

# Conciliationism and Fictionalism

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper offers fictionalism as a new approach to the problem of reasonable disagreement discussed in social epistemology. The conciliationist approach to reasonable disagreement is defined, and three problems with it are posed: that it is destructive of inquiry, self-defeating, and unacceptably revisionary. Hans Vaihinger’s account of fictions is explained, and it is shown that if the intellectual commitments that are the subject of reasonable disagreements are treated as fictions rather than as beliefs, the three noted problems are avoided. Whereas beliefs have a “rivalrous” relation to the source of their justification (evidence), fictions have a non-rivalrous relation to the source of their justification (expediency), meaning that disagreement over which fictions to employ is not problematic in the way that disagreement over what to believe is. Some objections to the fictionalist approach to reasonable disagreement are answered.

**KEYWORDS:** Conciliationism – disagreement – fictionalism – pessimistic induction – social epistemology – Hans Vaihinger.

## 0. Introduction

In this essay I address three criticisms regarding the consequences of the conciliationist approach to disagreement; that conciliationism is destructive

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of inquiry, self-defeating, and unacceptably revisionary. Although I endorse the doxastic revision that conciliationism suggests, my intention in this paper is not to defend conciliationism, but rather to draw a new approach toward reasonable disagreement from the examination of these three criticisms. I suggest that the doxastic revision which conciliationism requires of us is consistent with our maintaining a propositional attitude other than belief towards our intellectual commitments. I suggest that we ought to relate to them as fictions, and that doing so avoids the three noted criticisms. In part one I briefly state what I take conciliationism to be. In part two I explain the three criticisms of conciliationism. In part three I explain Hans Vaihinger's account of fictions. In part four I show how fictionalization of our intellectual commitments avoids the three criticisms. In part five I state and respond to five objections to my suggestion.

### 1. Specifying conciliationism

“Conciliationism” and “the steadfast view” are the two approaches to the question of the extent to which doxastic revision is rational for the disputants of a reasonable disagreement. The former calls for substantial doxastic revision, and the latter calls for little or no doxastic revision. One way of stating the insight of conciliationism is that in cases of reasonable disagreement one is provided with second order evidence which weighs against the first order evidence one holds for one's belief or undercuts this evidence.

On conciliationism, not all disagreements give us reason for revising our beliefs, only reasonable disagreements do. For there to be a reasonable disagreement, the disputants must be epistemic peers. Epistemic peers are those who meet these two conditions:

- “(i) they are equals with respect to their familiarity with the evidence and arguments which bear on that question, and
- (ii) they are equals with respect to general epistemic virtues such as intelligence, thoughtfulness, and freedom from bias” (Kelly 2005, 175).

I will make two controversial assertions about these conditions which allow conciliationism to apply to many of our real-world disagreements,

rather than remaining a doctrine that applies only to model cases of disagreement in which we merely stipulate that (i) and (ii) obtain.

First, “equal” need not mean “same.” To say that two disputants are epistemic peers with respect to (i) and (ii) is not to say that they have the very same evidence or epistemic virtues. If sameness of (i) and (ii) is required for a reasonable disagreement, then it seems unlikely that anyone has ever had a reasonable disagreement, given the uniqueness of every individual’s life experiences (King 2012). But real-world disagreements are, surely, sometimes reasonable disagreements. So, a conception of “equal” other than sameness should be adopted. I suggest a dialectical understanding of “equal.” That is, so long as the disagreement of the two disputants could not (counterfactually) be resolved by a mutual disclosure of their various dissimilarities, there is a reasonable disagreement. The extra tidbit of evidence that disputant A has only makes A and B not peers if this evidence ought to significantly change the beliefs of disputant B if it were disclosed to B. That A has reviewed 1001 case studies and B has reviewed 1000 case studies does not make A and B non-peers, nor does that A is a little more open minded whilst B is a little more attentive.

Second, note that the definition of “epistemic peers” offered is metaphysical. Yet, as an epistemological matter, in a given real-world disagreement we are often not quite sure whether the disputants are epistemic peers or not. In real-world disagreements we are often locked in “apparently” reasonable disagreements, where it seems that both (i) and (ii) may well obtain. It seems that we have grounds for some degree of doxastic revision not only when we know that (i) and (ii) obtain, but so far as it seems they may obtain. Where the disagreement is clearly attributable to a lack of evidence or failure of reason in one party, the disagreement gives one no grounds for revising one’s beliefs, but where the disagreement cannot be attributed to such factors, the hypothesis that the disagreement is a reasonable one remains plausible and provides grounds for some degree of doxastic revision.

## **2. Three criticisms of conciliationism**

I now turn to stating the three objections to conciliationism that I wish to address.

### 2.1. *Pessimistic induction*

The first criticism is that the doxastic revision advised by conciliationism, even though epistemically required, would put an end to much intellectual inquiry. As a conciliationist, one finds oneself in a somewhat exotic form of the pessimistic induction problem (Laudan 1981) that counsels against belief in the theoretical entities posited by contemporary science, that is, against scientific realism. Surveying the history of philosophy or social science one would find, on the characterization of epistemic peerhood I have offered, that most of the disputant's disagreements were apparently reasonable disagreements. Therefore, the peers to these disagreements ought to have conciliated and become adoxic (rather than maintaining, for example, nominalism and realism, Keynesianism and monetarism). Likewise, one finds oneself in apparently reasonable disagreements, in many cases over the same or similar matters as past thinkers. Therefore, by induction one has good reason to believe that in 30 years, when the next iteration of philosophy and social science has emerged, one will again find oneself in apparently reasonable disagreements about the same or similar questions – again requiring conciliation. Therefore, one reasonably anticipates never having justified beliefs about these matters. If one's end in philosophizing is to hold justified beliefs about philosophical matters (or to hold any other type of mind-to-world direction of fit propositional attitude that is sensitive to evidence), then by ought implies can one should not bother philosophizing. One should become dispirited with philosophizing, and go to tend the garden, or some activity about which one can reasonably anticipate a decent chance of success. Note that this pessimistic induction is more severe than the one facing scientific realism, since there is at least some chance that present scientific theories will not succumb to the same fate as those of the past (being superseded) whereas in this case we know that the problem (apparently reasonable disagreement) already obtains for our present beliefs. Likewise, the various strategies for defending scientific realism, such as selective realism (Hardin & Rosenberg 1982; Psillos 1999), entity realism (Cartwright 1983; Hacking 1982), structural realism (Worrall 1989), or claiming that the scientific theories of the present are "more successful" than those of the past or in some way qualitatively different (Fahrbach 2011), seem hard to replicate *vis-à-vis* philosophical and social scientific theories or to not really admit of analogues at all.

## 2.2. *Self-defeat*

Conciliationism has been charged with being self-defeating (Christensen 2009, 762; Plantinga 1995). Conciliationists recommend substantial doxastic revision in the light of apparently reasonable disagreement. Steadfasters instead recommend little or no doxastic revision in the light of an apparently reasonable disagreement. Plausibly, steadfasters are in an apparently reasonable disagreement with conciliationists. According to conciliationism this demands that one undergo a substantial doxastic revision away from conciliationism. This effect can be iterated *ad infinitum* in very messy and contradictory directions, e.g. “Cynthia conciliationist” conciliates with the steadfaster to some intermediate position, but in turn meets “Cal conciliationist” who thinks he has a special reason not to conciliate with the steadfaster. It appears to Cynthia that she is in an apparently reasonable disagreement with Cal, so she conciliates closer to the original conciliationist position. In a world of recursive debates, maintaining the sort of “50:50” adoxicism typically suggested by conciliationism would rarely be justified.

## 2.3. *Revisionary*

Conciliationism seems too revisionary and counter-intuitive. We can imagine the case of a philosopher who has spent many decades carving out theories, and has many intuitions, about various matters: the immorality of abortion, the truth of pansychism, etc. Then they hear about conciliationism, find it to be convincing, and now have to abandon their many beliefs. From a reflective-equilibrium point of view, conciliationism is a case of the tail wagging the dog. If one must weigh one’s theories and intuitions about all these other matters against one’s theories and intuitions about the epistemology of disagreement, this latter must lose out.

## 3. Fictions

In *The Philosophy of “As If”* Vaihinger distinguishes between two types of ideation; hypothesis and fiction. Typically, we are under the impression that all of our intellectual commitments fall under the former category. Opinion, belief, and knowledge may be counted under the umbrella of

“hypothesis” because they share that they are intended to correspond to the world. Vaihinger’s claim is that some of our intellectual commitments are not of this kind. Rather, there is a class of ideations called fictions which may be characterized as “products of the imaginative faculty” (Vaihinger 1935, 63). These are not intended as claims about reality, and are “advanced with the consciousness that [they are] an inadequate, subjective and pictorial manner of conception, whose coincidence with reality is, from the start, excluded” (Vaihinger 1935, 268). According to Vaihinger, fictions are representations which are known to be false or impossible. They induce us to think as if something that is the case were not the case, or as if something which is not the case were the case. The reason we should be interested in entertaining such ideations is that doing so proves to be useful in the wider process of theorizing or in practical activity. Despite their falsity, fictions “remain from a practical standpoint necessary elements in our thought” (Vaihinger 1935, 134). Therefore, whereas the justification for a hypothesis is evidence, the justification for a fiction is its expediency. Expediency here I will characterize loosely as that which aims at any good not immediately and narrowly concerned with corresponding to reality in the way that “hypothesis” is; guiding action, organizing thought, generating new hypotheses, regulating emotions.

According to Vaihinger, fictions play a role in many aspects of our intellectual and practical lives. I will mention a few examples for the purposes of illustration. In economics we create models which could never obtain in reality; a market in which there is perfect information, homogeneous products, no barriers to entry or exit, etc. Similarly, we may think about impossible utopias to help draw normative conclusions about what we should do. To the same end we might try to reason as if we were behind a veil of ignorance (Rawls 1999, 118-123). I may try to think about some matter as if I were you. We may import analogies from one field of thought to another; we may think about society as if it were an organism or a family, or about economic competition as if it were a process of Darwinian evolution. We may instruct a jury to deliberate as if they did not know a piece of excluded evidence that they do know. We may treat a human being in a permanent vegetative state, or a newborn, as if they were persons.

My suggestion is that we treat those of our intellectual commitments subject to reasonable disagreement as fictions. Whereas Vaihinger asserts that fictions are imaginative representations that are known to be false or

impossible, it seems that a weaker characterization captures what is essential; that fictions are imaginative representations not intended to correspond with reality (but where a possible correspondence with reality is not “from the start, excluded”). A good example here is free-will; an ideation that it seems can be consciously employed as a fiction in much juridical and ethical practice and reasoning whilst deliberately not taking a stand on the question of whether free-will as a metaphysical hypothesis is known to be false or impossible, or even true.

Conciliationism does not advise us to believe that our intellectual commitments are false. But it does give us grounds for not believing them and (with the addition of the pessimistic induction) for anticipating that we will not be able to justifiably believe them for the foreseeable future. The consciousness of this seems enough to sustain us in the practice of relating to our intellectual commitments as fictions rather than as hypotheses: images of how it is useful to think about the world regardless of what the world is really like. Note that relating to one’s intellectual commitments as fictions does not completely foreclose the possibility that it may at some time become legitimate to regard these intellectual commitments as hypotheses, but it offers an alternative way of relating to them until such a time may come. For example, we might imagine someone who undergoes an intellectual journey in which they first relate to the idea of God as a hypothesis (“Since there is evil, God does not exist”), then as a fiction (“It is good to act as if God exists”, “Investigate nature as if it were an orderly production”), then as a hypothesis again (“I’ve reconsidered the ontological argument – God exists!”). We might denote these different ways of relating to an intellectual commitment with a subscripted h or f, e.g. God<sub>h</sub> or God<sub>f</sub>.

#### **4. Solutions to the three criticisms of conciliationism**

I now explain how treating our intellectual commitments as fictions rather than beliefs resolves the three noted criticisms.

The key point pertaining to all three criticisms is to note a difference between beliefs and fictions in the manner of their justification. Because beliefs are intended as claims about reality then, out of a set of mutually contradictory beliefs, only one belief about some matter can be true. One is justified in holding a given belief rather than one of its competitors by

the evidence one has. And, typically, evidence counting for one belief is evidence against its competitors. For instance, evidence that supports the belief “Elvis is alive” counts against the belief “Elvis is dead.” This is to say that beliefs are “rivalrous” – they compete for the justificatory resource of evidence (like rival gold-mining crews) and for one belief to become better justified by the discovery of new evidence typically means a depreciation in the justificatory value of the evidence for another belief (like the devaluation one such crew may inflict on another by finding the mother lode). In the case of apparently reasonable disagreement, that someone meeting (i) and (ii) holds different beliefs than oneself functions, according to the conciliatorist, as a piece of evidence against one’s own beliefs. By contrast, fictions do not make claims about reality and fictions are justified by their expediency not by any relation they bear to evidence. Whereas only one belief out of a set of mutually contradictory beliefs can be the best (the true), there seems to be no reason for assuming that there must be one fiction which is uniquely the best (the most expedient) in every respect and every context. Again, that one belief has had a lot of evidence adduced for it tends to show that it is the best (the true), but that some fiction has proven expedient does not tend to show that it is the best (the most expedient). In this way, fictions that are justified by expediency are “non-rivalrous.” That someone employs a different fiction to the fiction that I employ, and does so to great effect, does not by itself show that my fiction is inexpedient. Concretely, if one political scientist investigates political institutions using a model that treats politicians as if their only motivation was to hold office and finds this fiction to be very expedient (in generating testable hypotheses, directing new research, etc.), this does not show that some other fiction would be inexpedient, e.g. a model that treats politicians as if their only motivation was to make money. By contrast, the more evidence ascertained for the belief that the only motivation of politicians is to hold office, the less reasonable it becomes to hold competing beliefs.

I anticipate that two difficulties will be raised. First, whilst the great expediency of one fiction may not act to “defeat” whatever expediency another fiction may have, and does not provide grounds for refusing to try-out some new fiction, it does provide *prima facie* reason to shift from employing some less expedient fiction to employing the more expedient fiction. Concretely, there may be some expediency to a Marxist approach to political economy, but there is perhaps greater expediency in a neo-classical approach

to political economy. Even if the expediency of the one does not detract from or destroy the expediency of the other, one ought to employ the latter. As Vaihinger himself remarked; “Expediency not only determines the acceptance or rejection of a particular fiction but also its selection from among others” (Vaihinger 1935, 90). Second, it seems that epistemic peers may reasonably disagree in their *beliefs* about which fictions it is most expedient to employ, leading to adoxicism about this question, meaning that they will have to suspend judgment about which fiction to employ, meaning that the dispiriting effect of conciliationism has not really been avoided.

In response to both these difficulties, note a distinction between the monolithic and the ecological expediency of a fiction. The former refers to what the most expedient fiction is when considered in isolation, i.e. a scenario in which the intellectual community had to collectively choose to adopt one approach to political economy or the other. The latter refers to what the most expedient combination of fictions for an intellectual community might be, i.e. whether it is more expedient that everyone agree on one approach to political economy, or whether it is better that several approaches are employed – and if so which approaches. The two noted difficulties are only difficulties for the monolithic expediency of a fiction. In the ecological sense of expediency, that someone else’s use of a fiction has proved very fruitful for their research does not always provide one with a reason to shift to employing that fiction. For instance, a particularly expedient fiction may have attracted numerous researchers, such that one’s net input to the intellectual enterprise is greater if one focuses on what is an overall less expedient but underutilized fiction; for instance, one might deliberately adopt a strange cousin of rational choice theory rather than rational choice theory itself. Or again, one may have a different purpose in mind for which some other fiction may be more expedient. Regarding the second difficulty, that many people are locked in apparently reasonable disagreements about which the most expedient fiction is in the monolithic sense (“Which theory is the best”), although it does provide grounds for doxastic revision about this question, it does not provide reason for hesitating in the selection of a fiction, since it is generally not true that expediency will be maximized by everyone employing the same fictions. Whilst there are numerous benefits to a shared paradigm (related to as a fiction or not), it is expedient that people choose to employ different fictions, even

ones which we may regard as unpromising. For instance, economics is plausibly a more progressive discipline because of the coexistence of Austrianism, Keynesianism, Behavioralism, etc., and the struggles between them than it would be if every researcher held the same intellectual commitments. Reasonable people can be aware of this, and so will not view differences in belief about which fictions it is most expedient to employ as a reason for indecision in employing a given fiction; any one of a number of fictions will remain reasonable options. Indeed, one may have nothing more than subjective grounds for employing a fiction (“it seems plausible to me,” “it seems like a good approach”), or arbitrarily adopt a fiction on a volitional basis, but nevertheless find expediency in employing it.

This is not to say that the selection of any fiction in any circumstance will be expedient in the ecological sense. Even taking into account the synergy that results from allowing different forms of thought to flourish, compete, and cross-pollinate, certain fictions are so evidently inexpedient (or may become so with the passage of time) that one would reasonably regard someone who selected them as no longer being a peer, e.g., a political scientist who investigates political institutions using a fictional model that treats politicians as if their only motivation was to acquire letterheaded paper. On an analogy with Feyerabend’s epistemological anarchism (Feyerabend 1975), we might call this view “fictional minarchism.” The conditions under which it becomes expedient to begin employing some fiction or other can likely not be put in a general formula, and if they could it would be an extremely difficult to ascertain when such conditions obtained as an empirical matter. No doubt practical wisdom is called for. For instance, I would hazard that there is ecological expediency in the existence of small groups of creationists, phrenologists, mercantilists, and Steady State theorists, if only insofar as they inadvertently help clarify the commitments of researchers within the mainstream paradigms.

#### *4.1. Pessimistic induction*

Fictionalization of our intellectual commitments means that they avoid the pessimistic induction. Since fictions are not assertions about reality, it is no objection that previous intellectual commitments turned out to be false. Again, since fictions are justified by their expediency rather than any relation they bear to evidence, that intellectual commitments past, present,

and future, have a weighty piece of second order evidence going against them is not a relevant ground for the revision of one's fictions.

A different sort of pessimistic induction, grounded in the general inexpediency of many or most past fictions might give one reason to expect that one's fictions will prove inexpedient. Since expediency is a comparative concept only an observation of a trend of decline in the expediency of fictions employed would give one reason for doubting the expediency of one's own. But I take it that the real historical record of philosophy and the social sciences does not support this; whether our intellectual commitments in this area have proven expedient at all may be questionable, but the case for a gradual degeneration in their expediency seems hard to make.

#### 4.2. *Self-defeat*

Conciliationism, as originally conceived, as well as being an epistemological or methodological claim about what we ought to believe under conditions of apparently reasonable disagreement, is itself offered as an object of belief. Such a conciliationism<sub>h</sub> is indeed self-defeating. But we can also endorse conciliationism<sub>f</sub>, a fiction that concerns the most expedient way of relating to one's intellectual commitments under conditions of apparently reasonable disagreement. Conciliationism<sub>f</sub> could be characterized as "treating apparently reasonable disagreements as if they provide reason for conciliation." That others endorse steadfast<sub>h</sub> or steadfast<sub>f</sub> ("treating apparently reasonable disagreements as if they provide no reason for conciliation") is now not a reason for someone who endorses conciliationism<sub>f</sub> to conciliate about conciliationism<sub>f</sub>; since the differences in approach between the two fictions are not a disagreement of theoretical reason but a difference in practical reason conciliationism<sub>f</sub> is not self-defeating.

The question then might seem to be whether conciliationism<sub>f</sub> or steadfast<sub>f</sub>, or something else, is the most expedient fiction. Here, it might seem that steadfast<sub>f</sub> is the most expedient fiction; continuing along as if "I am right and others are wrong." Steadfast<sub>f</sub> allows one to practically ignore the dispiriting conclusion of the pessimistic induction. Moreover, it might at first seem that conciliationism<sub>f</sub> is a very inexpedient fiction, since it advises detaching from all of one's intellectual commitments, as if they were all, and would remain, subject to a weighty piece of undercutting evidence.

Although these characterizations of steadfast<sub>f</sub> and conciliationism<sub>f</sub> seem right, attempting to figure out which approach is the better and then adopting it is misconceived, given the previous remarks about ecological expediency. There is therefore likely to be room in the intellectual community for personalities who adopt either steadfast<sub>f</sub> or conciliationism<sub>f</sub>, and there is call for an individual switching between them depending on the inquiry being pursued. Judgments about when it is best to adopt either of these fictions about one's intellectual commitments are no doubt difficult and highly contextual. At any rate, the self-defeat objection to conciliationism<sub>h</sub> is avoided by its fictionalized analogue.

### 4.3. Revisionary

Conciliationism<sub>f</sub> is not a hypothesis to be believed, but a fiction. It therefore makes no attempt to be consistent with the evidence one has for one's favored theories or with the evidence of intuition. Rather, to cite these things as grounds for not endorsing conciliationism<sub>f</sub> would be a category error, because fictions draw their justification from their expediency not from any relation they bear to evidence.

Having outlined my resolution of these criticisms, I now address five objections, in part as a clarificatory exercise.

## 5. Objections answered

### 5.1. *"People believe their intellectual commitments and don't treat them as fictions. People cannot think like that."*

I take it that the first sentence of this claim is for the most part descriptively accurate, but not worrying. The second sentence of this claim would be worrying if it is true. If it is true, fictionalization of our intellectual commitments would remain justified in principle. But there would be an "ought implies can" problem, and a certain frivolousness, in recommending that people think in a way that they are unable to think. In response, I would suggest that it is descriptively more precise to say that people cannot relate to their intellectual commitments as fictions all or most of the time, rather than that people are unable to do so at all. In this respect, there are many philosophical companions in guilt; skepticism

about causation, solipsism, and so forth, can only be sustained with effort for a short time before by “a kind of laziness...I happily slide into old opinions” (Descartes 1996, 15). The same difficulty seems to attend conciliationism itself, so in this respect my suggestion is no worse off than the view from which it departs.

It seems that the psychological possibility worry can also be addressed by pointing to numerous cases of philosophers and other inquirers explicitly treating very important elements of their thought as fictions; Thomas Hobbes’ state of nature (Hobbes 1998, 85), John Rawls’ veil of ignorance (Rawls 1999, 118-123), David Hume’s account of justice and property (Hume 2007, 316-317), Edward Craig’s account of knowledge (Craig 1991), Bernard Williams’ account of truthfulness (Williams 2002, 20-22), Friedrich Forberg on God, freedom, and immortality (Forberg 2010), the models of economists, the rational choice theory employed in political science, the domestic analogy of international relations, teleology in biology, the legal treatment of rivers as persons, etc., each of which is likely to outrage or bemuse any undergraduate who mistakes them as hypotheses to be believed.

Further, although it seems most inquirers hold firm beliefs about their area of inquiry, much of the language they use suggests otherwise. One often hears an academic refer to their ideations as “projects,” “research programs,” or “orientations” (Hayek 1955, 225), which may “work out” or allow one to “tell that story” or “make that move.” Much intellectual activity might comfortably and charitably be reinterpreted as fictive. For instance, a Marxist anthropologist might say “When I examine a society previously unknown to me, I do so as if each feature of its religion, morality, and law, was explained principally by the society’s mode of production.” One thing they might be doing is employing Marxism as a hypothesis to explain this society, and also seeing if Marxism as a hypothesis is falsified by the evidence this new society gives. But another thing they might be doing is self-consciously treating Marxism as an entirely unfalsifiable fiction that is expedient at gaining certain insights into this society or organizing inquiry about it. We are accustomed to condemning the Marxist anthropologist’s claim for being unfalsifiable, but the real ground of its condemnation might be its inexpediency (if it is inexpedient).

5.2. *“If we think of our ideations as fictions, we will stop caring about them.”*

Given the examples related above and the controversies that have raged over them, I think this objection *prima facie* fails, even if it is hard to explain why. Those inquirers engaged in explicitly fictive thinking are not aiming to write fantasy novels. Rather, the aim of fictive thinking is expedience, in terms of both practical activity and in terms of the organization of thought and the direction of inquiry. Therefore, fictions have a connection with both the use of theoretical reason and practical reason. This means that they engage our interest in both the true and the good, though at a certain remove from the immediacy of either belief or action.

5.3. *“Why not ‘acceptance’ or ‘supposition’ instead of fiction?”*

Any propositional attitude that is a “hypothesis” in Vaihinger’s sense, something that affirms something about reality (such as knowledge, opinion) or is intended as a tentative or hopeful precursor of an affirmation (such as acceptance, supposition), is subject to a parallel of conciliationism. If disputants have apparently reasonable disagreements in their opinions or suppositions, or over which claims to accept, this likewise acts as a second order piece of evidence undercutting whatever evidence supported the differing opinions or suppositions or acceptances. That Colombo and Poirot have different opinions or suppositions (rather than beliefs) about whodunit is good reason for both to revise their opinions and suppositions about the matter. Acceptances are more akin to fictions in that they are objects of volition (Cohen 1992, 22). Yet whilst it seems justifiable to adopt one of a number of different acceptances in adverse epistemic conditions, doing so is not justifiable as epistemic conditions improve; acceptances are therefore sensitive to evidence in a way that fictions are not. For instance, it seems justifiable for one physicist to accept one version of string theory, and for another physicist to accept some other version of string theory, as temporary propositions. But it is not justifiable for a contemporary physicist to accept in this way Newtonian physics, whereas it remains very expedient to take it up as a fiction in many contexts.

5.4. *“In terms of ecological expediency, are there not also circumstances in which it is essential that everyone is guided by the same fictions? e.g. that we all employ the fiction of free will.”*

When speaking about expediency, I have been speaking principally about the expediency regarding the advancement of intellectual understanding. The example of juridical punishment is one in which we aim at something more concretely practical, where it seems true that we must all converge on the same fiction. But since fictions are non-rivalrous and are justified by expediency, there is no problem with our employing one fiction at one time or context and another fiction at another time or context depending on the purpose in hand. For instance, a judge *qua* judge will act and think as if the convict was free in committing their crime and merits a certain punishment. Such a fiction is part and parcel of the role of judge and the practice of juridical punishment. But the same judge might be quite committed to determinism<sub>f</sub> when as a prudential agent he has to decide which part of the city to reside in.

5.5. *“When I say ‘I believe God exists’ or ‘I believe abortion is murder’ I am stating my beliefs. I do not mean ‘I think and act as if God exists,’ and I refuse to mean this. Your suggestion is unacceptable regarding matters such as religion and morality.”*

One response to this objection is to aver that many of one’s epistemic peers do not believe that God exists or that abortion is murder, and that the objector ought to fictionalize their religious and moral commitments. But two other responses can be made, each of which avoids the demand for fictionalization. A first is that religious and moral beliefs are not founded on evidence at all. Whilst such a response might raise questions about whether religious and moral beliefs ought to be held at all, it indicates that disagreements about religion and morality are not apparently reasonable. If the beliefs of A are not based on the reasoned consideration of a body of evidence, and B is aware of this, then the fact that A endorses certain beliefs provides no undercutting defeater of B’s beliefs. Second, one might question whether the commitments of religion and morality are best characterized in terms of belief. For example, many philosophers who are by no

means hostile to religious faith have characterized it as being something other than a species of belief. For Kant, faith is a practical mode of conviction distinct from theoretical knowledge and opinion (Wood 1970, 17-25). Robert Audi describes faith as a cognitive attitude separate from belief, and one which is “epistemically less at risk, in the sense that it is less easily defeated, than rational belief” (Audi 1991, 219). Going further, Schellenberg claims that belief and faith are incompatible (Schellenberg 2005, 127-166), whilst for Schleiermacher faith is a feeling rather than a cognition (Schleiermacher 1893). Similar claims can be made about some (but by no means all) metaethical views; familiar kinds of non-cognitivism would plausibly avoid the need for conciliation and fictionalization, as would (more arguably) certain varieties of constructivism, intuitionism, and moral sentimentalism.

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