Chapter 4: Swamping and Intrapersonal Doxastic Conflict

Recall that the last chapter began the defense of

**The Equal Weight View (EWV).** For any persons S1 and S2, any proposition p and any time t, if S1 and S2 are in a peer encounter over p at t, then the opinions of S1 and S2 about p at t are worth the same evidentially.

from a series of objections. In the last chapter, I did two things: First, I clarified EWV and, second, I argued that EWV withstands Tom Kelly’s first objection based on The Uniqueness Thesis. In this chapter, I continue the defense of EWV by presenting, explaining, and evaluating Kelly’s second and third objections to EWV. I conclude that these objections fail as well. Let’s consider the second objection now.\(^{216}\)

4.1 **The Second Objection: EWV implies that the Original Evidence is Epistemically Swamped**

Kelly presents the following case as a way of setting up our second objection to EWV:

**Case 4.** Despite having access to the same substantial body of evidence E, you and I arrive at very different opinions about some hypothesis H: while I am quite confident that H is true, you are quite confident that it is false. Indeed, at time t0, immediately before encountering one another, my credence for H stands at .8 while your

---

\(^{216}\) As noted at the end of the previous chapter, Kelly assumes that the Uniqueness Thesis is true while presenting his remaining objections to EWV. We will, too.
credence stands at .2. At time t1, you and I meet and compare notes. How, if at all, should we revise our respective opinions?²¹⁷

Kelly provides the following commentary on this case:

According to The Equal Weight View, you and I should split the difference between our original opinions and each give credence .5 to H. This is the reasonable level of confidence for both of us to have at time t1. As a general prescription, this strikes me as wrongheaded, for the following reason. Notice that, in the case as it has been described thus far, nothing whatsoever has been said about the relationship between E and H, and in particular, about the extent to which E supports or fails to support H. But it is implausible that how confident you and I should be that H is true at time t1 is wholly independent of this fact.²¹⁸

To demonstrate this seeming implausibility, Kelly fleshes out Case 4 as follows:

Case 4, continued. In fact, hypothesis H is quite unlikely on evidence E. Your giving credence .2 to H is the reasonable response to that evidence. Moreover, you respond in this way precisely because you recognize that H is quite unlikely on E. On the other hand, my giving credence .8 to H is an unreasonable response and reflects the fact that I

²¹⁷ See Kelly (forthcoming).
²¹⁸ See Kelly (forthcoming).
have significantly overestimated the probative force of E with respect to H.\textsuperscript{219}

In this continuation of the case, Kelly maintains that EWV implies that, rationally, we should adjust our credence levels to .5 since .5 splits the difference between my credence and yours.\textsuperscript{220} And this is so no matter what the original evidence, E, actually supports. Consequently, Kelly argues, the original evidence, E, turns out to be utterly irrelevant from the epistemic point of view. This consequence is what Kelly finds unacceptable about EWV. The argument, then, seems to be this:

\textbf{The Original Evidence Argument Against EWV}

\begin{enumerate}
\item If EWV is true, then in cases of peer disagreement, the original evidence is epistemically irrelevant.
\item But it’s not the case that, in cases of peer disagreement, the original evidence is epistemically irrelevant.
\item Therefore, EWV is not true.
\end{enumerate}

What are we to make of this obviously valid argument?

Let’s look at line (1). Once again, Kelly makes a claim about what a proponent of EWV is committed to, apparently having in mind The Split the Difference Principle when he makes that claim. And, once again, it’s not at all clear why a proponent of EWV is committed to this view since an EWV proponent can consistently reject The Split the Difference Principle. As noted in the previous

\textsuperscript{219} See Kelly (forthcoming).
\textsuperscript{220} Quite clearly we have here an explicit indication of Kelly’s taking EWV to be the same thing as, or to entail, The Split the Difference Principle.
chapter, there’s a lot of logical space between EWV and The Split the Difference Principle.

In light of this, it’s not at all clear that an EWV proponent is committed to the claim that in cases of peer disagreement, the original evidence is epistemically irrelevant. The logical space between EWV and that claim is filled with a lot of candidate epistemic principles. If there is anything objectionable about some implication about a case, perhaps the fault is with the epistemic principle inserted into that logical space, not EWV.\textsuperscript{221}

Perhaps offering an EWV reading of Kelly’s Case 4 would be helpful at this point. There should be no surprises here. When I compare notes with you, I hear that you have credence .2 for H given E. So, from your peer testimony, I get evidence that .2 credence is the justified credence to have for H given E. On the other hand, you hear from me that I have .8 credence for H given E. As a result, you get from my peer testimony equally good evidence that .8 credence is the justified credence to have for H given E.

Notice that at this point I have said nothing about what EWV implies is the justified credence to take toward H given E. That’s because there is no implication to say anything about. All EWV does is note that both of the peer testimonies count for the same evidentially. It doesn’t say anything at all about how that peer testimonial evidence interacts with the additional evidence E that one has in this case. So, EWV

\textsuperscript{221} Kelly apparently thinks that EWV can be interpreted in a variety of ways so as to avoid having certain consequences. See Kelly (forthcoming) fn. 14. It seems to me that the point is better put this way: EWV (interpreted as suggested above) could be conjoined with a variety of different epistemic principles resulting in different implications.
is consistent with the view that the original evidence E continues to be epistemically relevant even after full disclosure among peers. Indeed, if we conjoin EWV with The Absolutely No Weight View presented above, where peer testimony counts for absolutely nothing evidentially, then we have the result that the original evidence E remains not only epistemically relevant, but epistemically decisive after full disclosure among peers.\textsuperscript{222} All of this is enough to show that premise 1 of the above argument is false. The objection fails.

While it seems to me that this is all an EWV proponent is committed to saying about Case 4, and as a result there’s no good objection to EWV to be made here, let’s see if we can say more about Case 4. So, let’s consider a way of reading the case that seems especially plausible to me and is consistent with EWV. Once again, there’s nothing particularly novel about this way of reading the case.

As already noted, after we compare notes you have my peer testimony that .8 credence is the justified credence to have for H given our shared E and I have your peer testimony that .2 credence is the justified credence to have for H given our shared E. Now, once I have your peer testimony that I have terribly misevaluated the evidence, I have good reason for thinking that someone has made a terrible mistake in this case, and I have no reason for thinking that it is you, and not me, that has made

\textsuperscript{222} Once again, I am not endorsing this conjunction of EWV with The Absolutely No Weight View. I’m not even suggesting it’s plausible. The conjunction simply makes the point that EWV is perfectly consistent with the view that the original evidence remains epistemically relevant in cases of peer disagreement after full disclosure. A further note: I have used the expression ‘epistemically decisive’ here. In this case, to say that X is \textit{epistemically decisive} is to say that X effectively decides the relevant epistemic fact(s). So, in this case, by claiming that the original evidence remains epistemically decisive after full disclosure, I am claiming that the original evidence remains in such a position that it effectively decides what is epistemically justified. This expression, ‘epistemically decisive’, will come up again.
the mistake. Of course, I will (no doubt) actually think that you are the one that made the mistake. You will think the same about me. But none of this matters. What does matter is whether you or I have a good reason for thinking that the other is the one who made the mistake, assuming that that good reason (or something comparable) is not had by the other person.

So, even though, by hypothesis, in Case 4 you happened to be the one that responded reasonably to the original evidence, you have acquired (misleading) reasons for thinking that you made a mistake. Importantly, these are not reasons that you can discount. So it’s not terribly implausible that you should now revise your position after getting new evidence, namely, my peer testimony that you made a mistake. Of course, the same reasoning applies to me in this case. It’s not terribly implausible that I should revise my position after getting new evidence, namely, your peer testimony that I have made a mistake.

We can even say a little more here, but before we do, let’s remind ourselves that an EWV proponent is not at all committed to saying any of this. So here’s what else we can say. A plausible reading of Case 4 makes it credible that the original evidence does become epistemically irrelevant in cases of peer disagreement after full

---

Plantinga is fond of pointing out that one actually will think the other person made the mistake, and he apparently thinks that makes an epistemic difference. See his (1995). In his (2007) Tom Kelly also seems to think that this fact matters. He thinks it breaks the symmetry found in cases of peer disagreement. However, it seems to me that in order for there to be an epistemic asymmetry, there needs to be a difference in reasons. And presumably merely pointing out that I in fact think the other person has made the mistake is not enough to yield a difference in reasons. As stated in the main text, a reason for thinking that the other person has made the mistake would yield that difference, assuming that that reason (or something comparable) is not had by the other person.
We’ll use Case 4 to make the point. Consider your credence level .2 for H given the original shared evidence E. By hypothesis, that credence level is in fact the justified level to have for H given E. That is, there genuinely is a strong epistemic supports relation between your credence .2 for H and the original shared evidence E. However, when you get my peer testimony that you have made a mistake, that .8 credence, not .2, is the justified credence for H given E, you acquire new (misleading) evidence that you’ve badly mishandled the original evidence E. You now have (misleading) evidence that indicates that the original shared evidence E does not support your credence. Put simply, you have acquired an undercutting defeater for your original justification. While acquiring this undercutting defeater doesn’t literally make the original evidence E epistemically irrelevant (after all, there’s still something epistemic there—the epistemic supports relation—that the undercutting defeater has to undercut), the defeater does defeat whatever justificatory work the original evidence was doing in the first place. Put bluntly, the undefeated

---

224 The language of ‘epistemically irrelevant’ is unfortunate. There will be more on this below.
225 I have nothing specific to say here about the epistemic supports relation. But I don’t need to in order to make the point relevant for our purposes.
226 For more on undercutting defeaters (as opposed to rebutting defeaters), see Pollock (1986). I’m not suggesting here that all cases where one receives peer testimonial evidence during a peer encounter are cases where one gets an undercutting defeater. It seems that there are some cases where peer testimonial evidence functions as a rebutting defeater instead. We’ll consider some of those cases below.
227 This is why Kelly’s language of ‘irrelevance’ is unfortunate. Consider, for example, what Bruce Hunter has to say in discussing some defeasible evidence e: “In stock cases [of defeat], we don’t ‘lose’ e, but its import is undercut when it and the rest of our original total evidence is combined with additional evidence e’.” See his (1992). See also Feldman (2005) pp. 111-113.
undercutting defeater is now epistemically decisive, not the original evidence E.\textsuperscript{228}

Kelly gestures at this fact that the original evidence was once decisive to determining rational belief as a reason for thinking that it should still be at least somewhat relevant. He writes:

With respect to playing a role in determining what is reasonable for us to believe at time t1, E gets completely swamped by purely psychological facts about what you and I believe. (This despite the fact that, on any plausible view, it was highly relevant to determining what it was reasonable for us to believe back at time t0.) But why should the normative significance of E completely vanish in this way?\textsuperscript{229}

\textsuperscript{228} I suppose it’s in this sense that the original evidence becomes epistemically ‘irrelevant’. While this will come up below, it might be worth pointing out now that Kelly will sometimes say that the original evidence becomes ‘swamped’. He seems to mean the same thing here by ‘swamped’ as he does by ‘irrelevant’. Now, if by ‘swamped’ Kelly means that the original evidence becomes overwhelmed by the peer testimony such that it is no longer epistemically decisive, but the combined peer testimony is, then it does seem that the original evidence gets swamped in cases of peer disagreement (by the undercutting defeater yielded by the peer testimony). Kelly thinks that’s a mistake. I don’t. Here’s a further note: Notice the use of ‘epistemically decisive’ again. Here’s another way of putting the same points while avoiding that expression: In the relevant cases, the original evidence is no longer what effectively decides what is epistemically justified; rather, upon getting the peer testimony (and so acquiring an undercutting defeater), the combined peer testimony is now what effectively decides what is justified.

\textsuperscript{229} See Kelly (forthcoming). Here Kelly uses the language of normative significance vanishing. As I’ve already noted, Kelly will sometimes say that the original evidence gets swamped while other times he will say that the original evidence becomes irrelevant. I take it that Kelly means to be making the same point with each expression. But it’s not clear how all of these expressions are related. For example, it’s not at all clear that being swamped and being irrelevant really amount to the same thing. Consider: my vote in the 2008 presidential election was without doubt entirely swamped by the other votes. But I presume that my vote was at least relevant to the election (whereas the fact that I didn’t wear my Cleveland Browns hat while I voted was not relevant to the election—unless someone would have voted differently had they just seen me wearing that hat, a truly bizarre consideration). Any impulse to say that my vote was not relevant has to turn, it seems to me, on some ambiguity in relevance. Anyway, I will not pursue this point here. Following Kelly, I will continue to treat being swamped and being irrelevant (as well as vanishing normative significance) as synonymous. But as I already noted above, this language is particularly unfortunate.
Unfortunately, this reasoning is not cogent. It’s not unusual for considerations that were once epistemically highly relevant to lose their relevancy later. Or, to put it differently, it’s not unusual for considerations that were once epistemically decisive to no longer be decisive at some later time since something else becomes decisive. We’ve known this for some time now as the literature on the epistemology of defeat makes clear.230 Consider:

**The Cohen Shopping Case.** Cohen is shopping with his young son. They are furniture shopping at a store they know quite well. The store carries only two kinds of tables: red tables and white tables. Cohen’s son wants a red table. They see what looks to be a red table. Cohen’s perceptual seeming seems highly relevant here to determining what it is reasonable for him to believe. We might say that there is an *epistemic supports* relation between Cohen’s perceptual seeming and his belief that the table he is currently looking at is red. Now consider:

**The Cohen Shopping Case, cont.** The store manager approaches Cohen and his son and informs them that they are currently doing some work on their store lighting. One consequence of this lighting work is that all of the tables will appear red. This is so even if the table is actually white, not red. And, of course, the actually red tables will still appear to be red. Cohen and his son have every reason to trust this

---

230 See, for example, Pollock (1986).
store manager. They have known him for quite some time and he has
proven to be a very reliable, helpful store manager.\footnote{This case is an adaptation of a case Stewart Cohen presents in his (2002).}

I take it that the fact that the table appears red has now (to use Kelly’s terminology) lost its epistemic relevancy in determining what it is reasonable for Cohen to believe. To use another way Kelly puts it, the normative significance of the perceptual seeming has vanished. Or, to put the same point in the preferred way we put it above, Cohen’s perceptual seeming was once epistemically decisive, but now it is not; the undercutting defeater Cohen acquired from the store manager’s testimony is now decisive in determining what is justified for Cohen. And all of this is so even though just minutes ago Cohen’s perceptual seeming was highly relevant/normatively significant/decisive for determining what it was reasonable for Cohen to believe.

Consequently, it’s not crazy at all for an EWV proponent to think that something similar happens to the original evidence after one receives peer testimony in a case of peer disagreement.

One could object to this by pressing that the analogy here between The Cohen Shopping Case and Kelly’s Case 4 is imperfect.\footnote{My thanks to Earl Conee for pointing out the following objection to me.} Here’s how the objection might go. In Case 4, Kelly thinks that EWV yields the result that, no matter how strongly E supports your .2 credence for H, that is, no matter how strong the \textit{epistemic supports} relation between E and your .2 credence, my peer testimony always makes the same difference in what belief is justified for you, namely, it completely undercuts your
There are a couple of things that we might say in reply. First, no analogy is needed. That is, there need not be an analogy between the two cases in order to make the point that in some widely recognized cases at least, considerations that were once epistemically decisive no longer stay decisive given new considerations. This isn’t a mysterious or bizarre phenomenon. So, any objection based on the idea that considerations can’t lose their relevancy/normative significance/decisiveness to the reading we gave of Case 4 are thereby weak objections unless one can offer additional considerations showing why it’s particularly mysterious or bizarre for this to happen in the case of peer disagreement specifically. So far as I can tell, Kelly doesn’t do that here.

Second, Case 4 and The Cohen Shopping Case do seem to be importantly analogous. Consider that we can stipulate that the epistemic supports relation between the original shared evidence E and your .2 credence is extremely strong in Case 4, in the same way that the epistemic supports relation between the perceptual seeming and Cohen’s red table belief is extremely strong. Given that there is such a strong epistemic supports relation, it will presumably take a lot to defeat that relation. We

233 Recall that we already denied that EWV has this implication.
234 I’m assuming here that the epistemic supports relation between perceptual seemings and corresponding beliefs (under apparently normal conditions) is extremely strong.
get that in The Cohen Shopping Case. But we also get that in Case 4. Peer testimony just is strong enough to defeat the epistemic supports relation that obtains between the original shared evidence E and the .2 credence. (At the very least, we haven’t heard why it isn’t strong enough to do the trick.) As in The Cohen Shopping Case, lesser testimony in Case 4, say, testimony from an epistemic inferior, won’t do the trick of defeating the support yielded by the extremely strong original evidence E.

Moreover, it’s still true that in Case 4, the original shared evidence E makes a difference in what credence is justified in the sense that it’s still there yielding its extremely strong epistemic support to the .2 credence. Indeed, on many traditional epistemological views, that epistemic supports relation between a body of evidence E and a hypothesis H is a necessary relation: not only doesn’t it vanish (as Kelly puts it), it can’t vanish. This is analogous to what’s going on in The Cohen Shopping Case. The perceptual seeming is still there yielding its support, too. But, in both cases, i.e., with the original shared evidence E and the perceptual seeming, what was once decisive is no longer decisive due to undercutting defeat. In that sense, the original evidence E in Case 4 doesn’t still make a difference to what is justified, but then neither does the perceptual seeming in The Cohen Shopping Case. Things are analogous here after all.

There’s another important objection we should consider here. I’ve been arguing that, contra Kelly, the original shared evidence does become epistemically

\[235\] The additional objections from Kelly that we’ll consider do try to make this case. Obviously, I don’t think those objections work. There’ll be much more on that in the chapters that follow.

\[236\] The literature here on the status of the epistemic supports relation is large. For some representative work in support of the view that these epistemic relations are necessary relations, see Chisholm (1989) and Fumerton (1995).
irrelevant (in the intended sense) and the peer testimony becomes epistemically
decisive in such cases of peer encounter. Now, Kelly may object that my reasoning to
this point has focused entirely upon the individual in the example who initially
adopted the justified credence level (namely, ‘you’). Kelly may concede that for the
individual who initially responds reasonably to the original shared evidence, that
original evidence does get swamped by the (misleading) defeating peer testimony.
However, even with that concession, Kelly may press that (in Case 4, at least) for the
other individual (namely, ‘I’)—the one who initially responded unreasonably to the
original shared evidence—that original evidence does not become epistemically
irrelevant after the peer testimony is received. After all, that newly acquired peer
testimony reinforces the initial probative force of that evidence. In short, the original
evidence ‘proclaimed’ that .2 credence is the justified credence, and now one’s
epistemic peer proclaims the very same thing. How could it now be true that
adopting some other credence is the way to go here for that individual? Surely, the
objection continues, the original evidence is still epistemically relevant (in the
intended sense) for this individual.

In a very recent paper, David Christensen seems to echo this point. He
considers this particular objection from Kelly. After Christensen names the
individuals in Kelly’s Case 4 ‘Rita’ (for Kelly’s ‘you’) and ‘Wayne’ (for Kelly’s ‘I’),
he then claims that, according to Kelly,

---

237 Recall that in Case 4, your peer testimony that .2 credence toward H given E is the justified
credence is in fact correct. Your peer testimony reinforces that .2 credence is the way to go.
238 See his (2009). Christensen considers other variations of this objection as well.
the Conciliationist prescription would seem to amount to disregarding
the original evidence \(E\) (after all, the 0.5 compromise was dictated by
Rita’s and Wayne’s initial takes on \(E\), and not influenced at all by what
level of credence was really supported by \(E\)).\(^{239}\)

So Christensen’s reading of Kelly’s main objection matches mine. Christensen then
offers the following commentary:

What should the Conciliationist say here? Kelly’s sort of examples
show that when the Conciliationist says, for example, that Rita and
Wayne each should respond to the evidence provided by the other’s
disagreement by moving to credence 0.5, we must not understand this
as meaning that the resulting credences will be fully rational.
Conciliationism should instead be seen as a view about the bearing of
one particular kind of evidence. Clearly, taking proper account of one
bit of evidence cannot be expected to erase previous epistemic
blunders. Thus the Conciliationist should agree that Wayne’s belief in
the example is not fully rational. She should agree that Wayne does,
indeed, have more reason for doxastic revision than Rita does—the
reason provided by the original evidence…. So Kelly’s examples
reveal something important about how Conciliationism must be

\(^{239}\) See his (2009) p. 6. Note that Christensen (who is explicitly following Adam Elga in his
(forthcoming)) takes EWV to be a ‘Conciliatory’ view, where Conciliatory views are those views “on
which the disagreement of others should typically cause one to be much less confident in one’s belief
than one would be otherwise—at least when those others seem just as intelligent, well-informed,
honest, free from bias, etc. as oneself.” See p. 1.
understood. But on this understanding, it is not clear that

Conciliationism makes the original evidence irrelevant.\textsuperscript{240}

So Christensen (\textit{pace} Kelly) seems to think that the original evidence does continue to have epistemic relevancy on Conciliationism (and so, for Christensen, EWV) in that it prevents us from fully rationally licensing the adjusted credence of the individual who initially responded unreasonably to the original evidence. It’s worth considering briefly the merits of this objection.\textsuperscript{241}

A few things are worth noting here. First, EWV is not in any danger here. Nothing said here touches EWV since EWV makes no claims about what credences are justified in any case.

Second, even if we granted \textit{everything} in this objection, we still have the result that for at least \textit{some} individuals in \textit{some} cases, the original shared evidence does become epistemically irrelevant (in the intended sense).\textsuperscript{242} That result seems to go untouched by this objection. And that seems to be all we need to reject line (2) of Kelly’s argument.

Third, while there is something very attractive about Christensen’s presentation of the objection, there is at least some reason to worry about embracing it fully.\textsuperscript{243} Take Case 4 again. In Christensen’s commentary, he seems to endorse the

\textsuperscript{240} See his (2009) p. 6.
\textsuperscript{241} More will be said on this in Chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{242} As the above arguments about you in Case 4 seem to show.
\textsuperscript{243} Here’s something Christensen says in the presentation of the objection that I don’t pursue critically in the main text: “Clearly, taking proper account of one bit of evidence cannot be expected to erase previous epistemic blunders.” Understood as a general principle ranging over all cases, all bits of evidence, and all epistemic blunders, this principle is false. In some cases, taking proper account of one bit of evidence can be expected to erase previous epistemic blunders. Numerous examples will show
view that both you and I should move to a .5 credence given the peer encounter.\textsuperscript{244} In addition, Christensen seems to think that a .5 credence is fully rational for the one who initially had the justified credence given the original evidence E, but that a .5 credence is \textit{not} fully rational for the one who didn’t initially respond justifiably to the original evidence.\textsuperscript{245} And this latter result is so, Christensen explains, because the original evidence does retain its epistemic relevancy.

But notice that this response Christensen offers entails the following view: in Case 4, your .5 credence toward H is fully rational while my .5 credence toward H is \textit{not} fully rational \textit{even though we have the exact same relevant evidence for H}. And this result seems rather bad. It is incompatible with our current assumption that some version from among the fine-grained versions of The Uniqueness Thesis presented in Chapter 3 is true. Moreover, this result is incompatible with the version of The

\textsuperscript{244} Textual evidence of this view: “Kelly’s sort of examples show that when the Conciliationist says, for example, that Rita and Wayne each should respond to the evidence provided by the other’s disagreement by moving to credence 0.5, ….” So, Christensen concedes that Conciliatory views do call for both you and me to move to .5 credence in this case.

\textsuperscript{245} Textual evidence of this view: Christensen seems to pick only on Wayne’s adjusted credence as not being fully rational. These lines in the passage quoted are particularly relevant: “Clearly, taking proper account of one bit of evidence cannot be expected to erase previous epistemic blunders. Thus the Conciliationist should agree that Wayne’s belief in the example is not fully rational.”
Uniqueness Thesis Christensen himself seems to find attractive.\textsuperscript{246} Indeed, no appeal to The Uniqueness Thesis is needed here to get a puzzle. This result Christensen apparently advocates seems incompatible with any plausible \textit{permissive} notion of rationality as well. Surely \textit{relaxing} the constraints on rationality wouldn’t have the result that one and the same credence level given precisely the same relevant evidence is in one case fully rational and in another not fully rational. That’s hardly \textit{permissive}.

But notice that nothing in the above argument turns on the credence being \(0.5\). Any number will do. The upshot, then, seems to be that rationality demands that in Case 4 we adjust our credences to the same credence level (whatever that level turns out to be) since we share the exact same evidence.

So, it appears that the following claims are incompatible: (1) the claim that, in Case 4, we are rationally permitted to adopt different credences because the original evidence remains epistemically relevant, and (2) the claim that in Case 4 you and I share the same relevant evidence. But (2) seems beyond reproach. So it seems that we need to dump (1), the claim that we are rationally permitted to adopt different credences because the original evidence remains epistemically relevant. But that’s exactly what the objection we’re considering endorses. So, we have reason to think

\textsuperscript{246} In (2007) p. 211, Christensen claims that he finds “the Rational Uniqueness assumption [the assumption that there is only one maximally rational response to a given evidential situation] quite attractive.”
the objection fails. The original evidence really does lose its epistemic relevancy (in the intended sense).247

So, we’ve considered some reasons for thinking that the original evidence does indeed lose its epistemic relevancy in cases of peer disagreement. And so, we can conclude from all of this that there’s reason to reject premise 2 of Kelly’s above argument. In cases of peer disagreement, the original evidence does become epistemically irrelevant.248 Since both premises of the argument are dubious, there’s no good objection to EWV here.

As it turns out, the next four objections Kelly raises purport to pursue this matter of the (alleged) epistemic irrelevancy of the original evidence in cases of peer disagreement given EWV. Note that in considering the following objections, we should remember what we’ve already argued above: that EWV does not imply that the original evidence becomes irrelevant in cases of peer disagreement. However, an EWV proponent certainly can (though need not) offer a view that does. That’s the view reflected in the reading of Case 4 I offered above as being especially plausible. Let’s consider in depth whether this additional move would be a bad move to make for an EWV proponent. We turn now to the third objection Kelly presses.

4. 2 The Third Objection: EWV Shares Important Features with a Highly Implausible View About How to Handle Intrapersonal Doxastic Conflict

Kelly presents the objection as follows:

---

247 This does leave us with the admittedly odd result that, even though both the original evidence and you (my epistemic peer) testify that .2 credence is the way to go in Case 4, I rationally should not adopt a credence of .2 (unless you should, too, but that means that you would not be rationally required to adjust at all, and that seems clearly wrong).

248 It is irrelevant only in the sense articulated. Again, the language is just unfortunate.
Suppose that one suddenly realizes that two beliefs that one holds about some domain are inconsistent with one another. In such circumstances, one has a reason to revise one’s beliefs. But how should one revise them? We can imagine a possible view according to which, whenever one is in such circumstances, one is rationally required to abandon both beliefs. This view about how to resolve intrapersonal conflicts is the closest analogue to The Equal Weight View. But such a view has little to recommend it.249

According to Kelly, such a view has little to recommend it because it “completely abstracts away from facts about which beliefs are better supported by one’s evidence” and “would have one treat one’s prior beliefs on a par, regardless of how well- or ill-supported they are by one’s total evidence.”250 Perhaps we can capture this objection by way of the following argument:

**The Intrapersonal Conflict Argument Against EWV**

1. EWV shares important theoretical features with the terribly implausible view that claims that in cases of intrapersonal conflict, one rationally should abandon both beliefs that are in conflict.

2. If that’s so, then EWV is not true.

3. Therefore, EWV is not true.

What are we to make of this valid argument?

---

249 See Kelly (forthcoming).
250 See Kelly (forthcoming).
It’s not clear what we are to make of this argument. Apparently we’re supposed to think of cases of intrapersonal conflict as analogous to cases of peer disagreement. It’s just that in these allegedly analogous cases of intrapersonal conflict, one is in peer disagreement with oneself rather than someone else. Furthermore, the view that claims that one is to abandon both of the inconsistent beliefs, ignoring the original evidence pertaining to these beliefs, is supposed to be analogous to the pronouncements of EWV.

A proponent of EWV need not worry here. This objection doesn’t seem compelling as it stands. Even if we grant line (1) of the argument, a proponent of EWV can still reject the argument. Line (2) has little going for it. That a view within one domain shares some theoretical similarities with another view in a different domain doesn’t seem to make for a good objection. At least, we seem not to regard this as a good objection elsewhere, so it’s not clear why we should here.

Consider some examples. Take the following venerable theory of morally right action:

**Maximizing Actual Consequences Consequentialism (MACC).** An act is morally right if and only if (and because) there is no other act available to the agent that brings about a better balance of good over evil.

MACC shares some important theoretical similarities with this far less plausible view about morally right action:
**Ethical Egoism (EE).** An act is morally right if and only if (and because) there is no other act available to the agent that brings about a greater balance of good over evil for the agent.

While MACC is admittedly quite controversial (like every other significant theory of morally right action), we seem not to think that a good objection to it is that it shares some important theoretical features with EE. Indeed, we shouldn’t think that’s a good objection. To think it is would be to say something like “MACC is a maximizing consequentialist principle that takes actual consequences to be decisive in determining morally right action. But so is EE, and that is obviously an objectionable principle. So MACC must be no good.” I take it that is not a cogent line of reasoning.251

Or consider this example. The following view:

**Evidentialism.** Doxastic attitude D toward proposition p is epistemically justified at t if and only if having D toward p at t fits the total evidence S has at t.252

shares an important theoretical feature with this view:

**Evidentialism*.** Doxastic attitude D toward proposition p is epistemically justified at t if and only if having D toward p at t fits some proper subset of the total evidence S has at t.

---

251 I hope this is obvious. Clearly MACC and EE do not stand or fall together. EE faces devastating objections that MACC does not face.

252 This is (a very slight variation of) Conee and Feldman’s principle EJ. See their “Evidentialism” *Philosophical Studies* 48: 15-34 (1985).
Evidentialism and Evidentialism* obviously do not stand or fall together, and this is so in spite of the fact that they share the following important theoretical feature: they both make epistemic justification turn entirely upon evidence a person has at a time. So, pointing out that Evidentialism shares an important theoretical feature with Evidentialism* doesn’t make for a good objection.

Neither does picking on the alleged theoretical similarity between EWV and this other view about how to handle intrapersonal conflict. An EWV proponent can sensibly reject line (2) of the argument. This third objection from Kelly fails.

In the next chapter, we’ll consider another objection that purports to pick on the alleged irrelevancy of the original evidence given the truth of EWV.

---

253 Once again, I hope it’s obvious why they don’t stand or fall together. Evidentialism* (but not Evidentialism) is refuted by examples where a proper subset of one’s total evidence supports p, but the rest of one’s total evidence contains lots of undefeated defeaters. For more on this, see section 1 of Kelly (2008b).