuals who accomplish varying epistemic feats each have seemingly plausible claims to having achieved epistemic success. So consider an individual who routinely takes reasonable doxastic attitudes. Such an individual, it seems, may plausibly claim epistemic success. Now consider an individual who believes only truths. It seems that such an individual has also achieved epistemic success of some kind. So, too, the individual who forms the vast majority of his doxastic attitudes in a thoroughly responsible, painstakingly careful and dutiful manner.

This variation in conceiving of epistemic success is relevant since the properties and relations that make one fit for one kind of epistemic success need not make one fit for another kind of epistemic success. Consider, for example, the

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50 Particularly if we think of truth as being the so-called *epistemic goal*. There’s a large literature on this. See, for example, Marian David (2005) and Jonathan Kvanvig (2005).
property of *being-a-victim-of-an-evil-demon*. Call this the ‘demon property’. Let’s say that having the demon property entails that things seem to one precisely as they would were there no such demon, yet one forms wildly false beliefs about the external world. Of course, having the demon property then makes one particularly unfit for achieving certain kinds of epistemic success, such as believing only truths and attaining lots of knowledge. On the other hand, having the demon property seems rather irrelevant to, and so does not make one particularly unfit for, achieving other kinds of epistemic success, such as routinely forming reasonable (epistemically justified) doxastic attitudes or (less controversially) routinely arriving at doxastic attitudes in a responsible, painstakingly careful and dutiful manner. So, if ‘epistemic success’ is to be understood as referring to attaining knowledge or believing only truths, then either having or failing to have the demon property is to be regarded as one of that individual’s epistemic credentials and, consequently, that fact will be a part of one’s epistemic résumé. But if we understand ‘epistemic success’ as something like routinely forming reasonable doxastic attitudes or, alternatively, routinely arriving at doxastic attitudes in a responsible and dutiful manner, then either having or failing to have the demon property is not to be regarded as one of that individual’s epistemic credentials and, consequently, that fact will not show up on one’s epistemic résumé. In short, then, how we think of epistemic success here (at

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51 Of course, if one understands the concept of justification to entail having a proper (or reliable) connection of some sort to one’s external environment, then having the demon property will be terribly relevant.
least partly) determines the makeup of our list of epistemic credentials and the nature of one’s epistemic résumé.

It seems to me that arguing here over what kind of epistemic success counts as the real or true kind of epistemic success is misguided. It seems that there just are different ways one might be epistemically successful. Here’s a quick argument to that conclusion. Attaining reasonable (epistemically justified) doxastic attitudes is a good thing from the epistemic point of view. Attaining true beliefs is a good thing from the epistemic point of view. Attaining knowledge is a good thing from the epistemic point of view. Engaging in responsible, careful, dutiful inquiry is a good thing from the epistemic point of view. Attaining or engaging in what is good from the epistemic point of view just is to be epistemically successful. Therefore, attaining reasonable (epistemically justified) doxastic attitudes, true beliefs, knowledge, or engaging in responsible, careful, dutiful inquiry is to be epistemically successful.

One might object to this quick argument by claiming that epistemic success is tightly connected to epistemic goals. That is, what counts as epistemic success is the achievement of one or more epistemic goals. But, the objection may continue, there is only one epistemic goal, and so, contrary to the argument, there is only one epistemic success—namely, the achievement of that one epistemic goal.

There is no need here to determine what the one epistemic goal is. Truth is often cited as the epistemic goal. But whether truth or something else is the goal is inconsequential to this objection. What matters for this objection is that it makes
sense to talk of epistemic goals, that there is only one, and that epistemic success just is the achievement of that one epistemic goal.

Whatever the merits of epistemic goal talk, I see no reason to think that epistemic success is limited to the achievement of the epistemic goal. So, I think we can grant that it makes sense to talk of epistemic goals, grant that there is only one such goal, but still maintain that there are different kinds of epistemic success.

Perhaps this will help us see why. Consider basketball. It’s not crazy to think that, if there is a goal to basketball and only one at that, the goal of basketball is to win. To achieve that goal, i.e., to win, certainly does seem to count as success. It seems quite right to say that the winning team has experienced success in virtue of their winning. However, it also seems quite right to say that a team has experienced success for other reasons. For example, it seems right to say that a team has experienced success when it shoots well from the field, fails to commit a turnover, rebounds well, plays solid team defense, and hustles after loose balls. And this may be so even when the team loses the game, failing to achieve (we’re granting) the one goal of basketball. In such a situation, we might reasonably say that the losing team has failed to experience one kind of success (winning), but it has experienced other kinds of success (good field goal percentage, team defense, etc.) anyway. We might justify our considering doing these other things as experiencing success by pointing out that doing those things (shooting well, playing good team defense, etc.) all count as good things from the basketball point of view. We can also say that while a team
that wins has experienced success of some kind, if it fails to shoot well, play good
team defense, hustle, rebound, and the like, the team has failed in other ways.52

Matters seem to be similar when thinking about epistemic success. Let’s
suppose that talking about epistemic goals makes sense, and that there is just one
goal. Let’s say, following received tradition, that the one epistemic goal is believing
the truth while avoiding error.53 Now, achieving that goal, that is, to have a large
assortment of true beliefs and very few false beliefs, does seem to count as having
experienced epistemic success. However, it also seems right to say that one who
routinely forms reasonable (epistemically justified) doxastic attitudes and conducts
responsible, dutiful inquiry has also experienced epistemic success. And this may be
so even when one still ends up believing very few truths and a whole lot of
falsehoods, thereby failing to achieve what we’re granting is the one epistemic goal.
Moreover, it also seems right to say that one who does achieve the epistemic goal of
believing truth and avoiding error, and is thereby successful in that sense, might also
be a colossal epistemic failure in other ways: one might accidentally and fortuitously
stumble upon the truth and avoid error while making ridiculous inferences, yielding
to wishful thinking and superstition, and conducting sloppy and negligent inquiry.54
So, even if there is just one epistemic goal, it still seems eminently reasonable to
allow for multiple kinds of epistemic success.

52 And that team’s coach will let his team know as much accordingly.
53 See, for example, William Alston’s (1988) p. 258. I’m not endorsing this view here. I’m simply
assuming it for the sake of discussion.
54 We might easily imagine something like an epistemic coach tearing into such a fortuitous pupil.
So, it seems right to take the preceding argument to heart and recognize different kinds of epistemic success. Now, the notion of *epistemic peers* invokes the notion of *epistemic credentials*. What counts as an epistemic credential, we saw, is relative to particular kinds of epistemic success. So, identifying two (or more) individuals as epistemic peers means that they have equally impressive epistemic credentials *of this sort, that sort, and some other sort* (taking into account the various kinds of epistemic success).

Perhaps it would be useful, then, to make explicit some of the specific sorts of epistemic credentials relevant to determining epistemic peers. Here’s one. Two (or more) individuals might share equally impressive epistemic credentials with respect to attaining reasonable (epistemically justified) doxastic attitudes. Call such individuals *justification peers*. Here’s an attempt at analyzing this notion:

(8) For any two individuals S1 and S2 and any time t, S1 and S2 are *justification peers* at t if and only if S1 and S2 are equally fit at t for attaining justified doxastic attitudes.

Note that what exactly makes one fit for attaining justified doxastic attitudes will vary with accounts of justification. For example, if we take an evidentialist account of justification (according to which, roughly, a justified doxastic attitude is one which is supported by and based upon one’s total evidence), we might think that the abilities to form doxastic attitudes that fit one’s total evidence and to resist

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55 I’m dropping the reference to the equivalency between ‘reasonable’ and ‘epistemic justification’ from here on. I’m also dropping the modifier ‘epistemic’ (and its cognates) in front of ‘justification’ (and its cognates). These should all be assumed throughout.
wishful or fearful thinking, biases and prejudices, and the like while forming doxastic attitudes are among the properties that make one fit for attaining justified doxastic attitudes. On the other hand, if we adopt a reliabilist account of justification (according to which, roughly, a reasonable doxastic attitude is one which is the result of a belief-forming process that tends to result in true beliefs), we might follow the evidentialist in some ways on what makes one fit, but we will part ways with the evidentialist in other important ways. Specifically, in adopting a reliabilist account of justification, we will, unlike the evidentialist, think it terribly important that one is not in a cognitively hostile environment like a world in which one is at the mercy of an evil demon (the sort that guarantees that the external world is in truth nothing like how it appears to one).

As it stands, (8) is completely general. No specific class of propositions is singled out as the class of propositions toward which S1 and S2 are equally fit for attaining justified doxastic attitudes. As we’ll see shortly, I don’t think that this all by itself is a problem with (8), but it does raise the following point: it seems clearly possible for two (or more) individuals to be justification peers about some class of propositions and not for others. For example, S1 might be particularly susceptible to forming doxastic attitudes toward propositions about religion on the basis of wishful

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56 I am not assuming here any sort of robust doxastic voluntarism.
57 By condemning wishful, fearful, and biased or prejudicial thinking, for example. I say ‘might’, however, because I suppose if my forming beliefs via wishful thinking, say, happened to be a reliable belief-forming practice, then we wouldn’t follow the evidentialist in condemning wishful thinking.
58 This assumes that we can make sense of the idea of there being classes of propositions. To take the example about to come up in the body of the paper, we might wonder whether there is any sensible, informative and correct way of classifying a proposition as being religious or otherwise. I will proceed, though, on the assumption that we can make sense of there being classes of propositions, though I make no claims about how easy it is to actually do the classifying.
or fearful thinking, thereby making S1 unfit for forming justified doxastic attitudes. S2 may not suffer from such a defect regarding religious propositions and, as a result of otherwise being as equally fit as S1 is in attaining justified doxastic attitudes regarding religious propositions, S1 and S2 are not justification peers about religious propositions.

None of this is a problem for (8) since (8) is consistent with there being justification peers about some class of propositions or other. To see this, it might help to think about the following: two individuals may be peers when it comes to running in general even though they fail to be peers at some specific distance. Or, to take another example, two individuals may be peers when it comes to the game of basketball in general even though they fail to be peers at some specific skill set within the game.\footnote{Lebron James and Kobe Bryant could plausibly be regarded as basketball peers even though (arguably) Kobe has the better jump shot and Lebron is the better defender.} Similarly, two individuals may be peers when it comes to forming justified doxastic attitudes in general even though they fail to be peers regarding some specific class of propositions or subject matter.

There is one final, and more worrisome, point to raise about (8). Notice that there is no modifier such as ‘only’, ‘a lot of’, ‘some’, or ‘just a couple of’ in front of ‘justified’. Consequently, (8) does not make it clear whether we are to regard two (or more) individuals as justification peers in a wide range of cases. Consider, for example, the following case. Suppose some individual, call him ‘Einstein’, is particularly well-equipped for forming justified doxastic attitudes toward propositions dealing with a wide variety of topics. Einstein is, among other things, excellent at
making good inferences and disciplined in forming doxastic attitudes apart from wishful or fearful thinking and bias or prejudice. On the other hand, another individual, call him ‘Jones’, is rather dull and dim-witted when it comes to most things. On these topics, he hastily and sloppily makes inferences and routinely forms doxastic attitudes out of wishful or fearful thinking and bias or prejudice. However, Jones does not exhibit these traits when it comes to thinking about NCAA Division 1 football. When forming doxastic attitudes about propositions closely associated with NCAA Division 1 football, Jones is clear, precise, and careful in making inferences. His inferences are typically quite good, and, unlike most college football fans, his doxastic attitudes are not based on wishful or fearful thinking or bias and prejudice. So, Jones is well-equipped for forming justified doxastic attitudes toward these propositions (and, sadly, very few others). Now, our question is whether (8) entails that Einstein and Jones are justification peers. I don’t think the way (8) is formulated makes the answer to this question clear. And it seems to me that the answer we would want here is that they are not justification peers.

Let’s first note that adding ‘only’ or ‘a lot of’ in front of ‘justified’ will not work. Consider adding ‘a lot of’. With that revision, (8) seems to entail that Einstein and Jones are justification peers since Einstein seems well-equipped for forming a lot of justified doxastic attitudes (on, it turns out, a wide range of topics) and Jones also seems well-equipped for forming a lot of justified doxastic attitudes (though, it turns out, they mostly are about propositions dealing with college football). So, on this
revision, (8) would entail that Einstein and Jones are justification peers, but, it seems, they are not.

Another problem with adding ‘a lot of’ is that you may have two (or more) individuals who are cognitively equipped to entertain only a few propositions at all (given severely limited cognitive abilities) but where one individual (call him ‘Wilson’) is well-equipped for forming justified doxastic attitudes toward those very few propositions while the other individual is not at all so equipped. In such a case, a revised (8) seems to entail that they are justification peers since neither individual in this case has any shot at all (given their cognitive equipment) at forming a lot of justified doxastic attitudes—neither individual here can even entertain a lot of propositions. That is, in virtue of neither individual being equipped at all to form a lot of justified doxastic attitudes, both individuals in this case are equally well-equipped for attaining a lot of justified doxastic attitudes. But the right answer in this case seems to be that Wilson and the other individual are not justification peers since Wilson is better fit for the very few propositions they can consider. For these reasons at least, revising (8) by adding ‘a lot of’ in front of ‘justified’ is no good.

A comparable revision to (8) using ‘only’ is also no good. Suppose Einstein and Jones both have deterministic psychological defects (through no fault of their own) both to entertain the proposition expressed by ‘there is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe’ and to disbelieve it entirely out of fear. Consequently, both are equally fit for forming only justified doxastic attitudes—that is to say, not at all fit.

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60 Craft your own story here. In any event, the circumstances seem possible.
Neither has any chance at all of forming only justified doxastic attitudes. In this case, a so-revised (8) would entail that Einstein and Jones are justification peers. But, again, this seems wrong.

Revising (8) by adding ‘some’ or ‘a couple of’ (or the like) in front of ‘justified’ is clearly unacceptable. To begin with, (8) would then clearly entail that Einstein and Jones are justification peers, and we are assuming that they are not. In addition, (8) would then seemingly entail that nearly everyone is a justification peer with nearly everyone else since nearly everyone is very well fit indeed for attaining justified doxastic attitudes about some topic or other (perhaps simple facts about one’s mental life, personal facts, simple perceptual facts, and the like). And (8) wasn’t supposed to have the result that nearly everyone is a justification peer with nearly everyone else. That doesn’t seem right at all.

It’s not at all clear that any modifier added in front of ‘justified’ will result in a satisfactory analysis. Perhaps we need to take a cue from the Einstein/Jones example and take seriously the observation made above that there can be justification peers about some class of propositions in particular. Doing so may prompt us to reject (8) and offer the following analysis in (8)’s stead:

(9) For any two individuals S1 and S2, any time t, and any class of propositions C, S1 and S2 are justification peers at t about C if and only if S1 and S2 are equally fit at t for attaining justified doxastic attitudes toward propositions in C.
This analysis allows us to say about the Einstein/Jones example that Einstein and Jones fail to be justification peers about a large number of classes of propositions, which may in turn explain our apparent inclination to think of Einstein and Jones as not being justification peers in general (if there were such a notion). (9), then, has the advantage on (8) in being able to sidestep any difficulties associated with the Einstein/Jones case. Consequently, (9) seems preferable to (8), leaving us with the view that the concept of justification peers is something that is relativized to a class of propositions.

It would be nice if (9) were an acceptable analysis. But I am not confident that it is. My worry is this: (9), like (8), lacks a modifier in front of ‘justified’ and it seems like this will result in the same kinds of difficulties we experienced with (8), only now restricted to a class of propositions.\footnote{This is ignoring the worry I raised in fn. 58 above: that we can sensibly carve out classes of propositions. The prospects look dim for providing a clear and helpful way of identifying classes of propositions, although it doesn’t follow from that difficulty there are no classes of propositions.} Consider a variation on the Einstein/Jones case. Suppose that when it comes to religious propositions, Einstein is an exemplar of justified doxastic attitude formation. He makes careful, precise inferences and resists forming doxastic attitudes on the basis of wishful or fearful thinking and bias or prejudice. Einstein is quite fit to form justified doxastic attitudes about religious propositions. Jones, on the other hand, is, as before, dull and dim-witted about religious propositions. He makes silly, hasty inferences and is often controlled by wishful thinking, fear, and bias and prejudice. However, when it comes to propositions about Zoroastrianism in particular, Jones is no slouch. He is a model of
clear, precise thinking and unmoved by wishful thinking, fear, or bias and prejudice. When it comes to Zoroastrianism, Jones is quite fit to form justified doxastic attitudes. He is Einstein’s equal here, but an epistemic disaster regarding every other religious proposition. Now, the question before us is whether Einstein and Jones are justification peers about religious propositions. Again, it’s not clear what (9) entails, though it seems like a proper analysis ought to have it that Einstein and Jones are not justification peers about religious propositions.

It seems, then, that the best way to go is to eschew the reference to a class of propositions in the analysis of *justification peers* and propose something like the following:

(10) For any two individuals S1 and S2, any time t, and any proposition p, S1 and S2 are *justification peers* at t about p if and only if S1 and S2 are equally fit at t for attaining a justified doxastic attitude toward p.

In our proposed analyses, we’ve moved from the complete generality found in (8) to talk of classes of propositions in (9) to what we find in the current proposal: talk of single, target propositions. Here in (10), peerhood with respect to justification is relativized to individual propositions. Consequently, this analysis avoids any worry about quantification.

Perhaps there is another sort of worry one could raise here about (10). An example might help motivate the worry. Suppose Kerry and Carrie are equally gifted, careful, skilled at making inferences, etc. Carrie has spent a lot of time thinking about chemistry, studying it and spending time in the lab. Kerry has not. He hasn’t studied it
and has spent no time in a lab. Now take some sophisticated proposition about
chemistry, perhaps something involving complex reactions. Present that proposition
to both Kerry and Carrie. For Carrie the chemist, this is easy stuff. She has done the
requisite research. She forms the correct belief, and does so justifiably. For Kerry,
this is tough. He is ill-prepared to handle the proposition. He doesn’t know what to
think, and so he justifiably suspends judgment.

Now, the worry is this. (10) would seem to imply that Carrie and Kerry are
justification peers about that proposition, given their equal giftedness, care, inferential
skills, etc. They seem equally fit at forming justified attitudes about this proposition.
But all of this ignores Carrie’s expertise in chemistry and Kerry’s ignorance. It might
seem to one that Carrie is Kerry’s superior here. And (10) wrongly implies otherwise.
So we should reject (10).

The objection misses the mark. It conflates getting to the truth of the matter
and forming a justified doxastic attitude on the matter. Carrie is far better positioned
than Kerry is to get to the truth of matter. But Carrie has no advantage on Kerry when
it comes to forming a justified doxastic attitude. They are equals from the standpoint
of justification, though they are not equals (at this point) when it comes to getting at
the truth of the matter.62 There’s no good objection to (10) here. And as far as I can
tell, there are no other worries to raise for (10).63 Consequently, it seems that (10) is
acceptable. I suggest that we go with (10).

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62 We’ll get to the issue of being equals regarding the truth shortly.
63 One could press what ‘epistemic fit’ amounts to here. That would be a legitimate thing to press.
Specifically, one might notice that no explicit appeal has been made to evidence, reasons, processes,
So much for that epistemic credential relevant to determining epistemic peers.

Another relevant epistemic credential is this. Two (or more) individuals may share equally impressive epistemic credentials with respect to attaining true beliefs. Call such individuals *truth peers*. Here is an attempt to analyze this notion (following closely the analysis of *justification peers* above):

(11) For any two individuals $S_1$ and $S_2$, any time $t$, and any proposition $p$, $S_1$ and $S_2$ are *truth peers* at $t$ about $p$ if and only if $S_1$ and $S_2$ are equally fit at $t$ for attaining a true belief about $p$.

It is important to note that what makes one fit for attaining true beliefs about propositions has to do primarily with one’s *connection to the world*. On this reading, internally identical agents may not be equally fit for attaining a true belief about the world. So, if one is poorly connected to the world, as one is when one is the victim of the sort of demon alluded to above, then one is not very fit at all for attaining true beliefs about the world. On the other hand, if one is connected to the world in a superior way, then, regardless of whether one routinely or rarely forms justified doxastic attitudes or engages in responsible, careful inquiry, one is quite fit to attain the truth about the world.

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cognitive faculties, virtues, vices, and the like (except for *care* in the Kerry/Carrie case). The omission is deliberate. All of this would land us in controversies that we (happily) need not get into here. In particular, that would land us into controversies over the right analysis of justification. We can talk about justification peers without having to take a stand on this issue.

64 This claim about *connection to the world* should be read in such a way that it includes connection to necessary truths and falsehoods in addition to contingent propositions about the external (and introspective, i.e., internal) world. Surely two subjects can be *truth peers* regarding some necessary truth or falsehood as well as external (and introspective, i.e., internal) world propositions.
Perhaps an example will help here. Suppose Damon is a terrifically careful and precise thinker, forming beliefs on the basis of supporting evidence and engaging in responsible, thoughtful inquiry. He is an exemplary rational agent. However, Damon is also a denizen of a demon world. That is, Damon resides in a world where an evil demon sees to it that things are not at all as they appear to Damon. Consequently, nearly all of Damon’s beliefs about the world are false. He is poorly connected to the world and, as a result, ill-fit to form true beliefs about the world.

Angela, on the other hand, is a model of what not to do when it comes to forming beliefs. She is sloppy, reckless, and displays a startling inability to make good inferences. Angela, however, is a resident of an angel world. That is, Angela resides in a world where a benevolent angel sees to it that many of Angela’s beliefs about the world are true. So, aside from Angela’s mundane perceptual and introspective beliefs turning out to be true most of the time in the very ordinary way, many of her beliefs formed out of wishful thinking, bias and prejudice, sloppy reasoning, and wild speculation turn out to be true, too, due to the angel’s creative intervention.65 But, due to Angela’s lack of observation and relative disinterest in the

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65 One might wonder what exactly this looks like. Let’s take an example. Suppose Angela believes, purely on the basis of wishful thinking, that her parents will buy her a car for her birthday. The angel will then see to it that her parents do indeed buy her a car (by providing the requisite promptings and, if need be, finances). Let’s take another example. Suppose Angela is wondering about the character of a man she recently met. As a matter of fact, the man is an upstanding fellow. Unfortunately, Angela’s sloppy reasoning and wild speculations begin to lead her to believe that the man is corrupt. The angel, knowing Angela thoroughly, sees to it that she finally believes that the man is upstanding by bringing to her mind some feature of the man that the angel knows Angela will strangely associate with being an upstanding fellow (perhaps the fact that he was wearing khaki pants or had his hair styled a certain way at the time they met). One final example. Suppose Angela believes (foolishly!) that the Cleveland Browns will win the Super Bowl merely because she’s fond of the colors brown and orange and so likes the colors of the team and, furthermore, recalls liking the city on a recent visit. The angel, of course, will then orchestrate events so that the Browns (miraculously!) win that year.
truth, she never realizes her wildly successful track record in latching on to the truth about the world. Now take some ordinary proposition about the external world. In this example, it seems clear that Damon and Angela are not truth peers about that proposition. They are simply not equally fit for attaining the truth here since Damon is so poorly connected to the world (in virtue of the malevolent demon) while Angela enjoys a superior connection to the world (in virtue of the benevolent angel). Angela is better fit than Damon even given Damon’s far better rational agency.

The example makes a conceptual point. While it might very well be the case that the usual properties associated with superior rational agency—careful, precise reasoning, responsible inquiry, and the like—are related to attaining true beliefs about the world, that is so only contingently (if it is so at all) as demonstrated by Damon. Angela, conversely, shows that lacking those properties need not result in a systematic failure to attain the truth about the world.

A closely related point is this: Suppose S1 is a justification superior to S2 about nearly every proposition at nearly all times, where S1 is a justification superior to S2 about some proposition p at some time t if and only if S1 is more (or better) fit than S2 at t for attaining a justified doxastic attitude toward p. Even so, it doesn’t follow that S1 is a truth superior (analyzed accordingly with appropriate revisions) to S2 about any proposition at any time. The concepts are distinct, and Damon/Angela kinds of cases make this point.

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66 This example explicitly concerns external world propositions. Other examples may be constructed that concern necessary propositions and introspective (internal world) propositions.
Let’s move on to another epistemic credential relevant to determining epistemic peers. Two (or more) individuals might share equally impressive epistemic credentials with respect to attaining knowledge. Call such individuals knowledge peers. Consider the following:

(12) For any two individuals S1 and S2, any time t, and any proposition p, S1 and S2 are knowledge peers at t about p if and only if S1 and S2 are equally fit at t for attaining knowledge about p.

What makes one fit for attaining knowledge would seemingly have to do with what makes one fit for attaining the various constituent parts of knowledge.67 Let’s assume for the sake of discussion that knowledge requires justified true belief.68 Now take truth, for example. If one is not at all fit (for whatever reason) for attaining truth, then one will thereby be unfit for attaining knowledge. The same stands for belief. If one is particularly unfit for forming beliefs (for whatever reason), then it seems that one is unfit for attaining knowledge.69 And, of course, the same applies to justification. One who is particularly unfit for attaining justified beliefs will be correspondingly unfit

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67 This is assuming that there are constituent parts to knowledge, i.e., that knowledge is analyzable into various conceptual parts. That assumption may be (and has been) rejected. See Williamson (2000). On nearly every view, though, knowledge is factive, and so (as indicated in the text) fitness for attaining truth will apparently be relevant to fitness for attaining knowledge. That’s true for Williamson, too.
68 This assumption is not free from controversy. Only the view that knowledge is factive seems to have reached anything resembling a philosophical consensus. Justification and, to a lesser extent, belief have been regarded as unnecessary for knowledge. But nothing rides on any of this.
69 One might wonder what would make one unfit for forming beliefs. Some psychological conditions would do the trick, I imagine. If one is supremely cautious and hesitant, for example, then one would be entirely reluctant to form beliefs. And insofar as belief is required for knowledge, one’s ability to attain knowledge is thereby compromised. Furthermore, one who is unfit for forming beliefs may also be unfit for forming justified doxastic attitudes. This is because in many cases where the justified attitude is belief (or disbelief), she will be reluctant to form the epistemically called for attitude.
for attaining knowledge. If there is a fourth condition for knowledge, then (almost surely) similar remarks will apply there as well.

It is not clear how these will all interrelate to make for overall fitness for attaining knowledge. For example, suppose S1 is particularly fit for attaining justified beliefs but is not terribly fit for attaining truth.\textsuperscript{70} S2, on the other hand, is particularly fit for attaining truth, but not terribly fit for attaining justified beliefs. It’s not at all clear to me whether S1 or S2 is more fit for attaining knowledge. And it’s not clear that greater precision on understanding each factor will help, either. This is because it’s not at all clear how to weigh the factors.

Thankfully, we need not pursue any of this here. None of this calls into question (12) as an apt way of understanding knowledge peers. At most, given the above problem, it will be terrifically difficult to say when two individuals are knowledge peers. But we have no reason to think that this would be an otherwise simple task anyway. And, as we will see below, this difficulty has no unhappy consequences for the epistemology of disagreement literature.

Let’s move on to another epistemic credential relevant to determining epistemic peers. Here it is: two (or more) individuals might share equally impressive epistemic credentials with respect to engaging in thoroughly responsible, careful, dutiful inquiry. Call such individuals responsible inquiry peers.\textsuperscript{71} Once again, following the lead set by the other analyses, we have the following:

\textsuperscript{70} Perhaps S1 is the plaything of an easily bored evil demon.

\textsuperscript{71} For those inclined to think that justified doxastic attitudes just are responsibly formed doxastic attitudes, then responsible inquiry peers and justification peers are the same thing. See, for example,
For any two individuals S1 and S2, any time t, and any proposition p, S1 and S2 are responsible inquiry peers at t about p if and only if S1 and S2 are equally fit at t for engaging in inquiry about p in a responsible manner.

Fitness with respect to responsible inquiry seems to involve a variety of factors internal to the agent. James Montmarquet identifies some traits (or intellectual virtues) the exemplification of which seem important to engaging in responsible inquiry. Here is John Greco’s summary of those traits:

"Virtues of impartiality" include such personality traits as openness to the ideas of others, willingness to exchange ideas, and a lively sense of one's own fallibility. "Virtues of intellectual sobriety" oppose the excitement and rashness of the overly enthusiastic. Finally, "virtues of
intellectual courage” include a willingness to conceive and examine alternatives to popular ideas, perseverance in the face of opposition from others, and determination to see an inquiry through to the end.\textsuperscript{74}

There’s no need to think that this is exhaustive. Perhaps there are other traits as well.

As with justification, there’s a lot to say here that will be left unsaid. That’s okay for our purposes here. But it is worth noting a few things.

It may seem that relativizing responsible inquiry peerhood to propositions is a mistake given that fitness here amounts to having certain personality traits or virtues (which would in turn be understood as general dispositions or habits). A better analysis (the objection goes) would be this:

\begin{equation}
\text{(14) For any two individuals } S_1 \text{ and } S_2, \text{ and any time } t, S_1 \text{ and } S_2 \text{ are } \textit{responsible inquiry peers at } t \text{ if and only if } S_1 \text{ and } S_2 \text{ are equally fit at } t \text{ for engaging in inquiry in a responsible manner.}
\end{equation}

There’s no good objection here. It seems sensible to say that one could cultivate a disposition or habit of one kind or another \textit{with respect to some propositions but not others}. For example, it makes sense to say that while I am intellectually courageous about most things, I am not when it comes to propositions such as \textit{abortion is wrong} or \textit{homosexuality is permissible}. (13) allows us to say this while (14) does not, and so (13) is to be preferred.

Some comments made about knowledge peers apply here as well. There are hard questions about how these personal traits (or virtues) interrelate to yield a final

\textsuperscript{74} See Greco (2008).
verdict of ‘responsible’ or ‘irresponsible’ for any specific inquiry about some proposition. That is, it’s not clear how these traits interrelate to make for overall fitness for engaging in responsible inquiry about some proposition. So, it’s not clear that an agent that has the virtues of impartiality and intellectual sobriety yet lacks intellectual courage with respect to some proposition is overall fit for engaging in responsible inquiry about that proposition. Similarly, interpersonal comparisons will be hard to make here. For example, regarding some proposition, I may be modestly impartial and courageous, but exceptionally intellectually sober while another may be modestly courageous and sober yet exceptionally impartial. Who is overall more fit for engaging in responsible inquiry about that proposition is a vexed question. None of this, though, challenges (13) as the right analysis, and so we need not be delayed by these troubles. So much for responsible inquiry peers.

There’s another epistemic credential relevant to picking out epistemic peers. This will be the last epistemic credential we will consider, though there may very well be others to find. Two (or more) individuals might have the same information that bears on some proposition. Call such individuals information peers. Here’s the proposal:

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75 None of these remarks is intended to serve as an objection to Montmarquet’s view (or anyone else’s for that matter). I’m just flagging some difficult issues that remain for a comprehensive understanding of this specific epistemic credential for determining epistemic peers.

76 It seems as though there are plenty of other epistemic credentials relevant to determining epistemic peers since there are a lot of other factors relevant to epistemic standing and evaluation. For example, take any particular intellectual virtue, say, freedom from bias. We could wonder what makes any two individuals bias peers. Or take some specific kind of inference making ability, like proficiency at making good inferences involving statistics. We could wonder what makes two individuals statistical-inference peers. We could go on and on. But we won’t.

77 In what follows I do not take myself to be contributing to the conversation on what information is. For an overview of that conversation, see Floridi (2009).
For any two individuals S1 and S2, any time t, and any proposition p, S1 and S2 are *information peers* at t about p if and only if S1 and S2 have at t the same information bearing on p.

Some clarification about (15) is in order. It’s not clear what is meant by *information* or the *same information.* Nor is it clear what it means for one to *have information.* It’s not even clear what it means for information to *bear on* a proposition. I’m not going to say anything about the *bears on* relation. But let’s see what we can do to help clarify the notions of *information* (as used in (15) only), *same information,* and *having information.*

First, ‘information’ in (15) is not supposed to mean the same thing as ‘evidence’ as used in standard evidentialist theses of justification (or, perhaps, in epistemology generally).78 ‘Evidence’ in those contexts is intended to pick out mental items like beliefs, memories, rational intuitions, seemings, and perceptual experiences.79 ‘Information’ in (15) is not so intended. Rather, ‘information’ here is meant to pick out something that is in principle publicly accessible and shareable.80

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78 Here’s a standard evidentialist thesis of justification: “Doxastic attitude D toward proposition p is epistemically justified for S at t if and only if having D toward p at t fits the evidence S has at t.” See Feldman and Conee (1985). Here’s another: “Believing p is justified for S at t iff S’s evidence at t supports p.” See Feldman (2003a).

79 Alternatively, ‘evidence’ may refer to the *propositional content* (if any) of those mental items. I don’t mean to take a stand here on debates about what precisely counts as evidence. I only mean to contrast the use of ‘evidence’ in these contexts with ‘information’ in (15).

80 I’m assuming that (at least some of the) evidence in the sense identified in the text is not publicly accessible or shareable. This is not meant to deny that we can report to others our beliefs, memories, rational intuitions, seemings, and perceptual experiences. Surely we can (typically). We can in this sense share our evidence, and in this sense our evidence is publicly accessible. But in reporting we are not literally giving or handing over, say, our memories to others. For example, when I report to you that I remember walking around Cedarville University’s campus this morning, you are not thereby the proud owner of that memory. You are, rather, the recipient of some testimony to the effect that I am the proud owner of that memory.
this way, information is much more like the legal, courtroom notion of evidence than the evidentialist, generally epistemological notion of evidence already specified.81

Perhaps walking through some examples might help clarify how we are to think about ‘information’ as used in (15). Suppose Adam and Brenda are both sitting in on a philosophy class. The lecture topic for the day is cultural relativism about moral rightness. At the beginning of the class they are given a brief article by James Rachels presenting, explaining, and evaluating cultural relativism. After that, they hear the class professor present, explain, and evaluate cultural relativism. Finally, at the end of class, the professor has them read an analysis of cultural relativism by Fred Feldman. By this point, however, Adam has checked out. He’s staring at the article, but he’s daydreaming. He’s not actually reading anything. Meanwhile, Alyssa and Brad are in a philosophy class at a neighboring university. Coincidentally, they are talking about cultural relativism and also read the James Rachels and Fred Feldman essays. In addition, they hear the same presentation by their particular professor as Adam and Brenda heard from their professor. Now, take the proposition cultural relativism is true. In this example, candidate bits of information coming out of this scenario82 and bearing on that proposition include the readings and the lectures (with corresponding explanations and arguments).83

Here’s another example. Suppose Chelsea and Dirk are walking through the park on a bright, sunny day. They stop to relax for a moment on a park bench. As

81 For this contrast, see Feldman (1992) and Kelly (2008b).
82 Here I’m ignoring background information potentially acquired through other scenarios.
83 We’ll attend shortly to the question of what information Adam and Brenda have.
they are looking out over a meadow, Dirk sees a deer but Chelsea does not. They are looking in the same direction for the same duration. Furthermore, two men standing behind the park bench are taking digital photos of the relevant portion of the meadow during that time. Neither Chelsea nor Dirk is aware of these men. Now, relevant to the proposition *there is a deer in the meadow*, candidate bits of information arising from this scenario include Dirk’s sincere testimony that he saw a deer while looking over there (referring to the relevant segment of the meadow) for that long (referring to the time spent looking), Chelsea’s sincere testimony that she did not see a deer while looking over there (same referent as in Dirk’s case) for that long (same referent as in Dirk’s case), and the digital photos taken by the men standing behind them. Note that the perceptual experiences themselves had by Chelsea and Dirk do *not* count as information.84 Those are not in principle publicly accessible and shareable.

These examples will help us say a bit about what *same information* amounts to in (15). Consider Adam/Brenda and Alyssa/Brad. Perhaps not surprisingly, the James Rachels and Fred Feldman essays read by Adam and Brenda85 comprise the same information as the James Rachels and Fred Feldman essays read by Alyssa and Brad. Perhaps more surprisingly, the lecture heard by Alyssa and Brad comprises the same information as the lecture heard by Adam and Brenda. This is so even though the lecture was delivered by two different professors. After all, they were the same explanations and the same arguments. Think about it this way: were the lectures

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84 This provides a contrast with ‘evidence’ as used in evidentialism and epistemology in general. These perceptual experiences would count as evidence in (many of) those contexts.

85 Well, Adam checked out by the time the Feldman essay came around.
offered by the two professors to be represented by corresponding handouts, the handouts would be indistinguishable from each other.

Now, claiming that the two lectures comprise the same information doesn’t mean that there are no resulting differences in information now had by Adam/Brenda or Alyssa/Brad given the different lecturers. For example, here’s a bit of information had by Adam and Brenda that is not had by Alyssa and Brad: *this professor (referring to their professor) thinks that way* (referring to their professor’s evaluation) about cultural relativism. And, of course, Alyssa and Brad now have information that Adam and Brenda do not (given the differences in lecturers): *this professor (referring to their professor) thinks that way* (referring to their professor’s evaluation) about cultural relativism.

In the Chelsea/Dirk case, one point to bring out is that Dirk’s (Chelsea’s) sincere testimony that he (she) did (did not) see a deer in the meadow is the same information regardless of who has it. So, for example, with respect to Dirk’s sincere testimony that he saw a deer in the meadow, both Dirk and Chelsea have the same information. The same applies to Chelsea’s testimony.

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86 We’re getting a bit ahead of ourselves at this point by moving into discussion about what information one has.

87 It’s worth noting again how this differs from what we’d say about evidence. Surely Dirk, in virtue of having the perceptual experience of being appeared to deer-ly, is in a different position evidentially than Chelsea is in virtue of having Dirk’s apparently sincere testimony to the effect that he is being appeared to deer-ly. It’s just the evidential difference between having a perceptual experience that p and having testimony that someone had a perceptual experience that p. None of this commits us to the view that having a perceptual experience that p is worth more epistemically (or is better evidentially) than having testimony that someone had a perceptual experience that p. It’s just to say that it is different evidence (that may or may not be worth the same epistemically).
The digital photos taken by the two men may or may not count as the same information. It depends on how they turn out. Suppose the photos are indistinguishable. We then have a case similar to the otherwise indistinguishable lectures produced by different professors in the Adam/Brenda and Alyssa/Brad cases above. The photos count as the same information. On the other hand, if the photos are relevantly dissimilar, they count as different information.88

Again, it’s worth noting, as we did in discussing the lectures, that claiming that the digital photos are the same information (given indistinguishability) does not commit us to the view that there aren’t any potential resulting differences in the information had by any person given the different photographers. For example, suppose one photographer showed his photos to Chelsea and the other photographer showed his photos to Dirk. And suppose further that the digital photos are indistinguishable. Now, both Chelsea and Dirk have the same information (the digital photos). However, given the different photographers and the supposition that each sees only one set of photos, Chelsea and Dirk have information the other does not. Here’s information that Chelsea has that Dirk doesn’t: this photographer (referring to the man who showed her the photos) using this digital camera (referring to the camera used by that man) took these digital photos (referring to the photos the man showed her). And here’s some information that Dirk has that Chelsea doesn’t have:

88 The relevance here is to the target proposition. So, for example, suppose we are wondering whether there is a deer in the meadow. Now suppose one of the photographers had a finger very slightly in the way of the lens when the photo was taken. The other photographer made no such mistake. The photos would otherwise be identical but for the very slight image of the interfering finger in the upper left corner of the one photo. It is clear that the finger isn’t covering anything of consequence. I’d suggest that the photos are not relevantly dissimilar. Admittedly, I have nothing terribly helpful to say (beyond this) about what makes for a relevant dissimilarity.
this photographer (referring to the man who showed him the photos) using this
digital camera (referring to the camera used by that man) took these digital photos
(referring to the photos the man showed him).

I can imagine that one would press for some reason for thinking that the
digital photos (and the lectures, for that matter) count as the same information (given
the indistinguishability). Briefly, here are a couple of reasons. First, suppose the
photographers (or the lecturers) consulted each other prior to presenting their work to
others. Seeing that their work (the photos or the lectures) were indistinguishable, they
might say something like “Oh! I see that we’re showing (or telling) these people (or
our students) the same thing.” And it seems perfectly sensible to think that they’re
right about that. Second, upon seeing the indistinguishable photos (or hearing the
indistinguishable lectures), we wouldn’t have the sense of learning anything new.
Consider: suppose you see one set of photos (or hear one lecture) and then, after that,
look at the other set (or hear the other lecture). It would seem strange for you to say
something like “Ah! I’ve learned something new here by looking at this other set of
photos (by hearing this other lecture).” The reason for that strangeness is that you’ve
been exposed to the same information in both instances.89

Finally, considering the examples might help us say more about what it means
to have information (at least as it is used in (15) above). Consider the Adam/Brenda
case. Adam and Brenda both have the content of the James Rachels essay as

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89 I have already granted that some new things might be learned by looking at the other photos (or by
hearing the other lecture). But that is new information gathered from the context of the other photos (or
lecture). There’s nothing new about the other photos themselves (or the lecture). That’s what matters
here.)
information. They have this as information in virtue of reading it. That counts as a kind of internalizing. ⁹⁰ They both have the class lecture as information, too. They have this as information in virtue of hearing it. That also counts as a kind of internalizing. Brenda has the Fred Feldman essay as information, though Adam does not. Brenda has it as information because she read it, thereby internalizing it. Adam, on the other hand, had checked out by the time that essay was distributed. He was looking at it, but he was reading none of it. Consequently, he does not have it as information. No internalizing took place with Adam. ⁹¹

Let’s consider the Chelsea/Dirk case. As already indicated above, both Chelsea and Dirk have as information Dirk’s sincere testimony that he saw a deer in the meadow and Chelsea’s sincere testimony that she did not see a deer in the meadow. Neither of them have the digital photos as information. They haven’t seen them. Again, there’s been no internalization of the information, and so they don’t have the information.

Variations on the cases might help raise some objections to this way of thinking about having information. For example, suppose Brenda reads the Fred Feldman essay but understands very little of it. According to the above commentary, Brenda (apparently) still has the information while Adam does not. This is (seemingly) implied since Brenda has, in some sense at least, internalized it in a way that Adam has not. But it seems wrong to say that, in this variation, Brenda has

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⁹⁰ I don’t have an account of internalization to offer. The commentary is suggestive.
⁹¹ Commentary on this case should suffice for commentary on the Alyssa/Brad variation. There’s nothing new to say about that case.
information that Adam doesn’t have. The way of thinking about *having information* presented above implies otherwise, so we should reject that way of thinking about it.

It matters a great deal what is meant by ‘understand’ when the proposed variation on the case supposes that Brenda “understands very little” of the Fred Feldman essay. If we are supposing that Brenda’s grasp of the essay is approximately what it would be if the essay were in Mandarin Chinese (a language we’ll suppose Brenda does not speak), then it’s far more plausible to suppose that she does not have the essay as information any more than Adam does, which is to say, not at all. However, if we are supposing that Brenda grasps the meanings of the sentences but fails to engage critically with the essay (such that she fails to see or appreciate the force of the arguments, the subtleties of the positions advanced, etc.), then it’s far less plausible to suppose that Brenda doesn’t have the essay as information, that she is in the same position as Adam. In such a case, she has the information, she just doesn’t know what to do with it. She has the information, but she doesn’t see its significance. Adam, on the other hand, doesn’t even have the information in the first place.92 As it stands, there seems to be no basis here for rejecting the way of thinking about *having information* provided above.

Here’s another variation to consider. Suppose Chelsea and Dirk have been given the digital photos taken by the men standing behind them, but the photos are in

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92 No doubt there is a wide range of degrees of understanding that lies between the “it’s all Mandarin Chinese to me” and the “I don’t see the point of all this” positions. There’s vagueness here concerning when Brenda moves from having the essay as information to not having it as information.
sealed manila envelopes. Are we to say here that Chelsea and Dirk have those photos as information?

It seems that they do not, at least not in the sense intended in (15) above.93 Again, there’s been no internalization of the photos. Neither Chelsea nor Dirk has looked at them. From the standpoint of having the photos as information, the photos being in an envelope is little different than the photos still being merely on the memory card in the camera. Without internalization, the information is not had by either Chelsea or Dirk.

No doubt there is more to say about how we might understand information, having information, and same information as it is used is (15) above. But I will assume that I’ve said enough to clarify (15) for our purposes here.

There’s another point we might make about (15). Once again, it seems best to relativize peerhood here to propositions (as (15) does). Take two experts in any given field, fairly broadly construed. So, for example, take two experts in contemporary western protestant theology. Call them (creatively enough) S1 and S2. While both may have the credentials to be called (correctly) experts in their field, it’s obviously possible that S1 might have more information on some specific claim within that field than S2 does. So, for example, S1 may have more information bearing on Kevin Vanhoozer’s eschatology than S2 does. So for some proposition specifically

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93 But this is a departure from how some might think about having evidence in a legal sense. (Recall that I noted above that ‘information’ as used in (15) is a lot like ‘evidence’ as it is used in the legal, courtroom sense.) Richard Feldman writes, “Suppose a certain document is a crucial item in a case. You have that thing among your possessions, but you do not know about it. In the legal sense of “having evidence,” you may have the relevant evidence.” See his (2003a) p. 45. Notice Feldman’s tentative language here. I do not mean to suggest that Feldman is affirming this is how we are to think about having evidence (information) in the legal sense.
regarding Vanhoozer’s eschatology, S1 and S2 may not be information peers though they are both experts in their field.

So much for our discussion of epistemic credentials relevant to determining epistemic peers. Now let’s sum up what we’ve done so far in this section. We’ve offered the following as an analysis of *epistemic peer* (renamed here):

**Epistemic Peers.** For any two individuals S1 and S2 and any time t, S1 and S2 are *epistemic peers* at t if and only if S1 and S2 have equally impressive epistemic credentials at t.

Obviously, this understanding of *epistemic peer* appeals to the notion of *epistemic credentials*. We noted that what counts as an epistemic credential is determined by the various kinds of epistemic success. So, since there are a variety of ways to be epistemically successful, there are a variety of epistemic credentials relevant to peerhood.⁹⁴ Here are the relevant epistemic credentials offered (though as noted above there may very well be others) and renamed to represent their status as our final analyses:

**Justification Peers.** For any two individuals S1 and S2, any time t, and any proposition p, S1 and S2 are *justification peers* at t about p if and only if S1 and S2 are equally fit at t for attaining a justified doxastic attitude toward p.

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⁹⁴ It’s worth making explicit that none of these credentials all by itself is enough to make for epistemic peerhood. So, for example, being justification peers or truth peers is not sufficient for being epistemic peers. The notion of *epistemic peers* is a summary notion encompassing all relevant epistemic credentials.
**Truth Peers.** For any two individuals S1 and S2, any time t, and any proposition p, S1 and S2 are *truth peers* at t about p if and only if S1 and S2 are equally fit at t for attaining a true belief about p.

**Knowledge Peers.** For any two individuals S1 and S2, any time t, and any proposition p, S1 and S2 are *knowledge peers* at t about p if and only if S1 and S2 are equally fit at t for attaining knowledge about p.

**Responsible Inquiry Peers.** For any two individuals S1 and S2, any time t, and any proposition p, S1 and S2 are *responsible inquiry peers* at t about p if and only if S1 and S2 are equally fit at t for engaging in inquiry about p in a responsible manner.

**Information Peers.** For any two individuals S1 and S2, any time t, and any proposition p, S1 and S2 are *information peers* at t about p if and only if S1 and S2 have at t the same information bearing on p.

While more could be said about each credential, we need not do so in order to proceed. Rather, at this point, it’s worth considering how others have thought about the notion of *epistemic peers* in the epistemology of disagreement literature. There are some important differences to note.

Prior to looking at these different accounts, we should note one important methodological point. The function of the concept *epistemic peers* in the epistemology of peer disagreement literature is primarily this: to raise in a particularly compelling way the interesting, important, and oft-discussed epistemological question about justification for the parties to the targeted dispute.
That interesting, important epistemological question about justification is this: *In cases of (known) peer disagreement over p between S1 and S2, is S1’s belief that p defeated (partially or fully) by S2’s opposing peer testimony?*\(^{95}\) There has been an explosion of literature on the epistemology of peer disagreement precisely because there seems to be something especially threatening (from the standpoint of justification) about a (known) disagreement with an epistemic peer.\(^{96}\) Consequently, given that this is a (if not the) key function of the use of the concept, we will be especially concerned to see whether the offered accounts of *epistemic peers* offered in the literature allow the concept to play that threatening role, and to play it in a particularly compelling way. That is, if a (known) disagreement with an epistemic peer, given a particular account of peerhood, does *not* prove to be especially threatening (from the standpoint of justification), or if there is another account of peerhood that proves to be *more* threatening than that particular account, then we

\(^{95}\) Note that in what follows I’ll keep referring to this question as ‘the interesting epistemological question about justification’ (or something like that). This is for ease of reference. Note also that to raise this question *in a particularly compelling way* is to raise the question in such a way that a positive answer to that question is hard to avoid without doing some rigorous epistemological work. Not surprisingly, I have nothing at all precise to say about what makes an answer “hard to avoid” or what makes some epistemological work “rigorous”. Finally, we might say (in a preliminary way, at this point) what it is about this epistemological question about defeat that is supposed to be so challenging. Here are a few brief words on this point. When S1 is in a known disagreement with an epistemic peer, S2, over p, S1 seems to be in a known disagreement over p with someone over whom S1 knowingly enjoys no relevant epistemic advantage regarding p. But in order for S1’s doxastic attitude toward p to be (fully) justified or reasonable in the face of such opposing peer testimony, it seems that S1 must knowingly enjoy some distinct and relevant epistemic advantage over S2 regarding p. By hypothesis, S1 knowingly enjoys no such advantage over S2. Consequently, S1’s doxastic attitude is defeated (at least partially) by the opposing peer testimony. The challenge is to show what, if anything, is wrong with this line of reasoning.

\(^{96}\) The notion of *epistemic threat* may need some clarification. I simply have in mind here the threat of *defeat*. So, S1’s known disagreement with an epistemic peer, S2, over some proposition p seems especially threatening when there seems to be a strong case in favor of the view that S1’s belief that p is defeated (partially or fully) by S2’s opposing peer testimony. Of course, it may turn out that the strong case is ultimately unsuccessful.
have reason to set aside that account of peerhood in favor of another.\(^97\) With that methodological point made, let’s move now to consider some proposals made in the epistemology of peer disagreement literature.

Let’s start with Gary Gutting.\(^98\) For Gutting, two individuals count as epistemic peers when they are equals with respect to factors such as “intelligence, perspicacity, honesty, thoroughness, and other relevant epistemic virtues.”\(^99\) Clearly,

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\(^97\) There’s a potential objection that we should address here. In laying out the accounts of justification peers, truth peers, knowledge peers, responsible inquiry peers, and information peers, I did not seem to adopt this methodological point. That is, I didn’t subject those accounts to the test of whether they individually raise in a particularly compelling way the interesting epistemological question about justification that the literature is supposed to raise. Yet I propose here to subject the offered accounts of epistemic peers to that test. Why, the objection may proceed, is this a right test for the offered accounts we will consider shortly but not for the earlier accounts (of justification peers, etc.)? (Thanks to Earl Conee for raising this worry.)

There’s a good reply to this objection. It has to do with function. As noted in the text, the test for the offered accounts of epistemic peers found in the literature is derived from the function that concept was assigned within that very literature. It’s a fitting test given that purported function. On the other hand, the accounts of justification peers, truth peers, knowledge peers, responsible inquiry peers, and information peers represent epistemic credentials relevant to determining epistemic peers. Pretty clearly, whether those accounts are indeed epistemic credentials relevant to determining epistemic peers does not require that they individually raise in a particularly compelling way the interesting epistemological question about justification that the literature is supposed to raise. So no such test along those lines is required for those accounts. It wouldn’t be a fitting test for them.

This response raises what may be a more fundamental objection. The response asserted a claim made in the main text: that a fitting test for the offered accounts of epistemic peers found in the literature is whether they raise in a compelling way the interesting epistemological question about justification that the literature is supposed to raise. So, it seems, we’re looking for an account that proves threatening in all cases. But, the objection presses, surely invoking an account of epistemic peers can prove threatening in some cases without being threatening in all cases, and it’s hard to see why failing to be threatening in all cases yields a reason for rejecting that account. (Thanks to Earl Conee for pressing this objection.)

There’s something plausible to say to this. It’s true that we’re looking for the account of epistemic peers that proves most threatening, or threatening in the most cases. But there’s no a priori methodological commitment to finding an account that proves threatening in all cases. So (contrary to the objection) it’s not true that failing to be threatening in all cases is all by itself a reason to set aside that account to look for another. Maybe that’s the best we can do. However, if we can find another account that is threatening in more cases than that account, then we now do have a reason to set aside that account in favor of the more threatening account. In short, why not try to find the most threatening account of epistemic peer? After all, it seems like that kind of account would best play the role the epistemology of disagreement literature assigned to the concept of epistemic peers.

\(^98\) Gutting is often credited in the epistemology of disagreement literature as first invoking the notion of an epistemic peers.

Gutting makes epistemic virtues crucial to his understanding of epistemic peers. Indeed, for Gutting, that seems to be the entire story for epistemic peers. So when Gutting refers to epistemic peers, he seems to have in mind (to some degree at least) what I have called ‘responsible inquiry peers’ above.

There are several worries one might raise for Gutting’s characterization of epistemic peerhood. One worry is the reference to “other relevant epistemic virtues”. It’d be nice to hear how we’re to think about relevance here, particularly since we’re trying (I assume) to articulate as clearly as possible what it is about certain intellectual encounters that generates the interesting epistemological questions about justification discussed in the epistemology of disagreement literature. But we can set aside that worry.

There is also the worry that Gutting’s proposal is (apparently) not relativized to propositions. That is, Gutting’s proposal doesn’t seem to take into account that while two individuals might be, on the whole (as best as we can make sense of this), equally careful, thorough, precise, unbiased, and otherwise epistemically virtuous, they may not be equals with respect to certain propositions, like religious, moral, or political propositions. And it’s equality with respect to certain propositions that seems to matter most for the epistemology of disagreement literature.

Another point to note (which should be obvious given the above conceptual work) is that Gutting’s characterization of epistemic peerhood glosses over the multiple epistemic credentials relevant to determining epistemic peers. There’s just

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100 Assuming, once again, that we can sensibly categorize propositions as being religious, moral, or political (among other categorizations).
no reason to think that *epistemic peers* singularly picks out the credential represented in responsible inquiry peers, as Gutting’s characterization suggests. As was already noted above, though, this is not a point unique to Gutting’s proposal. We’ll see this come up again and again below. ¹⁰¹

A more troublesome worry about Gutting’s proposal (and here’s where the methodological point made above becomes relevant) is that understanding *epistemic peers* in this way doesn’t suffice all by itself to generate any particularly interesting epistemological questions. At least, it doesn’t all by itself generate the interesting epistemological question about justification addressed in the epistemology of peer disagreement literature. And that’s reason to think that we need to find another way than Gutting’s to think about epistemic peerhood.

Here’s one reason why Gutting’s proposal doesn’t generate that interesting epistemological question about justification. Call two persons who meet Gutting’s conditions for peerhood ‘Gutting peers’. Now suppose S₁ and S₂ are Gutting peers. S₁ finds herself in a disagreement with S₂ over some proposition, and S₁ knows that S₂ is her Gutting peer. At this point, we might wonder whether we have enough to generate any interesting epistemological questions about justification for S₁’s belief. The answer, it seems to me, is that we don’t. This is because S₁ might know that she

¹⁰¹ So far as I can tell, the only one in the literature to hint that there may be multiple aspects of *epistemic peers* is Ralph Wedgwood. He writes: “There are various ways in which one may define the notion of an “epistemic peer”.” See his (forthcoming). Note that this point (about glossing over the multiple epistemic credentials relevant to determining epistemic peers) is never (even a part of) the basis for rejecting an account of peerhood presented below. One might wonder why I then raise the point at all. It’s certainly not to fault or criticize philosophers for missing the range of relevant credentials. Rather, the reason is this: to remind us that there are these multiple credentials relevant to determining epistemic peers (as the prior conceptual work demonstrated).
is better informed about the relevant matter than S2 is. And this doesn’t count as a strike against S2’s being as epistemically virtuous as S1, particularly if S2’s being less informed is something that is beyond her control, something that she can’t do anything about. Being less informed need not be anything like a reflection of, say, S2’s sloppy, half-hearted inquiry. So, a known disagreement with a Gutting peer doesn’t generate the interesting epistemological question about justification that disagreement with an epistemic peer was supposed to raise. Known disagreement with a Gutting peer just isn’t especially threatening from the standpoint of justification.

Perhaps an example will help make this point more clear. Consider the following case:

Dr. J does a careful study to examine the effectiveness of drugs X, Y, and Z for treating some disease. The study indicates that X works best. Dr. J has no other information relevant to the preferability of the three medications. Meanwhile, Dr. K has done a similar study and it indicated that Y works best. Dr. K is just as intelligent as Dr. J, and each has good reason to think that his study was effectively carried out. After some time, Dr. J learns about Dr. K’s results. Dr. J knows about flaws in Dr. K’s study, flaws that Dr. K has no way of knowing about and do not involve errors of reasoning, lack of care or precision, bias, prejudice, or any other epistemic vice. Indeed, Dr. K was just as

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thorough, precise, careful, unbiased, unprejudiced, and otherwise epistemically virtuous as Dr. J was in his study.\textsuperscript{103}

In this case, it seems right to say that Dr. J and Dr. K are Gutting peers. But if we add to this story that Dr. J knows that Dr. K is his Gutting peer, no interesting epistemological questions about the justification of Dr. J’s beliefs are raised. Dr. J would still know about the flaw in Dr. K’s study, and so Dr. J is still in a position to retain (justifiably) his belief that drug X works best, and none of this makes trouble for the claim that Dr. J and Dr. K are Gutting peers. We have good reason, then, for setting aside Gutting’s conception of epistemic peerhood.

Considering this case helps us see the force of the methodological point made above. The notion of a Gutting peer just doesn’t raise the interesting epistemological question about justification in a particularly compelling way. It did not take much rigorous epistemological work to show that there could be a known disagreement between two Gutting peers without there being (partial or full) defeat of one’s belief. Surely some other account of \textit{epistemic peers} would raise in a more compelling way the interesting epistemological question about justification that’s supposed to be raised in the epistemology of peer disagreement literature.

Bryan Frances offers what seems to be the same characterization of epistemic peerhood. He says that epistemic peers are individuals that are “\textit{equal} in intelligence, biases, and intellectual care—both generally and with regard to the topics surrounding

\textsuperscript{103} This case comes from Feldman (2003a) pp. 184-185.
Like Gutting, Frances seems to take epistemic peerhood to amount to what I have called ‘responsible inquiry peers’. Consequently, with the exception of relativizing his characterization to propositions and the unclear appeal to “other relevant epistemic virtues”, Frances’ proposal faces the same worries as Gutting’s proposal. And so we have reason to look beyond Frances’ proposal regarding epistemic peerhood for another proposal.105

There are some aspects of Richard Feldman’s characterization of epistemic peerhood that constitutes an improvement upon Gutting’s and Frances’. Here’s what Feldman offers: “Let’s say that people are epistemic peers when they are roughly equal with respect to intelligence, reasoning powers, background information, and so on.”106 In another work, Feldman talks about disagreements between individuals who are equally “intelligent and well-informed”.107 So let’s treat these two characterizations as one proposal for what makes two individuals epistemic peers. Consequently, Feldman’s proposal avoids the worry raised by the Dr. J/Dr. K case. In that case, Dr. K was not as well-informed as Dr. J since he wasn’t informed about the flaw in his study. Dr. J had information that Dr. K did not. Gutting’s and Frances’ proposals still allowed them to be regarded as epistemic peers. Feldman’s proposal, however, does not. That’s an improvement.

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104 See his (forthcoming).
105 Michael Bergmann seems to have in mind a view similar to Frances, though Bergmann may add to the characterization of epistemic peers something like the requirement that the two subjects be information peers as well. See Bergmann (2009). If that’s so, see the discussion of Feldman’s characterization that follows for relevant criticism of Bergmann’s view.
107 See his (2003a) p. 183.
Even so, Feldman’s proposal does face some of the same issues as Gutting’s and/or Frances’ proposal. Here’s the first. When Feldman refers to epistemic peers, he seems to have in mind, at least, what I have called ‘information peers’ above. He may, though I’m not sure, have in mind some aspects of responsible inquiry peers, too.\(^\text{108}\) He may have other things in mind, also. It’s hard to tell, and that’s the first issue for Feldman’s characterization: it’s not clear what Feldman would have us add to the characterization when he adds “and so on” at the end of his characterization. As with Gutting’s appeal to “other relevant epistemic virtues”, it’d be good to hear more about how we’re supposed to think about epistemic peerhood on Feldman’s view.

Of course, this isn’t to say that we should thereby reject Feldman’s characterization. There’s no argument (on these grounds, at least) that Feldman’s proposal is mistaken. Rather, it’s just to raise a question about how we are supposed to understand epistemic peerhood given Feldman’s characterization. We should note, though, that this question is pressing because (as we said above with Gutting’s proposal) we’re trying (I assume) to articulate as clearly as possible what it is about certain intellectual encounters that generates the interesting epistemological question about justification discussed in the epistemology of peer disagreement literature.

Another issue that Feldman’s proposal faces that Gutting’s faced as well is this: Feldman’s proposal is not relativized specifically to propositions.\(^\text{109}\) It seems that two individuals may be, on the whole, equals with respect to intelligence, reasoning

\(^{108}\) Feldman, Gutting, and Frances all invoke ‘intelligence’ in their characterizations of epistemic peerhood. Gutting and Frances seem to take that to be an epistemic virtue. I imagine that Feldman does, too.

\(^{109}\) As already noted, Frances recognized the need to do this.
powers, background information, and how well-informed they are without being equals in all of those ways regarding some specific proposition. And, again, it’s the specific proposition that seems most relevant to the epistemology of peer disagreement literature.

There’s yet another point common to Feldman’s and Gutting’s proposal (and Frances’ proposal shares this issue, too): the glossing over of the multiple epistemic credentials relevant to determining epistemic peers (as indicated by the above conceptual work). Once again, there’s no clear reason why we should think that *epistemic peers* picks out just the credentials picked out by *information peers* and *responsible inquiry peers*, to the exclusion of the other credentials, as Feldman’s proposal seems to indicate.

A final, and far more troublesome, worry to raise for Feldman’s proposal is this. Call two individuals meeting Feldman’s criteria for peerhood ‘Feldman peers’. It’s not clear that a known intellectual encounter with a Feldman peer is, all by itself, enough to generate the interesting epistemological question about justification found in the epistemology of peer disagreement literature. Recall that this was the chief complaint raised against Gutting’s and Frances’ proposals. So it’s the same complaint, but that complaint comes up for a different reason. Here’s what I mean.

Suppose S1 knows that he is in a disagreement over some proposition p with a Feldman peer, namely, S2. So, S1 knows that he and S2 are equals with respect to intelligence and reasoning powers in addition to being equally well-informed with respect to p (i.e., they have the same information bearing on p). At this point, we
might wonder (as we did with Gutting’s and Frances’ proposals) whether we have enough to generate the interesting epistemological question about justification for S1’s belief. Once again, the answer seems to be that we do not. A known disagreement with a Feldman peer is not enough all by itself to generate the interesting epistemological question about justification that it was supposed to raise. Here’s why.

Suppose further that S1 knows that S2 believes as he does because he is currently suffering from the effects of a bizarre Plantinga-style cognitive malady, say, the blast of an Alpha Centaurian’s ray gun or a malevolent brain lesion, or, if you prefer, the effects from a more traditional cognitive malady, say, the whims of an evil genius or Cartesian demon. Furthermore, S2 has no way of suspecting that this is so. It seems that in such a case, the justification of S1’s belief is not at all threatened by a disagreement with S2.

Importantly, all of this is consistent with S2 being a Feldman peer to S1. First, it seems clear that S2 can still be as equally intelligent with respect to p as S1 even though S2 currently suffers from this malady. Second, it seems that S2 can still have equally good reasoning powers as S1, even as applied to p. Nothing in the proposed malady necessitates that S2 reasons badly or sloppily about p. All that is necessitated is that S2 disbelieves what S1 believes, and this may be the direct result of the cognitive malady, not S2’s bad reasoning. Finally, it seems that S2 can still have all of the same information bearing on p as S1 does. Once again, nothing in the proposed
malady necessitates that S2 lack some key information regarding p that S1 has.\footnote{Crucially, this is not to deny that S1 has information that S2 lacks. He does. Obviously, S1 knows that S2 is currently suffering from the cognitive malady. And that matters here. But this is the key: notice that this information is not information bearing on p. In making the case for or against p, we would not (I take it) present S2’s suffering from a cognitive malady.}

Since this was all it takes to be a Feldman peer, we have reason to think that it is possible for S1 to have an intellectual encounter with S2, a disagreeing Feldman peer, without thereby having the justification of S1’s belief especially threatened at all.

If all of that is correct, we have shown that a known intellectual encounter with a disagreeing Feldman peer is not all by itself sufficient to generate in a particularly compelling way the interesting epistemological question about justification considered in the epistemology of peer disagreement literature.\footnote{It’s probably for this reason that Feldman strengthens the conditions of the sort of cases he considers by stipulating that the epistemic peers have “shared their evidence” in that they “have had a full discussion of a topic and have not withheld relevant information.” See his (2007) p. 201. See also his (2006) p. 419 where he has the epistemic peers operating under “full disclosure”. Presumably, information regarding S2’s cognitive malady is relevant, on Feldman’s view.} Some other account of epistemic peers may do the job better. That’s reason to look elsewhere for an account of epistemic peerhood.

Tom Kelly and Bruce Russell seem to offer similar analyses of epistemic peerhood. Here’s what Kelly has to say:

Let us say that two individuals are \textit{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

\footnote{Crucially, this is not to deny that S1 has information that S2 lacks. He does. Obviously, S1 knows that S2 is currently suffering from the cognitive malady. And that matters here. But this is the key: notice that this information is not information bearing on p. In making the case for or against p, we would not (I take it) present S2’s suffering from a cognitive malady.}
(ii) they are equals with respect to general epistemic virtues such as intelligence, thoughtfulness, and freedom from bias.¹¹²

And here is how Bruce Russell puts it:

> Suppose we mean by your epistemic peer someone who not only possesses all the intellectual virtues that you do (intelligence, perspicacity, honesty, thoroughness, conscientiousness, thoughtfulness, freedom from bias, sincerity in the pursuit of truth, etc.) but also someone who has been exposed to just the same arguments and evidence that you have.¹¹³

In these passages, Kelly and Russell pretty clearly have in mind something like what I have called ‘information peers’ (as represented in his condition (i)) and ‘responsible inquiry peers’ (as represented in his condition (ii)). In this way, their proposals look like Feldman’s (though Kelly and Russell are more explicit about epistemic virtues).¹¹⁴ Consequently, Kelly’s and Russell’s analyses share some problems with Feldman’s.

First, as with all of the other proposals we’ve seen, Kelly and Russell gloss over the multiple epistemic credentials relevant to determining epistemic peers.

¹¹² See his (2005) pp. 174-175. Interestingly, Kelly seems to offer a different characterization of *epistemic peers* in his (forthcoming). There he seems to suggest that epistemic peers are those who “are more or less equally reliable when it comes to making judgments about the domain in question.” There will be more on this sort of account below.

¹¹³ See his (unpublished).

¹¹⁴ One difference is that Kelly explicitly relativizes his analysis of *epistemic peers* to propositions. That’s an advantage of Kelly’s analysis over Feldman’s (and Gutting’s). Russell doesn’t do this explicitly, though he seems to intend his analysis to be the same as Kelly’s. See his fn. 1.
Second, and much more importantly, Kelly’s and Russell’s analysis of *epistemic peers* is insufficient all by itself to generate in a particularly compelling way the interesting epistemological question about justification that’s supposed to be raised in the epistemology of peer disagreement literature. This is for precisely the same reason as with Feldman’s proposal. Consider: let two individuals who satisfy Kelly’s and Russell’s proposed conditions be called ‘Kelly/Russell peers’. Now, in the case presented above in discussing Feldman’s proposal, it seems possible for S1 to have an intellectual encounter with S2, this time a disagreeing Kelly/Russell peer suffering from the undetected cognitive malady, without thereby having the justification of S1’s belief threatened at all. The interesting epistemological question about justification is not raised in a particularly compelling way by considering disagreements with Kelly/Russell peers. So, there’s reason to reject Kelly’s and Russell’s analysis.115

Let’s consider another proposal. David Christensen offers his proposal here:

But to the best of my knowledge, my friend is just as well-informed as I am—in fact, we may suppose that my friend and I have had long discussions in which we share every bit of evidence we can think of that’s relevant to P. And suppose further that I have good reason to believe that my friend and I are equally intelligent and rational, and that I know of no general reason (like the fact the people tend to be

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115 Ernest Sosa raises another issue for Kelly’s and Russell’s proposal (though he has just Kelly’s proposal in his sights). He writes: “Actually, we may need to add to Kelly’s definition that the two subjects not only possess those virtues, but employ them equally as well.” That seems right. See his (forthcoming).
biased towards their children) to think either of us is especially likely to be particularly good, or bad, at reacting to evidence on this particular topic—no reason, that is, aside from the fact that my friend disagrees with me about P. In other words, my friend seems to be what some have called an “epistemic peer.”

Christensen’s conditions for epistemic peerhood, then, seem to amount to this: the two individuals (1) are equally informed on things bearing on p (the target proposition), (2) are equally intelligent, (3) are equally rational (in general), and (4) know of no reason to think that the other is less likely to react to the information on this particular topic in a good or bad way (say, as a result of bias). So, Christensen seems to have in mind something like what I have called above ‘information peers’ (his condition (1)) and ‘responsible inquiry peers’ (his conditions (2) and (4)). He also adds the condition (namely, (3)) that the two individuals be equally generally rational, which may not be captured by any of the epistemic credentials for determining epistemic peers that I’ve offered above. Let’s consider the merits of this view.

Christensen does seem to relativize his account to propositions. That’s good. But there remain some complaints. Before getting to those complaints, we should


117 Robert Audi seems to offer a very similar account of *epistemic peer*. His conditions for being a “full-scale epistemic peer in the matter” are: (a) “the colleague is as rational and as thoughtful as I (in the relevant matter),” (b) the colleague “has considered the same relevant evidence equally conscientiously,” and (c) the colleague is “free of background cognitions that reduce the person’s overall justification regarding p.” See Audi (2008) pp.489-490.

118 David Jehle and Brandon Fitelson seem to offer a similar characterization of *epistemic peers*. They write: “Suppose two agents, S₁ and S₂, are *epistemic peers* regarding a proposition p: that is, suppose S₁ and S₂ are equally competent, equally impartial, and equally able to evaluate and assess the relevant evidence regarding p….” See their (2009) p. 280.
make a familiar point: Christensen’s account glosses over the multiple epistemic credentials relevant to determining epistemic peers as revealed by the prior conceptual work. Now for the complaints: Consider condition (4). The mere fact that there is no known reason to think there’s a difference here does not make for actual peerhood. Peerhood demands actual equality. It does not allow for merely apparent equality. Consequently, as a characterization of epistemic peerhood, Christensen’s view is too lax.119

This can be easily fixed. Let’s amend Christensen’s proposal so that condition (4) now reads as follows: “are equally likely to react to the information on this topic in a good or bad way (e.g., there’s no disparity in bias).” Now Christensen’s conditions for peerhood are as follows: the two individuals are (1) equally informed on things bearing on p (the target proposition), (2) equally intelligent, (3) equally rational (in general), and (4) equally likely to react to the information on this topic in a good or bad way (e.g., there’s no disparity in bias).120

Even with this change, there appears to remain a serious worry for Christensen’s proposal. Call individuals satisfying Christensen’s four (amended) conditions for peerhood ‘Christensen peers’. Suppose S1 and S2 are Christensen peers, and they know this. Suppose also that S1 and S2 knowingly disagree over some proposition p. Is this enough all by itself to threaten the justification of S1’s belief? If

119 Note that the complaint here isn’t that merely apparent equality is insufficient to raise in a compelling way the interesting epistemological question about justification that the literature is supposed to raise. It may very well be sufficient. I do not intend to deny that here. Rather, the complaint is just that peerhood demands actual equality, not merely apparent equality. Peers aren’t merely apparent equals; they are actual equals.

120 Jennifer Lackey offers similar conditions in both her (forthcoming-a) and (forthcoming-b).
the answer is ‘no’, then we have (yet again) the criticism that this account of peerhood is not sufficient all by itself to generate in a particularly compelling way the interesting epistemological question about justification that the epistemology of peer disagreement literature was supposed to raise.

Unfortunately for Christensen’s account, it seems that the answer to the above question is, indeed, ‘no’. For consider: Suppose S1 knows that S2 was just blasted by a Plantinga-style Alpha Centaurian’s ray gun, where (importantly) the ray gun blast does not interfere in the least with the victim’s reasoning, but it guarantees that the resulting belief is the wrong inference to make in that situation. In other words, the victim (in this case, S2) finds himself in the following situation: he acknowledges that the belief he holds isn’t the right inference to make given all of the information at hand (and so the reasoning itself is not impaired by the blast), yet he believes nonetheless (and this is a direct result of the ray gun blast). In such a case, the justification of S1’s belief is not threatened at all by the known disagreement with a Christensen peer.

Crucially, the details of the case described are consistent with S1 and S2 being Christensen peers. Let’s see how that can be the case. Take condition (1). It seems that in the above case, S1 and S2 remain information peers. That is, they have all of the same information bearing on p. Specifically, the ray gun blast itself does not bear on p. Think about it this way: in deliberating on p, both S1 and S2 are mulling over the same information. In this way, they continue to satisfy condition (1). Consider condition (2). We have no reason to deny that S1 and S2 fail to be equally intelligent.
The ray gun blast didn’t make S2 any less intelligent than S1. Condition (3) also remains satisfied. S2 continues to be equally generally rational as S1. Thankfully, this ray gun blast doesn’t happen every day to S2; it is an isolated incident. Finally, condition (4) seems to continue to be satisfied. That is, nothing in the case entails that either S1 or S2 are any less likely to react to the information bearing on p in a good or bad way. But this is a bit trickier to show. It depends on what Christensen means here. Let’s take a closer look.

Suppose by condition (4) Christensen has in mind equality of intellectual virtues. Indeed, the one example he offers, specifically, bias, has to do with intellectual virtues. But if this is what he means, then it seems clear that S1 and S2 can remain equals here. Nothing in the example renders S2 less intellectually virtuous than S1. Take, for example, the intellectual virtues Montmarquet identifies (and that we referred to above).121 These include the virtues of impartiality, intellectual sobriety, and courage. S2 doesn’t become any less impartial, intellectually sober, or courageous simply because he was blasted by an Alpha Centaurian’s ray gun. The blast certainly had an effect on him, but not that kind of an effect.

Suppose, rather, that by condition (4), Christensen has in mind equality of reasoning powers. If that’s so, then it seems clear that S2 can remain equals with S1 here, too. After all, S2 is reasoning through this well enough. Though it certainly had effects, the ray gun blast did not affect any of this. Recall: S2 acknowledges that the

121 Once again, see his (1993).
I’m not sure what else Christensen might have in mind by condition (4). So, it seems that condition (4) can remain satisfied by S1 and S2. Consequently, since they meet the other three conditions for peerhood Christensen identifies, it seems that S1 and S2 can genuinely be known disagreeing Christensen peers without thereby jeopardizing in the least the justification of S1’s belief. In other words, a (known) disagreement between Christensen peers doesn’t generate in a particular compelling way the interesting epistemological question about justification that’s supposed to be generated in this literature. Some other account may do a better job of it. That gives us reason to set aside Christensen’s characterization of epistemic peerhood.

Earl Conee provides what seems to be a considerably different way of thinking about epistemic peers. Conee writes: “People are epistemic peers on the topic of a proposition when they have a thoroughly shared basis and capacity for reasonable doxastic attitudes concerning the proposition” where “people have thoroughly shared rational bases when their bases either do not differ, or if they do, the differences are mutually known” and where having a “thoroughly shared capacity

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122 One might challenge whether this is a possible state to be in. That is, I can imagine one challenging that S2 could both (1) acknowledge clearly and resolutely that he has made the wrong inference given all of the information available, and yet (2) believe nonetheless. I’m assuming this is indeed possible, though I don’t have a handy explanation for how this is possible. For related comments, see Adam Elga’s discussion of Daria and her astrological beliefs in (2005). One key difference is that Daria might very well be suffering from an internal defect, an epistemic vice. Not so with S2. His is an external problem—he’s been blasted by an Alpha Centaurian’s ray gun, after all.
for reasonable doxastic attitudes” amounts to having “the same abilities to form reasonable doxastic attitudes.”

Now, instead of picking out merely what I have called ‘responsible inquiry peers’, ‘information peers’ or even some combination thereof, Conee’s characterization of epistemic peerhood picks out what I have called above ‘justification peers’ and, in virtue of the required thoroughly shared rational bases, ‘information peers’. Let’s consider the merits of Conee’s proposal.

There are some familiar worries to raise. One familiar worry is that Conee’s proposal is relativized to “the topic of a proposition”, not the propositions themselves. We’ve seen why this matters: S1 and S2 might be equals with respect to some broad area of inquiry, say, theology, or even a narrower subset of that area of inquiry, say, protestant theology, while failing to be equals with respect to some particular proposition within that area of inquiry.

Unfortunately, there’s a more serious familiar worry to raise: intellectual confrontations with justification peers are not all by themselves sufficient to generate in a particularly compelling way the interesting epistemological question about justification that is supposed to be raised in the epistemology of peer disagreement literature. Let’s see why.

Call two individuals that satisfy Conee’s stated conditions for peerhood ‘Conee peers’. Now suppose that S1 and S2 know that they are Conee peers and they

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123 See his (forthcoming). There are a few things to note here. First, Conee is explicit that this account of epistemic peers is a “terminological stipulation”. Second, Conee notes that mutual knowledge is not actually required here. What is required is “mutual fully reasonable belief” (see fn. 2). That’s his “official assumption”. He uses “mutual knowledge” simply because it is a more convenient phrase to use. Third, an issue will arise over this condition in the discussion that follows.
disagree over some proposition p: S1 believes p and S2 disbelieves p. At this point, we might wonder whether this disagreement threatens the justification of S1’s belief. Again, if the answer is that it does not, then we have (one more time) the criticism that this account of peerhood is not sufficient all by itself to generate the interesting epistemological question about justification that the epistemology of peer disagreement literature was supposed to raise.

And, once again, the answer here seems to be that it does not threaten the justification. A bizarre (but possible) example will help show why.124 Suppose S1 secretly administered an incredible pill to S2. The pill has these effects: (1) it makes p intellectually seem downright crazy to S2, and (2) it makes it intellectually seem to S2 (in a powerful, compelling, and overwhelming way) that pills with these powers are the stuff of ridiculous, outrageous science fiction.125 Now, since S1 and S2 are Conee peers, they share the same rational base (i.e., they are operating with the same relevant information), and where there are differences in that rational base (i.e., they are operating with differences in the relevant information), they know about those differences.

We need to pause for a moment. There’s a question here about whether the fact that S1 secretly administered the pill to S2 counts as part of that shared rational base or information set. If it doesn’t count, then S1 and S2 do seem to share the same rational base, and, since they also share the same capacity for forming reasonable

124 It’s not as though the other examples I’ve used have been boring and unremarkable. But a glance at the epistemology literature will show that it is replete with bizarre examples intended to make conceptual points. I’m falling right in line with that tradition. See Shope (1983) for a survey of the early literature on knowledge and its frequent use of bizarre counterexamples.

125 Why this second effect of the pill is included will be relevant later.
doxastic attitudes, there’s no obstacle to regarding S1 and S2 as Conee peers. But in this case, it seems that the justification of S1’s belief that p is not at all threatened by S2’s disagreement. The mere fact that S1 and S2 knowingly disagree and know that they are Conee peers, i.e., justification peers and information peers, is not all by itself sufficient to generate threats to the justification of S1’s belief. We have reason to look for another proposal for epistemic peers that will be sufficient to generate in a more compelling way the interesting epistemological question about justification that the literature is supposed to raise.

Of course, that’s all on the supposition that the fact that S1 secretly administered the pill to S2 doesn’t count as part of the thoroughly shared rational base. But suppose it does. If that fact does count, then they aren’t operating from the same rational base and so aren’t Conee peers. So in order to count as Conee peers, S1 and S2 must both know (or, officially, mutually fully reasonably believe) that fact. I take it that what this condition requires is that S1 and S2 both know about the difference in rational bases due to S1’s knowing about, and S2’s ignorance regarding, the secretly administered pill. So, in order to count as Conee peers, S2 needs to know about the secretly administered pill. And I’m assuming here, plausibly enough I trust,

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126 One might doubt that in an example such as this, S1 and S2 share the same capacity to form reasonable doxastic attitudes. Surely the ingested pill ruins things on that score. If that’s so, S1 and S2 fail to be Conee peers. However, there’s good reason to set aside such doubts. Here’s why we can plausibly hold that S1 and S2 share the same capacity for forming reasonable doxastic attitudes. The pill S2 ingests simply alters in a radical way how things overall seem to S2. It does not change or impair S2’s ability to respond reasonably to those overall seemings. So, S1 and S2 can remain equally capable of forming reasonable doxastic attitudes. The pill does not change that fact. S2’s capacity remains unaltered. See fn. 129 below for more on this. (Thanks to Earl Conee for pressing this objection.)

127 See fn. 123. I will hereafter drop the reference to the official view for the sake of simplicity (as Conee himself does).
that satisfying this requirement doesn’t demand that S2 actually believe that S1 administered a pill.\textsuperscript{128} It just demands that S2 knows about that difference in S1’s rational base, that S1 is operating upon that claim.

So, continuing on the supposition that S1’s knowledge of, and S2’s ignorance regarding, the secretly administered pill counts as a difference between the rational bases, we’ll need to add to the original case to address this issue. So, let’s suppose that S1, in the spirit of full disclosure, reports to S2 all about the secretly administered drug. S1 confesses to S2 how she secretly administered the pill to her, and what effects it’s supposed to have on S2. Of course, by hypothesis, those claims seem utterly crazy and ridiculous to S2 (and that’s a direct influence of the remarkably potent pill). Consequently, S2 is not at all moved by any of this report, and so S2 continues to reject p.\textsuperscript{129}

Even in this version of the case, it still seems that the justification of S1’s belief that p is not threatened by S2’s disagreement. The mere fact that S1 and S2 knowingly disagree and know that they are Conee peers is not all by itself sufficient to generate in a particularly compelling way any threats for the justification of S1’s

\textsuperscript{128} This is a plausible assumption since demanding otherwise would seem to entail that there could never be any difference in beliefs between subjects in order to count as Conee peers. But of course there can be such differences between peers.

\textsuperscript{129} And you might plausibly think that S2 does so reasonably. After all, what S1 is reporting to her genuinely seems utterly bizarre and ridiculous to S2. And if you’re inclined to think that how things seem to one is quite relevant to justification, it’s plausible to suppose that S2 is being reasonable in going with these seemings. Conee himself thinks that, on at least “one credible version of evidentialism”, seemings do have a major role in justification. He calls this version of evidentialism “seeming evidentialism”. See p. 15 of his (2004). For more on seemings and their (alleged) role in justification, see Huemer (2001).
belief. We still have sufficient reason to look for another proposal for epistemic peers that will do the trick of raising these threats in a more compelling way.

It’s worth looking at the proposal Adam Elga offers.\textsuperscript{130} Here’s what Elga has to say:

My use of the term “epistemic peer” is nonstandard. On my usage, you count your friend as an epistemic peer with respect to an about-to-be-judged claim if and only if you think that, conditional the two of you disagreeing about the claim, the two of you are equally likely to be mistaken.\textsuperscript{131}

Some clarifications are in order here\textsuperscript{132}: to get at Elga’s account of epistemic peers, we (clearly) need to set aside the “you count your friend as” and “you think that” parts of the above passage. Perhaps less clearly, we also need to set aside two other features of the above passage: (1) the “about-to-be-judged” modifier and (2) the antecedent of the right-hand side of the biconditional (the “conditional the two of you disagreeing about the claim” clause). Here’s the case for making these amendments. This will be brief.

Amendment (1) is called for since the modifier unduly restricts the concept of epistemic peers. It seems clear that two subjects can \textit{in fact} be epistemic peers even after judgments have been made about the proposition. Of course, we might wonder

\textsuperscript{130} David Enoch explicitly follows Elga on the notion of epistemic peers. He writes: “Fourth, by your ‘peer’ I will understand someone who is, somewhat roughly, antecedently as likely as you are to get things right (on matters of the relevant kind)…. What’s relevant here is just that she is (and is taken by you to be) as likely to get things right.” See his (forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{131} See his (2007) fn. 21.

\textsuperscript{132} Note that none of this needs to be read as an objection to Elga’s account. Take these as clarifying remarks done for our purposes.
whether those two subjects will (or, better, should) continue to regard each other as
epistemic peers after judgments about the target proposition (and their corresponding
reasons) have been shared. That may be what Elga is interested in thinking about, but
that’s not what we’re interested in thinking about here. To that end, amendment (1) is
called for.

Amendment (2) is justified since the targeted clause was inserted
(presumably) to capture what it means to count or regard another subject as an
epistemic peer, not what it means to be an epistemic peer. It seems clear that this
targeted clause was meant to be read only in conjunction with the “you think that”
clause immediately preceding it. And since we’ve already eliminated that latter
clause, and for obvious reasons, it’s safe to eliminate the former, targeted clause, too.

So, all of the proposed amendments seem justified since they are all vestiges
of the attempt to articulate what it means to count or regard another as an epistemic
peer. Making all of these revisions leaves us with the view that two subjects, S1 and
S2, are epistemic peers with respect to a proposition p if and only if S1 and S2 are
equally likely to be mistaken (or correct\textsuperscript{133}) about p. Let’s assume that this is the
account of epistemic peers that Elga endorses.\textsuperscript{134}

Elga contends that his account of epistemic peers is different from the other
accounts in the literature that we’ve considered. This contention seems to be correct.

\textsuperscript{133} Elga puts it both ways. For instances where Elga uses “correct” rather than “mistaken” see p. 486

\textsuperscript{134} Elga does talk about epistemic peers in other ways. In his (2007) he writes: “Furthermore, you
count your friend as an epistemic peer—as being as good as you at evaluating such claims” (p. 484).
Also in his (2007) he writes: “Initially, you count your friend as an epistemic peer—you think that she
is about as good as you at judging the claim” (p. 487). This sounds like it could be a different account
of epistemic peers. In any case, we’ll ignore it here.
Rather than going with the standard accounts of *epistemic peers* that appeal to what I have called ‘justification peers’, ‘responsible inquiry peers’, ‘information peers’, or some combination thereof, Elga appears to pick out what I have called ‘truth peers’. To put that notion before us again:

**Truth Peers.** For any two individuals $S_1$ and $S_2$, any time $t$, and any proposition $p$, $S_1$ and $S_2$ are *truth peers* at $t$ about $p$ if and only if $S_1$ and $S_2$ are equally fit at $t$ for attaining a true belief about $p$.

So, is this admittedly nonstandard way of thinking about epistemic peerhood one we should adopt? Let’s consider the merits of this view now.

The usual complaint that the account under consideration glosses over the multiple epistemic credentials relevant to determining epistemic peers applies here, too. There’s just no reason to think that *epistemic peers* singularly picks out the

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135 It seems fair to read Elga’s account as getting at, at least in spirit, what the notion of *truth peers* is getting at. At bottom, both accounts are getting at how well-connected each subject is to the world.

136 One final note about Elga’s account prior to evaluating it: Tomas Bogardus reads Elga’s account as making the subjects’ *reliability with respect to a target issue* a key component of epistemic peerhood. See his (2009) p. 325. (Robert Audi calls this kind of issue or domain reliability *sectorial reliability* in his (2009) p. 47. Moreover, as indicated in fn. 112 above, Tom Kelly seems to characterize epistemic peers as those who share equal reliability with respect to some particular domain.) It’s not clear that this is the best way to represent Elga’s account. One reason is that this move introduces the worries associated with relativizing peerhood to issues or topics rather than propositions. (These are worries that would attach to Kelly’s characterization.) And modifying this to *reliability with respect to a target proposition* doesn’t seem to help since it’s not clear what it means to be reliable with respect to a single proposition. Suppose I believe $p$, and $p$ is false. Does that make me unreliable when it comes to $p$? Suppose I believe $p$, and $p$ is true. Does that make me reliable when it comes to $p$? If the answer is ‘yes’ to both of these questions, then for $S_1$ and $S_2$ to be *equally* reliable with respect to $p$ (and so peers, on this view) entails that they *agree* with one another. But clearly we don’t want that result. We need to allow conceptual space for peers to disagree. There’s also the question about suspension of judgment. Suppose I suspend judgment on $p$. Does that make me unreliable or reliable with respect to $p$? Moreover, does it make me more (or less) reliable than another who falsely (or truly) believes $p$?

We can avoid all of these questions by not appealing to *reliability* in the account. So, unlike Bogardus, I haven’t characterized Elga’s account using *reliability*. 
credential picked out in *truth peers*, as Elga’s characterization suggests. But, frankly, we have yet to reject an account on that basis. We certainly won’t here, either.

Elga’s account does relativize *epistemic peers* to propositions. As we’ve noted before, that’s a good feature of an account that not all accounts of *epistemic peers* in the literature share. So there’s no basis for complaint on that front.

Those are some of the lesser issues. There’s a more pressing matter to consider. We might wonder whether Elga’s account falls at the same point as all of the other accounts we’ve considered. That is, we might wonder whether a known disagreement between truth peers (i.e., folks who satisfy the conditions for peerhood in Elga’s account\(^{137}\)) is sufficient all by itself to generate in a particularly compelling way the interesting epistemological question about justification that the epistemology of peer disagreement literature was supposed to raise.

It is sufficient. To begin to see this, consider the problem cases presented above. In each problem case, what made the known disagreement between S1 and S2 insufficient all by itself to threaten the justification of, say, S1’s belief that p is this: S1 had good reason for thinking that S2 wasn’t as likely to be correct about p as S1 was. Put differently, in each of those problem cases, S1 had good reason for thinking that S2 wasn’t as fit as S1 for attaining a true belief about p. S1’s good reason for thinking this regards the cognitive maladies, Alpha Centaurian ray gun blasts, and secretly administered pills that loom large in those cases. So in none of those problem cases do we have a genuine intellectual encounter between truth peers, and so no

\(^{137}\) As far as I can tell, we could just as truthfully refer to these truth peers as ‘Elga peers’. I’ll continue to refer to them as *truth peers* in the main text.
known encounter with a truth peer.\textsuperscript{138} So none of those problem cases are problematic for Elga’s account.

In addition, it’s hard to see how there could be a case where there is a known disagreement between truth peers and yet not thereby have raised in a particularly compelling way the interesting epistemological question for the justification of, say, S1’s belief that p. When S1 and S2 know that they are equally likely to be right about p or, alternatively, that they are equally fit for attaining a true belief about p, and they knowingly disagree about p, it seems clear that we’ve successfully raised, in a particularly compelling way, the interesting epistemological question about justification that the literature is supposed to have raised. Indeed, a known disagreement between truth peers seems to raise that interesting epistemological question about justification in the most compelling way relative to the other accounts of epistemic peers offered in the literature.

Let’s be clear. None of this is to say that, in all cases where there is a known disagreement between truth peers, S1’s justification for her belief that p is (partially or fully) defeated. Maybe it isn’t defeated (even partially) in some such cases.\textsuperscript{139} That’s not the claim being made here. It is to say, though, that the interesting epistemological question about justification that the epistemology of disagreement

\textsuperscript{138} There’s no justifiably believed encounter with a truth peer in those cases either (although, of course, that doesn’t follow from the mere fact that S1 and S2 aren’t in fact truth peers). There’s no justifiably believed encounter with a truth peer in these cases because (as stated above in the main text) in each case S1 has good (read: justifying) reason for thinking that S2 is not as fit to form a true belief about p as S1.

\textsuperscript{139} I have in mind here cases like the oft-discussed Extreme Restaurant Case. See Christensen (2007) p. 199. This issue will be taken up in more detail in some of the chapters to follow. In addition, note that if we were claiming here that defeat always occurs in cases of (known) disagreement between truth peers, then we’d be taking a very controversial stand at this premature stage in the inquiry.
literature was supposed to raise is, in fact, raised, *and in the most compelling way* we’ve seen, when we consider known disagreements between truth peers. In terms of the methodological point made at the very beginning of this survey of the literature: appealing to *truth peers* to pick out the relevant epistemic credential of *epistemic peer* does allow the concept to play the functional role it was supposed to have in the epistemology of disagreement literature. And it allows it to play that role quite powerfully. As we’ve seen, that simply was not true of the other accounts found in the literature. That is a clear and compelling reason to favor appealing to *truth peers* over any of the other offered accounts surveyed here.

An objection at this point might be that known disagreement between truth peers is not *necessary* for raising, in a particularly compelling way, that interesting epistemological question about justification. Surely meeting some other conditions while failing to meet Elga’s conditions (or the conditions specified in the analysis of *truth peers*) is sufficient. But, the objection continues, invoking the correct account of *epistemic peers* would be necessary for raising that interesting epistemological question in a particularly compelling way. So we should set aside the Elga account (or the truth peer account) of *epistemic peers* and look elsewhere.

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140 As evidenced by the considerable amount of rigorous epistemological work regarding justification done on cases like the Extreme Restaurant Case (which come the closest to showing that known disagreements between truth peers don’t threaten, say, S1’s justification for her belief that p). No considerable amount of rigorous epistemological work regarding justification needs to be done on cases like the problem cases raised for the other accounts of *epistemic peers* addressed in the text.
This is not a good objection.¹⁴¹ Let’s pick on one of the premises in the objection, namely, the claim that meeting some other conditions while failing to meet Elga’s conditions (or the truth peer conditions) is sufficient to raise the interesting epistemological question in a particularly compelling way. But surely we’d need to hear what those other conditions might be. I’m certainly not sure what those other conditions would be. Frankly, nothing comes to mind, and we’ve got good reason to be pessimistic about anything plausible coming to mind. After all, none of the accounts with their corresponding conditions seem to do the trick.

¹⁴¹ In what follows I pick on one of the premises employed in the objection. That’s enough to show the objection is bad. But it’s worth pointing out that, contrary to the way the objection is stated, it’s not true that a known disagreement with the correct account of epistemic peers is necessary for raising that important epistemological question in a particularly compelling way. All that is necessary is that the folks involved justifiably believe that they are in such a disagreement (whether they are peers or not and whether they actually disagree or not). (In fact, even this probably isn’t necessary. If the overall argument in chapter 1 is right, differences in degrees of belief (or credences) that still fall under one of the same coarse-grained tripartite doxastic categories do not properly count as a disagreement. But S1’s justifiably believing that S2 takes a different credence level toward p than S1 does is still sufficient for raising, in a particularly compelling way, the interesting epistemological question about justification that the literature is supposed to raise.)

Now, some folks in the literature seem to understand all of this. See, for example, David Enoch. He writes: “I will put to one side the question of how to revise one’s beliefs given a disagreement with someone who is in fact – perhaps unbeknownst to one – one’s peer. Though this question may be of some interest – especially, perhaps, to those whose views about epistemic justification are (I would say implausibly) externalist – it is not this question I am primarily interested in (nor is it the question the literature on peer disagreement seems interested in).” See his (forthcoming). See also Elga: “Note that in setting up the problem, the initial assumption is that you count your friend as your epistemic peer. That contrasts with some presentations, in which the initial assumption is that your friend is your epistemic peer. The former assumption is appropriate, however. For example, one sometimes is reasonable in thinking wise advisors to be foolish. Evidence, after all, can be misleading.” See his fn. 14 in (2007). We might add to this (and Elga no doubt would agree) that sometimes one is reasonable in thinking foolish advisors to be wise. So, merely being epistemic peers is not enough all by itself to generate the interesting epistemological question. Good, justifying reasons for thinking that the other is one’s epistemic peer are needed in either case (i.e., whether the other is one’s peer or not). Given that actual disagreement isn’t necessary, Christensen misleads when he claims that “it makes a difference whether my friend actually does disagree with me, or whether I just know that she could have disagreed with me.” See his (2007) p. 208. I understand the point he is trying to make in that context, but it’s still not literally true that it makes a difference whether my friend actually disagrees with me. It’s enough that I justifiably believe that my friend disagrees with me, whether she does or not.
There’s another objection one might raise. To set this objection up, consider the following from Elga:

In defense of my use [of *epistemic peers*], suppose that you think that conditional on the two of you disagreeing about a claim, your friend is more likely than you to be mistaken. Then however intelligent, perspicacious, honest, thorough, well-informed, and unbiased you may think your friend is, it would seem odd to count her as an epistemic peer with respect to that claim, at least on that occasion. You think that on the supposition that there is disagreement, she is more likely to get things wrong.\(^{142}\)

We might add to this the following (paralleling Elga above)\(^ {143}\):

Given that you think your friend is no more (or less) likely than you to be mistaken about some proposition \(p\), then however dull, dimwitted, deceitful, careless, uninformed, and partial you may think your friend is, it would seem odd to count her as an epistemic inferior (in the relevant sense) with respect to \(p\), at least on that occasion; after all, you think she is no more likely than you to get things wrong here.

But these claims might strike one as sheer madness. Surely, in the first case, it is okay to treat your friend as an epistemic peer (once we’ve ratcheted up the epistemic virtues enough). And surely, in the second case, it is *not* okay to treat your friend as an epistemic peer (once we’ve ratcheted up the epistemic vices enough). Indeed,

\(^{142}\) See his (2007) fn. 21.

\(^{143}\) I’m sure Elga would be happy with the claim that immediately follows.
Jennifer Lackey expresses just this view in her presentation and commentary on a case:

For instance, I may be a complete novice with respect to identifying birds of prey, and you may be an expert ornithologist. When I am sober and you are highly intoxicated, however, we may be equally likely to be mistaken about whether the bird flying overhead is an osprey. On Elga’s account, then, you and I would be epistemic peers with respect to this question, but this strikes me as quite a counterintuitive result.\(^{144}\)

But taking *truth peers* as picking out the relevant epistemic credential surprisingly says otherwise. So we should flatly reject appealing to *truth peers* as picking out the relevant epistemic credential.

This is a forceful objection. But there’s a good response to it. The objection turns on the fact that there are multiple epistemic credentials relevant to determining epistemic peers. First, the objection is incorrect in claiming that taking *truth peers* as the relevant epistemic credential commits you to denying that it is okay, in the first scenario described, to treat your friend as a peer *with respect to just any* epistemic credential. Nothing said thus far denies that. Indeed, in the first scenario, it seems clear that you *should* treat your friend as a peer with respect to the epistemic credential picked out in *responsible inquiry peer*. However, it is indeed *not* okay, in that very same scenario, to treat your friend as a peer *with respect to the relevant*
epistemic credential, i.e., the credential that is sufficient to generate, in a particularly compelling way, the desired epistemological question about justification. This is because, as we’ve already seen above, known disagreements with responsible inquiry peers is not sufficient all by itself to generate in a particularly compelling way that desired epistemological question.

Second, the objection is incorrect in claiming that taking truth peers as picking out our relevant epistemic credential commits you to affirming that it is okay, in the second scenario, to treat your friend as a peer in any and all ways. Nothing has been said that commits you to that. In the second scenario, it does seem true that you should not treat your friend as a peer relevant to the credential picked out in responsible inquiry peer. But it does seem that, in that same second scenario, you should treat your friend as a peer relevant to generating, in a particularly compelling way, the desired epistemological question. After all, by hypothesis, when it comes to the target proposition, you know that your friend is just as likely as you to get it right (in spite of all of the stated vices). So, there’s no good basis here for rejecting truth peers as picking out our relevant epistemic credential.

There’s another objection to consider. To set the objection up, consider the following from Christensen:

Much of the recent discussion has centered on the special case in which one forms some opinion on P, then discovers that another person has formed an opposite opinion, where one has good reason to believe that the other person is one’s (at least approximate) equal in
terms of exposure to the evidence, intelligence, freedom from bias, etc.
(Such a person is often referred to as one’s ‘epistemic peer’.) In
addition, discussions typically assume that one has no special reason—
such as knowing that the other is drunk or tired—to discount her
opinion.145

Here Christensen is basically claiming that (most of) the literature understands
epistemic peers as something like the conjunction of responsible inquiry peers and
information peers, but then conjoins that understanding with a no special reason to
discount clause. Presumably, all of this is to raise, in a particularly compelling way,
the desired epistemological question about justification.

So far, there’s no apparent objection to appealing to truth peers as picking out
our relevant epistemic credential. But we can dig one up. Here’s how we might put
the objection: “Look, there’s nothing wrong with understanding epistemic peers to
pick out something other than truth peers so long as we conjoin that understanding
with the no special reason to discount clause. That’s all we need to do to generate, in
a particularly compelling way, the desired epistemological question. We need not
appeal to truth peers as our relevant epistemic credential to do that.” The upshot of
this objection is to soften the blow of the criticism leveled against all of the accounts
of epistemic peers surveyed, namely, that they fail to generate, in a particularly
compelling way, that interesting epistemological question all by themselves. If
Christensen is right, then they were never intended to do that work all by themselves.

That’s what the added no special reason to discount clause is for. And so, if that’s all correct, there’s no real motivation for dumping those competing accounts of epistemic peers and accepting truth peers as picking out the relevant epistemic credential.

There’s a plausible response to this objection. Ultimately, the response is that we do still need to appeal to truth peers to generate, in a particularly compelling way, the desired epistemological question. To see this, let’s consider the no special reason to discount clause. The objection seems to take this clause as being merely a supplement to the notion of epistemic peers in generating, in a particularly compelling way, that desired epistemological question; in other words, the notion of epistemic peers is doing some (but not all) of the work to generate that question in a particularly compelling way, and the no special reason to discount clause is doing the rest of the work.

But that doesn’t seem right to me. It seems to me that the clause is not functioning as a supplement here. Rather, it seems to me that the clause is doing all of the work of generating, in a particularly compelling way, that desired question all by itself. And that’s because the no special reason to discount clause just seems to be nothing more or less than the notion of truth peers. For consider: if I have no reason to discount your opinion, it must be that I have every reason to think that you are just as likely as me to get things right here. That’s because a reason to think you aren’t as likely as me to get things right just is a reason to discount your opinion.

So, contrary to the objection, appeal to truth peers is still the way to generate that question in a particularly compelling way. Of course, the objection is right that,
to raise that question in a particularly compelling way, we could appeal to the epistemic credential picked out in, say, responsible inquiry peers conjoined with the credential picked out in, say, information peers and then append the notion of truth peers to that (by way of the no special reason to discount clause). But why do that? That makes the use of those other credentials utterly gratuitous. It seems better to just appeal to truth peers as the relevant epistemic credential in the first place.

There’s one final, related, objection. The above discussion has often treated being equally fit for attaining a true belief as synonymous with being just as likely to get things right. Ernest Sosa raises an issue for the latter expression (which then applies to the former if we are taking them to be equivalent):

Our two definitions [i.e., Elga’s and Christensen’s] are intimately related if how likely you are to be right on a given question is determined just by your relevant competences and your familiarity with the pertinent evidence and arguments.\(^{146}\)

In the same vein, Sosa elsewhere claims that the two accounts actually “collapse into one” if we understand likelihood to be “relative to the information and virtues possessed by the thinker.”\(^{147}\) Since it seems reasonable to think that likelihood should be relativized to the subjects’ information and virtues/competencies, it follows that taking truth peers as the relevant epistemic credential is the same thing as taking it to be Kelly/Russell peers. The result: I’ve made a whole lot of noise without offering anything genuinely different. That’s bad.

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\(^{146}\) See his (2010).

\(^{147}\) See his (2010) fn. 8.
Fortunately, there’s a good response to this objection. It’s false that we should take *likelihood* to be relativized to the subjects’ information and competencies. Being truth peers is not an *internal* matter. It is an *external* matter.\(^\text{148}\) It’s a matter of being equally well-connected to the world. Therefore, we don’t have just one account disguised as two; rather, we have two genuinely different accounts. This objection fails.

It’s time to wrap up. I had two aims in this chapter. My first aim was to do some conceptual work on *epistemic peers*. Here’s the analysis I offered:

**Epistemic Peers.** For any two individuals S1 and S2 and any time t, S1 and S2 are *epistemic peers* at t if and only if S1 and S2 have equally impressive epistemic credentials at t.

My second aim in this chapter was to survey the current epistemology of peer disagreement literature, noting how the notion is understood and used there. After pointing out that the key role of the notion *epistemic peers* is to raise an interesting epistemological question about justification, I argued that nearly all accounts of *epistemic peers* in the literature fail to allow *epistemic peers* to play that role in an especially compelling way. I also argued that taking *truth peers* as picking out the relevant epistemic credential of epistemic peerhood is the way to proceed to generate in a compelling way the interesting epistemological question about justification. I defended this view from several potential objections.

\(^{148}\) Just to be clear: I am not claiming that *justification* is an external matter. (It’s not.) The claim is simply that *being truth peers* is an external matter. That’s all.
In these first two chapters we’ve done some of the preliminary conceptual work that is often neglected in the epistemology of peer disagreement literature. In the chapters that follow, I’ll take up that interesting epistemological question about justification I’ve been referring to repeatedly, defending an answer to that question from a host of difficult objections.