

THE QUESTION OF GOD'S EXISTENCE: PARTIAL EVIDENCE, DISAGREEMENT AND INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY*

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Abstract: In this article, I begin by arguing that justification of religious beliefs can involve at least two types of defeaters, namely *partial evidence* and *peer disagreements*. Belief in the existence (or nonexistence) of God, for example, is based on partial evidence. The body of evidence for this question is huge. No one is apt to consider all information and all arguments about the topic. In topics like this we have only partial evidence. Besides, there is persistent disagreement on the question of God's existence. Theists and atheists have never come to an ultimate answer. The disagreement with epistemic peers is also a sort of defeater for our religious beliefs. Thus, in the face of this scenario of dispute and defeaters, I argue for an attitude of *intellectual humility*. This intellectual virtue consists in owning or accepting our intellectual limitations. In this case, independently of having a belief in favor of or against God's existence, both parties in the dispute – theists and atheists – should recognize their intellectual limitations and reduce confidence in their own beliefs.

Keywords: God's existence, skepticism, partial evidence, peer disagreement, intellectual humility.

Resumo: Neste artigo, começo argumentando que crenças religiosas podem envolver no mínimo dois tipos de anuladores, a saber, evidência parcial e desacordo entre pares. A crença na existência (ou não existência) de Deus, por exemplo, é baseada em evidência parcial. O corpo de evidências acerca desta questão é enorme. Ninguém está apto a considerar todas as informações e todos os argumentos sobre esse tópico. Para questões desse tipo temos somente evidências parciais. Além disso, existe um desacordo persistente sobre a questão da existência de Deus. Ateus e Teístas nunca chegam a uma resposta definitiva. O desacordo com pares epistêmicos é também um tipo de anulador para as nossas crenças religiosas. Assim, diante desse cenário de disputa e anuladores, irei argumentar por uma atitude de humildade intelectual. Esta virtude intelectual consiste em reconhecer ou aceitar nossas limitações intelectuais. Neste caso, independente de termos uma crença a favor ou contra a existência de Deus, ambas as partes em disputa – Ateus e Teístas – deveriam reconhecer suas limitações intelectuais e reduzir a confiança em suas crenças.

Palavras-chave: Existência de Deus, ceticismo, evidência parcial, desacordo entre pares, humildade intelectual.

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1. Introduction

Concerning their justification, religious beliefs turn out to be quite complicated. Obviously, there are numerous reasons supporting these beliefs, however, there are also several challenges, with some arguments contradicting our justifications. On the question of God's existence, for example, our beliefs involve at least two types of defeaters, namely *partial evidence* and *peer disagreements*. In light of this context, I will argue for an attitude of *intellectual humility*, that is, in favor of owning our intellectual limitations. If my argument is correct, atheists and theists should recognize their intellectual limitations and reduce confidence in their respective beliefs.

In general, religious beliefs are formed based on partial evidence and this can be a defeater for the justification of these beliefs (LOUGHEED, 2020, p. 48; BALLANTYNE, 2015, p. 316). Since we have not considered all the evidence on the topic, we do not have full justification. Moreover, specifically regarding the question of God's existence, there is persistent disagreement between epistemic peers, and this can also be characterized as a defeater (FELDMAN, 2006a, p. 232, 2006b, pp. 212-213; MATHESON, 2015, p. 67; PITTTARD, 2019, pp. 1-2). When agents who are equally capable of judging a question have an opposite belief, this provides a reason for us to question our own belief. Thus, our religious beliefs, especially the belief in the existence or nonexistence of God, involve disputes and defeaters.

In this context, considering our epistemic condition, I defend a specific attitude that we can call intellectual humility (TANESINI, 2016b, p.1). But what exactly does it mean to have an attitude of intellectual humility in the face of religious disagreement? Firstly, it is necessary to distinguish and characterize these notions of attitude and humility. I understand attitude as being a broad assessment, a posture related to a specific object (CASSAM, 2018, pp. 4-5, 2019, p. 81; TANESINI, 2016b, p. 1). This posture involves not only specific mental states but also some practical and affective behaviors. On the other hand, humility is an intellectual virtue consisting of proper attentiveness and owning our intellectual limitations (WHITCOMB *et al.*, 2015, pp. 8-9). Here, the object of an attitude of intellectual humility is the religious disagreement, that is, our own religious beliefs and also the beliefs of our epistemic peers.

As we know, the question of God's existence involves an epistemic dispute and defeaters. Under these circumstances, in scenarios of religious disagreement, it is quite appropriate to adopt an attitude of intellectual

humility. In these cases, both sides of the dispute should recognize their epistemic limitations. In other words, the agents should revise their own arguments and also take into account the arguments of their epistemic peers, of those who are in disagreement with them. This does not mean that theists and atheists should completely abandon their beliefs or suspend judgment on the matter. It does mean, however, that in the face of the defeaters operating in this scenario – partial evidence and peer disagreement – both parties should reduce confidence in their respective beliefs¹. This attitude, when confronted with religious disagreement, can yield not only epistemic benefits but also practical ones, as it guide us toward the virtue of intellectual humility.

2. The question of God's existence: partial evidence and peer disagreement

The matter of God's² existence is very complicated and has always produced many discussions in philosophy. There is an infinitude of pro and con arguments relating to God's existence, and our beliefs on the topic are formed considering only a small part of this total evidence. Since it is not possible to consider the whole set of evidence, this would be a defeater for the justification of our belief (LOUGHEED, 2020, p. 48; BALLANTYNE, 2015, p. 316). Furthermore, this type of question involves persistent disagreement, and the experts have never come to an ultimate answer. The existence of peer disagreement also characterizes a defeater for our religious beliefs (MATHESON, 2015, p. 67). Accordingly, independently of having a belief in favor of or against the existence of God, this question involves dispute and defeaters.

For instance, to Aristotle God's existence is necessary because there must be something that is the first cause of everything, of all change and movement, although, being itself uncaused and unmoved. Since there must

¹ There is a close relationship between belief, knowledge, and confidence. Sometimes, the loss of confidence implies the loss of belief and, by implication, the loss of knowledge (CASSAM, 2019, p. 95). On the other hand, agents can have non-epistemic reasons supporting their beliefs, such as practical reasons or subjective experiences. However, I am not referring to this type of support here. What I am highlighting are objective or epistemic reasons. In this sense, both sides of the dispute have their justification undermined by knowing about the defeaters, and in this case both sides should reduce confidence in their beliefs.

² There are different conceptions of God and I will not highlight a specific notion here. The main point is that there is always discussion if such a being actually exists or not. Independently of the notion of God, there is always dispute and disagreement between theists and atheists. Thus, in this paper, I have in mind a broad conception of God as an omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient being.

always be motion without intermission, there must necessarily be something eternal, one or many, that first imparts motion, and this first mover must be itself unmoved (*Physics* VIII, 6, 258b10-259a13, [1991]). Thus, for this author God is the first eternal and unmoved mover, the cause of all movement and everything. On the other hand, Sextus Empiricus provides an argument against God's existence. For him, the divine (God) is something, or a body, or incorporeal. But, he is not incorporeal, since the incorporeal is inanimate, insensitive, and incapable of any action. Nor is a body, since the body is subject to change and is extinguishable, while the divine is inextinguishable. Therefore, the divine do not exist (AM IX, 151, [2006]). Here we have just two examples of arguments pro and con God's existence. The history of western philosophy shows dozens, perhaps hundreds, of arguments like these.

There is a vast amount of information, reports, books, and arguments that have been dedicated to the topic of God's existence. Nowadays, through the internet, we have easy and fast access to several libraries in different parts of the world, making the mountain of information about this question even bigger. The total body of evidence regarding the question of God's existence is huge. No one is apt to read everything already written on it or take into account all the arguments. It is impossible to consider the whole set of evidence regarding this type of question, and so our religious beliefs are formed and justified by handle only part of this total body of evidence³. Thus, we have a problem. If we have access to only part of the evidence, this would be a defeater for our belief. On the problem of partial evidence, Nathan Ballantyne says:

Any one of us can easily learn that we have only a small part of the relevant evidence for many significant questions. And yet many of us answer such questions, and regard our answers as entirely reasonable, despite knowing that our evidence is partial.

In this essay, I propose a kind of 'real-world' skepticism, a brand of skepticism drawn from the experience of life. It begins with our recognition that there is evidence against our views that we know about but do not have. I argue that thinking about unpossessed evidence often delivers *defeaters* – roughly, *prima facie* reasons to give up beliefs (BALLANTYNE, 2015, p. 316).

³ As affirmed by Kirk Lougheed (2020, p. 48), "for many important subjects such as ethics, politics, and religion, it is obvious that there is an overwhelming amount of available information. Everyone forms beliefs about these matters based on partial evidence."

Since I have not accessed the entire body of evidence, I would have a reason to think my belief is not justified. In other words, I have a defeater or a *prima facie* reason to give up this belief. Regarding the question of God's existence, we are precisely in this kind of scenario. This type of belief, be it in favor or against his existence, is formed based on partial evidence and we know that there is a relevant part of the evidence – perhaps the biggest part – to which we do not have access. Therefore, we have a defeater or a reason to give up our belief. The strength of this defeater may not be sufficient to eliminate our religious beliefs completely, but it can be sufficient to diminish the confidence we place in them⁴.

Furthermore, the question of the existence of God involves a persistent peer disagreement. Regarding this topic, the experts have never come to a definite conclusion; what we have is an insistent and long-lasting dispute between theists and atheists. Both sides of this dispute know about the disagreement between them and that their opponents are epistemic peers. However, epistemic peers in disagreement also characterizes a defeater for our beliefs. For example, if I believe P and 10 epistemic peers assessing the same evidence disbelieve this proposition (or believe $\neg P$), it would be a defeater for my belief⁵. Since all these people are my epistemic peers, that is, agents who are equally capable of and committed to judging the question, it seems obvious that a disagreement with all of them will have some impact on my own belief. In this case, the disagreement with all these epistemic peers provides a strong defeater for my belief (MATHESON, 2015, p. 67). In this scenario, it would be reasonable to revise or even abandon that belief. Several important questions, including religious ones, involve quite a similar scenario to the one seen in this example⁶. On the matter of God's existence, for instance, there are epistemic peers who are not in agreement with us. In the case of religious questions, there are always those (epistemic peers) who are on our side and support our beliefs. But, in the same way, there are others (also regarded as epistemic peers) who are in disagreement with us. In the case of religious questions, there are those who have beliefs that are radically opposite from

⁴ The effect of a defeater can be partial or full. In the case of a partial defeater, we can believe a specific proposition, but our confidence in our justification is reduced. In the case of a full defeater, all the justification is defeated and we have no more reasons to believe the proposition (MATHESON, 2015, p. 11). My argument supports the idea that our religious beliefs are based on partial evidence, therefore, we have a partial defeater for these beliefs.

⁵ This example is based in Matheson (2015, p. 67).

⁶ Recently, John Pittard (2019, pp. 1-2) affirmed that it is possible to maintain a belief even in the face of peer disagreements, if the agent has a genuine insight in favor of his belief. For him, disagreement does not have a great impact on our religious beliefs because these beliefs are precisely based on personal religious experiences.

ours. As we know, epistemic peers in disagreement can be a defeater for our own belief⁷. Accordingly, no matter whether we have a belief in favor of or against the existence of God, the persistent disagreement with epistemic peers about this question is a kind of defeater, a reason for us to reduce confidence in the justification of our own belief.

Therefore, considering that our religious beliefs are grounded in partial evidence, that is, a relevant part of the total evidence is not regarded, this characterizes a partial defeater for these beliefs. Besides, specifically concerning the question of God's existence, there is always a persistent peer disagreement on the issue and this also characterizes a defeater for our beliefs. Thus, in the face of this scenario of dispute and defeaters, the most adequate attitude toward our religious beliefs is an attitude of intellectual humility. No matter if we have a belief in favor or against the existence of God, in this case we should recognize our intellectual limits, the limits of our own belief and justification. Humility is an intellectual virtue that can lead us to epistemic excellence⁸. In the face of religious disagreement, the attitude of intellectual humility can be seen as epistemically correct and intellectually virtuous. In the next sections, we will see how it is possible to have an attitude of intellectual humility in the context of religious disagreement.

3. Attitudes

First of all, we can ask: what is an attitude? For social psychology, an attitude is a positive or negative assessment of a certain object about which we can make this positive or negative assessment (TANESINI, 2016b, p.12). However, in a more restricted view, philosophy regards attitudes as propositional mental states expressed by the formula 'S x that P'. In this case, an attitude is the mental state of someone towards a specific proposition

⁷ Here it is also possible to discuss the strength of this defeater. Can peer disagreements defeat the justification of our beliefs? For Richard Feldman (2005, 2009), peer disagreement completely defeats our justification, and in these cases we should suspend judgment on the question. Regarding religious disagreement, Feldman (2006b, p. 213) says that, as epistemic peers, theists and atheists should suspend judgment on the matter under dispute. My argument sustains that disagreement with epistemic peers is a partial defeater; therefore, it is a reason for us to reduce confidence in the justification of our religious beliefs.

⁸ In contemporary epistemology, the theory of intellectual virtues says that an excellent epistemic agent is someone who presents virtues. In other words, correct and properly justified beliefs are those based on intellectual virtues. The main intellectual virtues include intuition, memory, open-mindedness, and intellectual humility (GRECO, TURRI & ALFANO, 2017, np). For an overview of the theory of intellectual virtues, see the entry 'Virtue Epistemology' in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

(CASSAM, 2018, pp. 4-5). In general, an attitude is a mental state about some specific object and can include or not a behavioral and affective dimension.

We can understand an attitude as being a general posture regarding a specific object. In this sense, an attitude is something involving not only cognitive mental states but also behavioral and affective dispositions regarding that specific object. For Quassim Cassam:

One's attitude towards something is one's perspective on it. Attitudes require attitude objects, and an attitude object is anything towards which it is possible to have an attitude. So, for example, people, political parties and ideas are attitude objects. Attitudes can be positive or negative, weaker or stronger. Examples include dislike, contempt, indifference, disdain, suspicion, nonchalance, hostility, cynicism and respect. These are also examples of *postures*. [...] If this is right, then contempt for another person is not just a posture but an *affective posture*, a posture with an affective dimension (CASSAM, 2018, p. 4).

In this formulation, many things can count as an attitude object, for example, people, animals, political parties, ideas, places, etc. Besides, attitudes can be positive or negative, weaker or stronger. In this way, beyond containing specific mental states, attitudes also present a behavioral and affective dimension. When I have the attitude of contempt for someone, it means that I have specific beliefs, emotions, and behaviors regarding that person. I believe, for example, that that person does not deserve respect, my feelings are disgust and aversion, and I behave by avoiding talking to her or shaking her hand.

On the other hand, in a more restricted view, we can understand attitudes as simple propositional mental states without behavioral and affective dimensions. In this sense, an attitude can be represented by the formula 'S \times that P' where \times is a specific mental state of someone towards a specific proposition. For example, 'S *believes* that P' or 'S *desires* that P'. About this point, Cassam says:

In philosophy, attitudes are usually understood as propositional attitudes, that is, as mental states ascribed by means of a 'that' clause. [...] Also, many propositional attitudes lack an affective element. To say that someone believes it is raining is to say nothing about their feelings or emotions (CASSAM, 2018, p. 5).

Here, as the formula 'S \times that P' demonstrates, the object of an attitude is always a proposition. Moreover, attitudes or propositional mental

states do not necessarily imply a behavioral and affective dimension. The attitude of believing that it is raining, for example, does not necessarily imply a series of emotions and behaviors. It is possible to have this mental state pure and simple. In that way, we can have a more accurate notion of attitude but also a much more limited one.

For the purposes of my argument, I will adopt a pretty broad notion regarding attitudes. What I am calling attitude implies not only propositional mental states but also a behavioral and affective dimension. In this way, I understand an attitude as a general posture towards a specific object, including cognitive mental states, emotions, and behaviors concerning that object. Beyond this flexible notion of attitude, the object I intend to highlight is the scenario of religious disputes. The object towards which we can have an attitude of intellectual humility is the religious disagreement, more precisely, our own religious beliefs and the beliefs of our epistemic peers who are in disagreement with us.

4. The virtue of intellectual humility

I should make clear right from the beginning that I am not treating humility in its common and more widely-known sense. For many moral and religious conceptions, humility is no more than a simple, modest, submissive, and ruled life. Sometimes humility is also understood as a life of subjection, poverty, and inferiority. I will not deal with this common conception of humility here. The notion of humility that I am interested in is much more specific. Intellectual humility is a character trait of epistemic agents, a rational disposition to act in a certain way⁹. This personality trait can be seen as an intellectual virtue, one that is different from other intellectual virtues and opposed to certain intellectual vices.

It is very difficult to define what intellectual humility is exactly. Thus, in this article, I will adopt the most common notion used in the specialized literature. The virtue of humility is associated with other intellectual virtues, such as modesty or moderation and open-mindedness (WHITCOMB *et al.*, 2015, p. 3). Intellectual humility is something that is very close to these things, but it is also something specific and different from each one of these concepts. Another problem is that intellectual humility can be opposed to several and different intellectual vices, such as arrogance, vanity, pride, conceit, servility,

⁹ From here on, the term humility refers to this specific intellectual virtue. This specific notion of virtue follows the responsibilist approach in virtue epistemology (GRECO, TURRI & ALFANO, 2017, np).

selfishness, and self-complacency (WHITCOMB *et al.*, 2015, p. 5). Again, all those concepts in some way help us to define what intellectual humility is; however, they can also be an obstacle to a more specific and accurate delimitation. A perfect definition of intellectual humility should distinguish it from all these concepts, but this would be a very laborious task. Thus, merely to make it easy, I will begin by attributing a half-term understanding to the virtue of intellectual humility. From this perspective, a virtue is always the half-term between two extremes regarded as vices.

Intellectual humility, therefore, is a virtue found between two vices, and here I will highlight arrogance and servility. In general, an arrogant person is someone that feels superior to others, someone who exaggerates and illicitly raises his own intellectual skills. From another perspective, a servile person is someone that feels inferior to others and always downgrades his own intellectual skills. Both extremes are regarded as intellectual vices. Therefore, intellectual humility would be a half-term or something found between these two poles. But, more precisely, what is this thing called the virtue of intellectual humility?

An accurate definition of intellectual humility, as presented by Whitcomb *et al.* (2015), is something that involves the idea of intellectual limitations. They say:

We begin with the big picture. On the one hand, there are one's strengths – the good things about oneself, e.g. one's skills and successes. On the other hand, there are one's limitations – the bad things about oneself, or the insufficiently good things, e.g. one's weaknesses and mistakes. Proper pride is having the right stance towards one's strengths; humility is having the right stance towards one's limitations. Intellectual humility, then, is having the right stance towards one's intellectual limitations (WHITCOMB *et al.*, 2015, p. 8).

Everyone has intellectual skills and deficiencies, and all of us are capable of success as much as of error. Proper pride is something like a right stance towards our own intellectual strengths, an adequate assessment of our hits and successes. In the same way, humility is the right stance towards our own limitations, an adequate assessment of our misses and errors. Intellectual humility is something like a right stance towards or right assessment of our intellectual limitations.

More precisely, a right assessment of our intellectual limitations – intellectual humility – consists of *appropriate attentiveness* to and *owning* our intellectual limitations (WHITCOMB *et al.*, 2015, p. 8). Everyone has

intellectual limitations, that is, gaps in their knowledge (ignorance of current affairs), cognitive mistakes (such as forgetting an appointment), unreliable processes (for example bad vision or memory), and deficits in learnable skills (such as being bad in math). An intellectually humble person is someone who acknowledges and gives the appropriate attentiveness to her intellectual limitations.

An arrogant person tends not to give proper attention to her limitations, sometimes pretending and hiding her errors (TANESINI, 2016a, p. 72). We can often see people insisting on their mistakes, just to not admit a failure, pretending or disguising when they do not know something, or even hiding that they are not capable of solving some question. That would be an example of an intellectually arrogant posture. On the other hand, a servile person tends to see her limitations as the center of attention, over-highlighting and increasing them. There are also people that feel inferior to others all the time, despite having some skills and knowledge. They are usually very insecure, always highlighting their misses and errors. That would be a case of an intellectually servile posture. Both attitudes can be considered extremes or intellectual vices. Appropriate attentiveness to our limitations would be a virtue between these two extremes. Appropriate attentiveness is no more than assessing our intellectual limitations reasonably, in the right measure, at adequate moments and in appropriate situations (WHITCOMB *et al.*, 2015, pp. 8-9). In addition, the virtue of intellectual humility requires owning our limitations. Acknowledging our intellectual limitations requires a series of dispositions from us as epistemic agents (WHITCOMB *et al.*, 2015, pp. 9-10). For example, it requires a cognitive disposition: we should know or believe that we have intellectual limitations. It requires a behavioral disposition: we should act in agreement with our limitations. It requires a motivational disposition: if we acknowledge our intellectual limitations, we should be motivated and try to overcome them. Lastly, to own our intellectual limitations requires an affective disposition. We should not adopt an aggressive posture towards others; on the contrary, we should be attentive and generous.

Therefore, the virtue of intellectual humility is a half-term between the extremes – vices – of arrogance and servility. Intellectual humility is a right stance towards our intellectual limitations. In other words, it involves an appropriate attentiveness of and acceptance of our intellectual limitations. This implies a series of intellectual and behavioral commitments to ourselves and to our epistemic peers.

5. Intellectual humility and peer disagreements

As we have seen, disagreement with epistemic peers is a type of defeater for our beliefs (MATHESON, 2015, p. 67). For this reason, peer disagreement scenarios are very appropriate for an attitude of intellectual humility. In these cases, we should recognize the limits of our beliefs, and also the reasons and limits of the beliefs of those who are in disagreement with us. This attitude of intellectual humility can bring us a series of epistemic benefits, such as the ability to admit our misses and errors, the disposition to consider alternative ideas, and more tolerance towards opposite beliefs.

Peer disagreement results from a piece of evidence – second-order evidence – contrary to our already-established justification. Accordingly, reaffirming one's own belief and disregarding the belief of our opponent in a peer disagreement can be seen as an intellectually arrogant posture (TANESINI, 2016a, p. 74). When an agent reaffirms his belief and does not take into account the belief of his opponent, it means he does not see himself as potentially mistaken, it means he does not regard himself as a fallible epistemic agent. In summary, this kind of posture means he does not recognize his intellectual limitations. In other words, when someone does not appropriately recognize his intellectual limitations, he does not have the virtue of intellectual humility (WHITCOMB *et al.*, 2015, pp. 8-9). From another perspective, recognizing the limits of one's own belief is to admit the possibility of being mistaken. At the same time, to regard the belief and arguments of our opponent is also a way of acknowledging our intellectual limitations. This kind of posture in relation to the disagreement can be seen as an attitude of intellectual humility (TANESINI, 2016b, p. 1; WHITCOMB *et al.*, 2015, pp. 8-9). Therefore, disagreement with epistemic peers gives us a reason to recognize our intellectual limitations. It is a good reason to practice the virtue of intellectual humility.

In a peer disagreement, any one of the sides can be wrong, including ourselves. In this sense, to disregard the opponent – the disagreement in itself – is to disregard the possibility of ourselves being mistaken. More precisely, it means we are not taking into account our intellectual limitations. Not acknowledging our intellectual limitations when facing an epistemic peer can be seen as an attitude of intellectual arrogance. In Alessandra Tanesini's view, intellectual arrogance can manifest in different ways. She says:

Intellectual arrogance is a very common and varied phenomenon. [...] It is exhibited by individuals who do not respect their turn in conversation, who

interrupt others, who take up an unfair share of the available time. It shows up when a person boasts about his achievements, never admits to a mistake, publicly puts other people 'in their place', or thinks that he is always right. It is also manifested by excessive risk takers, by people who do not tolerate dissent, by those who try to intimidate others into agreeing with them (TANESINI, 2016a, p. 72).

Intellectual arrogance can manifest when we do not consider an opposite belief or when we do not acknowledge other people as being our epistemic peers, or also when we do not recognize the possibility of ourselves being mistaken. Not considering the belief of an epistemic peer in disagreement can be seen as diminishing his intellectual skills and, at the same time, increasing our own intellectual skills unduly. In summary, in a peer disagreement scenario, the attitude of reaffirming one's own belief and not taking into account the belief of the opponent can be seen as an intellectually arrogant posture. In other words, this attitude can be seen as an intellectual vice.

Nevertheless, when we are considering the disagreement with peers we are having an attitude of intellectual humility (TANESINI, 2016b, p. 1). Acknowledging the belief of our epistemic peers, even though those people are not in agreement with us, is a way of recognizing our intellectual limitations. The attitude of taking into account all reasons, including those supporting opposed beliefs, is the acceptance we are fallible epistemic agents. To take into account an opponent's belief is to admit the possibility of his belief being correct. After all, in contexts of peer disagreements, we ourselves may have committed some error and our own belief can be wrong. This kind of attitude in the face of disagreements is the acceptance of our intellectual limitations. In short, this is what characterizes the virtue of intellectual humility (WHITCOMB *et al.*, 2015, pp. 8-9). To acknowledge the disagreement and the reasons of our opponent is to own our intellectual limitations. Consequently, this is an attitude of intellectual humility.

However, we can ask: why should we adopt an attitude of intellectual humility in contexts of peer disagreements? The answer is that such an attitude can bring us some epistemic benefits. In a disagreement scenario, intellectual humility can lead us to a praiseworthy series of intellectual dispositions and behaviors. On this point, Whitcomb *et al.* says:

Intellectual humility increases a person's propensity to admit his intellectual limitations to himself and others (WHITCOMB *et al.*, 2015, p. 13).

Intellectual humility increases a person's concern about her own intellectual mistakes and weaknesses (WHITCOMB *et al.*, 2015, p. 14).

Intellectual humility increases a person's propensity to revise a cherished belief or reduce confidence in it, when she learns of defeaters (i.e. reasons to think her belief is false or reasons to be suspicious of her grounds for it) (WHITCOMB *et al.*, 2015, p. 16).

Intellectual humility increases a person's propensity to consider alternative ideas, to listen to the views of others, and to spend more time trying to understand someone with whom he disagrees (WHITCOMB *et al.*, 2015, p. 16).

In disagreement contexts, going beyond our own belief, we should also judge and assess the beliefs of our opponents, especially when they are our epistemic peers. Intellectual humility enables us to consider, assess and understand the reasons and the beliefs of others, even though those people are not in agreement with us. Besides, it is very important to our intellectual life, to the formation and justification of our beliefs, that we consider alternative ideas, recognize our own mistakes and faults, and identify the potential defeaters of our beliefs. The attitude of intellectual humility is important to help us achieve these epistemic goals. Thus, intellectual humility seems to be essential in scenarios of peer disagreements.

Therefore, as disagreement with peers is a kind of defeater to our beliefs, it is prudent for us to adopt an attitude of intellectual humility in these contexts. In other words, we should adopt the humble attitude of recognizing our intellectual limitations. In cases of disputes between peers, we should acknowledge the limits of our own beliefs and also take into account the reasons and limits of the beliefs of those who are in disagreement with us. When we regard the belief of an opponent, especially when that person is an epistemic peer, we are owning our intellectual limitations. This posture in the face of peer disagreements is an attitude of intellectual humility.

6. The attitude of intellectual humility in the religious disagreement

At the beginning of this article, we saw that religious beliefs are formed based on partial evidence. Moreover, religious questions are always highly disputed and promote persistent peer disagreements. These things are

characterized as defeaters for our religious beliefs (BALLANTYNE, 2015, p. 316; LOUGHEED, 2020, p. 48; MATHESON, 2015, p. 67). Under these circumstances, religious disagreement provides a perfect scenario for an attitude of intellectual humility, where both sides in the dispute should recognize their intellectual limitations and reduce confidence in their respective beliefs.

In practice, intellectual humility requires reevaluating the arguments of our own religious belief and, at the same time, taking into account the arguments of those who are in disagreement with us. For example, John being a theist, has arguments for his belief in God. In addition, he should know that his belief is based on partial evidence and involves persistent disagreement with epistemic peers. In this case, he can adopt an intransigent attitude, ignoring the disagreement and maintaining confidence in his unchanged belief. However, this kind of attitude can be seen as an intellectually arrogant posture. In this context, this inflexible attitude means that he does not recognize the possibility of being mistaken, that is, he does not recognize his intellectual limitations. From another perspective, he can adopt a more flexible attitude, reevaluating his arguments and revising the justification of his religious belief. In this case, he can take into account the arguments of his opponents, leaving his own belief aside for a moment and spending some time assessing the arguments of the opposite belief. This latter attitude can be characterized as an acknowledgment of his intellectual limitations. In other words, it can be characterized as an attitude of intellectual humility. In summary, John knows that his belief is not unanimous and that others have an opposite belief about the same topic, so remaining indifferent to the opinions of his peers would not be a reasonable attitude. Similarly, everything that applies to John also applies to Joseph, an atheist who does not believe in God and has arguments in favor of his own belief. Thus, both sides of the religious disagreement would have the same epistemic duties and obligations.

It is important to highlight that intellectual humility in religious disagreements requires a series of intellectual and behavioral commitments. Among the intellectual commitments, we should know that all of us have epistemic limitations, and anyone can be mistaken about his own beliefs and justification. We should also recognize our opponents as epistemic peers, as being agents equally apt to judge the question and assess the available evidence. Among the behavioral commitments, we should take into account the opinion of others, of those in disagreement with us, mainly when these people are our epistemic peers. We should spend an appropriate time assessing the belief and arguments of our opponent carefully and generously. We cannot

be careless and hasty with the opinion of our opponent, regarding his belief as mistaken beforehand. Furthermore, another behavioral commitment derived from intellectual humility is to deal with the opponent kindly, with no rashness or aggressiveness. The fulfillment of all these intellectual and behavioral duties, concerning our own belief and also the belief of our opponent, demonstrates an acknowledgment of our intellectual limitations. In short, it is a way of exhibiting and practicing the virtue of intellectual humility.

Another relevant point is that having an attitude of intellectual humility does not mean abandoning our own beliefs. Intellectual humility in the face of disagreement does not necessarily imply suspending the judgment about our initial belief. It just means we should reduce confidence in that belief¹⁰. In the case of religious disagreement, both sides have justification for their respective beliefs. However, the confidence in that justification is reduced by the fact there are defeaters operating in that context. One of these defeaters is that religious belief is based on partial evidence. Another one is the disagreement in itself. According to James Kraft (2012), our religious beliefs have good justification but sometimes the confidence in that justification is reduced because the context of religious disagreement imposes quite challenging conditions on us. He asserts that:

Good justification for a religious belief holds one's belief secure in one's possession across a large number of possible challenging situations by anticipating and avoiding error possibilities, though it isn't totally adequate for the extremely challenging conditions that occur during peer religious disagreements where confidence in the justification of one's belief is, consequently, reduced (KRAFT, 2012, p. 6).

A peer disagreement is precisely the scenario where confidence in our beliefs is affected because anyone can be committing an error, including ourselves. This is valid for both sides of the dispute. Thus, peer religious disagreement leads us to a reduction in confidence in our religious beliefs. Reducing confidence in the justification of one's belief does not mean abandoning that belief. In the face of religious disagreement, therefore, it is possible to continue asserting our belief in favor of or against the existence of

¹⁰ At some point, the loss of confidence implies the loss of belief and, consequently, the loss of knowledge (CASSAM, 2019, p. 95). We do not have space here to stress how and when this implication can occur. The main point is that defeaters operating in religious disputes (*partial evidence* and *peer disagreement*) are partial defeaters. In other words, they just call for a reduction in the confidence of our beliefs.

God. We are not required to give up this belief. However, the confidence in this religious belief – in its justification – should be reduced¹¹.

Besides, considering the religious context in general, intellectual humility avoids not only intellectual vices such as dogmatism and arrogance but also fanaticism and extremism. Some religious people are very radical and try to impose their doctrine in a quite incisive way, believing that their worldview and way of life are correct and unshakable. Sometimes, this religious extremism leads to bad habits with disastrous consequences. For instance, the middle east conflicts between Israel and Palestine, the recent civil wars in Syria, Libya, and Iraq. All of them, just to mention some examples, have religious extremism in their roots. However, when we have an attitude of intellectual humility in the context of religious questions, we are more moderate and tolerant. An intellectually humble person knows that his religious beliefs are not unshakable. Quite on the contrary, he knows that this kind of belief is based on partial evidence, and there is persistent peer disagreement about these issues. In the face of these defeaters, an intellectually humble person knows he should reduce confidence in his religious beliefs. Even with justification supporting a specific religious belief, we should recognize that our belief is not absolute and that epistemic peers have opposite beliefs on that same topic. Hence, the attitude of intellectual humility in the religious context allows us to recognize the limits of our own beliefs, avoiding radicalism and extremism.

Thus, since the context of religious beliefs involves disputes and defeaters, this is a perfect scenario for an attitude of intellectual humility. In this case, the agents involved in the dispute should recognize their intellectual limitations, reevaluate their own arguments and take into account the arguments of their epistemic peers. In summary, both sides of the religious disagreement should adopt an attitude of intellectual humility and reduce confidence in their respective beliefs.

¹¹ In some sense, I agree with Pittard (2019, pp. 1-2) when he says that it is possible to maintain our religious (or irreligious) beliefs in the face of disagreement. A strong conciliation, as defended by Feldman (2006b, pp. 212-213), would imply suspension of judgment, that the agents should abandon their beliefs and embrace the skepticism. What I am defending here is a kind of weak conciliation: the agents can maintain their respective beliefs but they should reduce confidence in their justification.

7. Conclusion

The main conclusion of this article is that we should adopt an attitude of intellectual humility to religious questions. As we have seen, most of our religious beliefs are formed based on partial evidence. The body of evidence concerning religious questions is enormous, and the justification of our beliefs takes into consideration just a small part of the total evidence. In other words, partial evidence is a kind of defeater for our religious beliefs. Additionally, when dealing specifically with the question of God's existence, there is persistent peer disagreement concerning the matter. Specialists and scholars have never arrived at a consensus or an ultimate answer. On this particular topic, theists and atheists are in permanent disagreement and have radically opposite beliefs. Peer disagreements also characterize a defeater for the justification of our beliefs, including religious ones. Thus, in the face of this scenario of dispute and defeaters, it is prudent to adopt an attitude of intellectual humility and recognize our intellectual limitations. In practice, we should re-evaluate our own arguments and consider the arguments of our epistemic peers, of those we are in disagreement with. This attitude in the face of religious disagreement is an intellectual virtue and can prevent a series of intellectual vices such as dogmatism and arrogance. Furthermore, this virtue can also lead us to some practical and epistemic benefits, such as admitting errors and faults, considering alternative ideas, and having more tolerance for opposite positions and ideas.

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