

CONCILIATIONISM AND UNIQUENESS

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Two theses are central to recent work on the epistemology of disagreement:

Conciliationism: In a revealed peer disagreement over P, each thinker should give at least some weight to her peer's attitude.

Uniqueness: For any given proposition and total body of evidence, the evidence fully justifies exactly one level of confidence in the proposition.

We explore the outstanding question whether Conciliationism commits one to Uniqueness, and return a negative verdict. After setting out some preliminary matters (§1), we explain and criticize Kelly's [2010] argument that Conciliationism commits one to Uniqueness (§2), thereby defeating his larger argument that Conciliationism deserves no dialectical special treatment. But this brings no comfort to Conciliationists: we argue that they're committed to a disjunction, one of whose disjuncts is Uniqueness, that amounts to an extremely strong and unobvious position (§§3–4). If we are correct, theorists should not treat Conciliationism as a default position in debates about the epistemic significance of disagreement.

Keywords: peer disagreement; Conciliationism; Uniqueness; Permissivism; evidence; justification; rationality

Two theses are central to recent work on the epistemology of peer disagreement:

Conciliationism: In a revealed peer disagreement over P, each thinker should give at least some weight to her peer's attitude. That is, each thinker's confidence should change to some extent: neither thinker is justified in staying *exactly as confident as she initially was* regarding whether P.²

¹ This paper is the product of full and equal collaboration between its authors.

² The technical terms are defined as follows. Thinkers T and T* are *epistemic peers* relative to proposition P iff T and T* have exactly the same evidence E bearing on P and are equally good evaluators of evidence like E and claims like P. T is in a *revealed peer disagreement* with T* over P iff T knows that T's attitude to P differs from the attitude T's peer T* takes to P. Conciliationism assumes that neither thinker has evidence of the other thinker having made an error—more exactly, evidence of a peer error that's *independent from* the shared evidence. For discussion of this qualification, see Christensen [2007a: §4] and Elga [2007: §11].

Uniqueness: For any given proposition and total body of evidence, the evidence fully justifies exactly *one* level of confidence in the proposition.³ (We follow White [2005] in calling the denial of Uniqueness *Permissivism*; the idea is that some body of evidence ‘permits’ more than one degree of confidence in some proposition.)

Here is an outstanding question in the literature on the epistemic significance of disagreement: ‘How tightly is Conciliationism tied to Uniqueness?’ (Christensen [2009: 763]). Many have argued for substantive logical or dialectical relations between these propositions. For example, Richard Feldman [2007: 211–2] and Roger White [2005: 446] suggest that endorsing Uniqueness commits one to Conciliationism.⁴ Moreover, Feldman [2007: 204] also claims that denying Uniqueness commits one to denying Conciliationism.⁵ Concurring with Feldman, Thomas Kelly argues at some length that Conciliationism commits one to Uniqueness and therefore is, in his words, an ‘extremely strong and unobvious’ position [2010: 118–21].

In what follows, we’ll explore the question whether Conciliationism commits one to Uniqueness. We return a negative verdict. After setting out some preliminary matters (§1), we will explain and criticize Kelly’s argument that Conciliationism commits one to Uniqueness (§2), thereby defeating his larger argument that Conciliationism deserves no dialectical special treatment. But this brings little comfort to Conciliationists: we will argue that they’re committed to a disjunction, one of whose disjuncts is Uniqueness, that amounts to an ‘extremely strong and unobvious’ position (§§3–4). If our argument is correct, theorists should not treat Conciliationism as the default position in debates about the epistemic significance of disagreement.

1. Preliminaries

In discussing the relationship between Uniqueness and Conciliationism, Feldman, White, and Kelly each focus on a relatively strong species of Conciliationism called the *Equal Weight View*. According to this position, you must give *equal* weight to your peer’s attitude when a disagreement is revealed; that is, in revising your attitude, the weight you give your peer’s attitude should be equal to the weight you give your own initial attitude toward the controversial proposition. It is unproblematic to

³ For sympathetic discussion of Uniqueness, see Christensen [2007a] and White [2005]. See also Feldman [2003, 2006, 2007], who argues for a version of Uniqueness stated in terms of ‘all-or-nothing’ attitudes.

⁴ Feldman is inclined to move from Uniqueness to Conciliationism, whereas White discusses (briefly but somewhat sympathetically) the reverse inference to Permissivism.

⁵ Cf. White [2010: 612]: ‘But if we really think there are [epistemically permissive] cases then even meeting an actual disagreeing peer seems to pose no challenge to one’s belief.’

recast these discussions as focusing on Conciliationism more generally. In fact, there are good reasons for concerning ourselves with Conciliationism instead of the logically stronger Equal Weight View.

First, Kelly [2010: 122ff.] has developed an impressive case against the Equal Weight View.⁶ Here's the basic difficulty, as Kelly sees it: for any revealed peer disagreement, the Equal Weight View—when combined with just the psychological facts about how the peers initially responded to the shared evidence—entails that the average of the peers' original credences is the one rational credence for both peers. The Equal Weight View thus weights the subsequently acquired 'psychological' evidence (i.e., propositions about the thinkers' responses to the original evidence) more heavily than the original evidence itself. As Kelly [2010: 123] argues, this relative weighting yields numerous implausible consequences, chief among which is this: once thinkers T and T* find themselves starring in a revealed peer disagreement, they 'are rationally required to make *equally* extensive revisions in [their] original opinions'—*even if* '[T's] original opinion was, while [T*'s] was not, a reasonable response to [their] original evidence'. No matter how great a difference there may be in the rationality of the thinkers' responses to the original evidence, this 'asymmetry completely washes out once [they] become aware of [their] disagreement'. Critically, we want to observe that (the logically weaker) Conciliationism doesn't mandate the same implausible relative weighting. And so Conciliationism is less vulnerable to Kelly's arguments: it may survive them even if the Equal Weight View does not.

The second reason we'll focus on Conciliationism is this: Kelly's argument that the Equal Weight View commits one to Uniqueness utilizes the claim that the weaker Conciliationism commits one to Uniqueness. Kelly attempts to establish an important dialectical thesis about the Equal Weight View. He's arguing that, initial appearances notwithstanding, the Equal Weight View is in fact 'an extremely strong and unobvious claim' [2010: 121]. Consider the following key step of Kelly's argument (bearing in mind that what he calls the 'No Independent Weight View' [2010: 115] is the denial of what we call 'Conciliationism'): 'Because I believe that the Uniqueness Thesis is false, I believe that the... No Independent Weight View is true, and (therefore) that the Equal Weight View is false' [2010: 121]. Kelly alleges that denying Uniqueness commits you to denying Conciliationism. He then uses the alleged link between Conciliationism and Uniqueness in his pitch to show that Conciliationism is an extremely strong and unobvious claim. That is because Conciliationism's alleged corollary, Uniqueness, '[e]ven if... true, [...] is an extremely strong and

⁶ For critical discussion, see Christensen [2011].

unobvious claim' [2010: 121]. So, given that Conciliationism depends ultimately on Uniqueness, Conciliationism inherits all of Uniqueness's debt. As a consequence, Conciliationism should not be treated as the default position in debates about the epistemic significance of peer disagreement. If Conciliationism is correct, substantive argument is required to show it.

It is worth pausing to emphasize just how strong Uniqueness is.⁷ Uniqueness is logically stronger than the thesis typically called *Evidentialism*. According to Evidentialism, you are justified in taking a doxastic attitude to proposition P iff taking that attitude to P is an epistemically fitting response to your total evidence (cf. Feldman and Conee [1985]). Uniqueness entails Evidentialism, but Evidentialism doesn't return the favour. We think it is fairly obvious that Uniqueness entails Evidentialism.⁸ To begin to see that Evidentialism does not entail Uniqueness, note that Uniqueness rules out the possibility of reasonable disagreement between 'evidential twins' (cf. White [2005: 446] and Feldman [2007: 205])—that is, thinkers who have exactly the same evidence. By contrast, Evidentialism leaves this possibility open. Evidentialism allows that some evidential twins exhibit different 'fittingness' facts, so that taking an attitude to a proposition is a fitting response to the shared evidence for one twin but not the other. Compatibly with Evidentialism, we can hold that some evidential twins are justified in taking different attitudes to the same proposition. Because Uniqueness rules out this possibility whereas Evidentialism leaves it open, Evidentialism doesn't entail Uniqueness.

Uniqueness is stronger than Evidentialism. But even the weaker Evidentialism is controversial. After all, many theorists deny that justification requires evidential support: think, for example, of 'pure' reliabilists and proper functionalists. And even among those who grant that justification requires evidential support, many propose that it requires something extra as well, say, fulfillment of intellectual duties (that go beyond taking the attitude your evidence supports).

⁷ For extended discussion, see Ballantyne and Coffman [forthcoming].

⁸ Here is the argument. Suppose first that Uniqueness is true. To get the left-to-right direction of Evidentialism, suppose you're justified in taking attitude A to P. By Uniqueness, A is the *only* attitude your evidence justifies taking to P. It's hard to see how the only attitude your evidence justifies taking to P could fail to be an epistemically fitting response to your total relevant evidence. Presumably, then, taking A to P is a fitting response to your total evidence. Having secured the left-to-right direction of Evidentialism, let's now get the right-to-left direction. Suppose that taking A to P is an epistemically fitting response to your total evidence. By Uniqueness, there's only one attitude your evidence justifies. Now suppose, for reductio, that you *aren't* justified in taking A to P. Then taking A is an epistemically fitting response to your evidence which is nevertheless epistemically unjustified. Since that's absurd, you must be justified in taking A to P after all. Having secured both directions of Evidentialism given Uniqueness, we can conclude that Uniqueness entails Evidentialism.

Evidentialism is controversial. Because Uniqueness entails Evidentialism, Uniqueness will be as mired in controversy as Evidentialism is.

Before turning to Kelly's argument for the thesis that Conciliationism commits adherents to Uniqueness, we want to underline the importance of the overall conclusion that Kelly aims to establish with that thesis. We concur with Elga [2010: 175] and other Conciliationists (e.g., Christensen [2007a] and Feldman [2007]) that Conciliationism is *prima facie* 'extremely natural and appealing'. It is sometimes noted that merely reflecting on certain cases can make Conciliationism seem trivially true (see Kelly [2010: 113]). This can be illustrated with a widely discussed example due to Peter van Inwagen [1996: 138]:

How can I believe (as I do) that free will is incompatible with determinism or that unrealized possibilities are not physical objects or that human beings are not four-dimensional things extended in time as well as in space, when David Lewis—a philosopher of truly formidable intelligence and insight and ability—rejects these things I believe and is already aware of and understands perfectly every argument that I could produce in their defense?

Once van Inwagen learns that the shared evidence has not led Lewis to place nearly as much confidence in incompatibilism (and so on), it seems that van Inwagen should reduce to at least *some* extent his confidence in incompatibilism. That is, van Inwagen is not justified in staying *exactly as confident as he originally was* that incompatibilism is true. The natural explanation of this change in justificatory status: van Inwagen's knowledge of Lewis's different response to the shared considerations is evidence that those considerations don't justify van Inwagen's original response—it is (higher-order) evidence that prevents those shared considerations from justifying van Inwagen's original response.

In light of such examples, it is unsurprising that theorists suggest Conciliationism has a strong presumption in its favour, that it merits something like a default status. Nevertheless, we'll ultimately argue that appearances mislead: Conciliationists in fact have significant burdens to bear.

2. Kelly's Argument that Conciliationism Carries a Commitment to Uniqueness

We turn now to Kelly's argument that 'commitment to [Conciliationism] carries with it a commitment to [Uniqueness]', which takes off from an example we'll call *Case* [2010: 118–9]:⁹

How things stand with subject S:

At time t_0 , S's total evidence with respect to some hypothesis H consists of E. S's credence for H stands at 0.7. Given evidence E, this credence is perfectly reasonable. Moreover, if S was slightly less confident that H is true, S would also be perfectly reasonable. Indeed, S recognizes that this is so: if S met someone who shared S's evidence but was slightly less confident that H was true, S would not consider that person unreasonable for believing as she does.

How things stand with subject S:*

At time t_0 , S*'s total evidence with respect to H is also E. S*'s credence for H is slightly lower than 0.7. Given evidence E, this credence is perfectly reasonable. Moreover, S* recognizes that, if S*'s credence was slightly higher (say, 0.7), S* would still be perfectly reasonable. If S* met someone who shared S*'s evidence but was slightly more confident that H was true, S* would not consider that person unreasonable for believing as she does.

At t_0 , S and S* have the same evidence E bearing on H *and* they know that E justifies each of the relevant credences for H. At t_1 , S and S* 'meet and compare notes'—in other words, S and S* learn this:

S has precisely the same evidence bearing on H as S* *and* is exactly as good as S* at evaluating such evidence and hypotheses *and* has a credence for H of 0.7 whereas S*'s credence in H is slightly lower.

Since this is now a revealed peer disagreement, Conciliationism entails that both S and S* are rationally required to revise their respective opinions. In other words, whatever credence(s) the new body of evidence $E+$ justifies, it *doesn't* justify the thinkers' original credences. But, according to Kelly [2010: 119], we've no reason to think $E+$ cannot justify those initial opinions: '[By hypothesis], the opinion that [S holds] about H is within the range of perfectly reasonable opinion, as is the

⁹ Kelly presents the example (labeled 'Case 3') with talk of 'me' and 'you'. We've used subjects S and S* instead, because there are two of us and thus, properly speaking, no 'me'.

opinion that [S* holds]. Moreover, [S and S*] have recognized this all along. Why then would [they] be rationally required to change?’

Kelly does not explicitly consider an answer to his rhetorical question. Instead, he suggests that no possible answer is even minimally promising. To bolster Kelly’s suggestion, we’ll consider one natural answer; it will serve to illuminate his argument.

Defenders of Conciliationism might see fit to state the obvious: the shared evidence expands from t_0 to t_1 , as the disagreement is revealed. This observation connects squarely with Kelly’s claim that ‘[by hypothesis], the opinion that [S holds] about H is within the range of perfectly reasonable opinion, as is the opinion that [S* holds].’ Kelly’s hypothesis (i.e., what is stipulated in Case) does not all by itself entail that the expanded evidence $E+$ justifies the thinkers’ original credences. That $E+$ justifies the thinkers’ initial opinions is Kelly’s unstated assumption, going beyond Case’s stipulated details. Conciliationists might dig in their heels here. They might insist that since $E+$ includes the new ‘psychological’ evidence concerning the thinkers’ actual responses to E, $E+$ *must* have a different justificatory profile than E—one that renders the original credences unjustified.

Obviously, the addition of psychological evidence *can* change what a body of evidence rationalizes. Does it *always*? That is what the envisaged defense of Conciliationism maintains. But everyone, Conciliationists included, should allow for cases in which new psychological evidence yields a slightly larger body of evidence with the same justificatory profile as the prior evidence.¹⁰ Suppose, for example, that Believer and Disbeliever are epistemic peers relative to P; Believer has credence 0.9 and Disbeliever has credence 0.1. Their shared evidence in fact rationalizes only 0.5 credence in P. Surely it’s possible that, when their disagreement is revealed, the expanded body of evidence also rationalizes only 0.5 credence in P. So one natural answer to Kelly’s rhetorical question—the assertion that new psychological evidence *always* changes what one’s body of evidence rationalizes—fails to defend Conciliationism from Case.

Returning to Case, let’s observe how it figures into Kelly’s argument that Conciliationism commits one to Uniqueness. Briefly: one either accepts that Case is possible or denies it. For Conciliationists, *denying* that Case is possible is the only sensible option. But denying that Case is possible requires endorsing Uniqueness. That’s the sense in which Kelly thinks Conciliationism commits one to Uniqueness.

¹⁰ Following Kelly’s helpful distinction between the ‘weight’ and ‘balance’ of evidence [2008: 934–935], the expanded evidence is ‘weightier’ but its ‘balance’ is unchanged.

More fully: take first the option that Case is possible. This won't be warmly received by Conciliationists. For Case has all the makings of a counterexample to Conciliationism: a revealed peer disagreement starring thinkers who can rationally retain their initial opinions. But if Conciliationists accept that Case is possible while denying it's a counterexample to their view, Kelly [2010: 119] claims they must 'heroically defend the idea that [S and S*] are rationally required to revise [their] original credences [when the disagreement is revealed]'. What would such a 'heroic defense' involve?

At t_1 (and supposing Case is possible), S and S* know that their original credences for H are rational responses to the enlarged body of evidence, E+. Given that knowledge is factive, it follows that those original credences remain rational. So, the 'heroic defense' Kelly imagines would seem to involve endorsing something like this: *even if* a thinker's credence is known by her to be epistemically rational, she may nevertheless be rationally required to revise that credence. We agree with Kelly that defending Conciliationism by endorsing *that* is a non-starter.

'[A] more promising line of resistance,' Kelly claims, 'is to deny that [Case] is possible at all. That is, an adherent of [Conciliationism] should endorse [Uniqueness]' [2010: 119]. Conciliationists must say that Case is impossible; and this, Kelly thinks, requires endorsing Uniqueness. But here Kelly is mistaken. Denying that Case is possible does not require endorsing Uniqueness.

The driving idea behind Case is what we'll call

Possible Recognition: Possibly, thinker T recognizes that both T's credence C for P and a peer T*'s credence C* for P are rational responses to their shared evidence.¹¹

Possible Recognition is logically stronger than Permissivism: Possible Recognition entails Permissivism, but Permissivism doesn't entail Possible Recognition. That is to say, the following position is at least coherent: while you can have evidence that justifies different attitudes to a proposition (i.e., Permissivism is true), you can't recognize that the shared evidence is like that in a revealed peer disagreement (i.e., Possible Recognition is false).

What Conciliationists must deny is *Possible Recognition*. They have two main strategies available. First, keeping in mind that Possible Recognition entails Permissivism, they can deny Possible Recognition *by affirming Uniqueness*. That is Kelly's advice. But Conciliationists have a second

¹¹ Cf. Christensen [2009: 763–4], who attributes to an earlier version of the present paper the point that Case's commitments extend beyond Permissivism to Possible Recognition.

escape at hand: they can deny Possible Recognition *while also rejecting Uniqueness* (i.e., while embracing Permissivism).¹² In concluding that Conciliationists must endorse Uniqueness, Kelly overlooks this second strategy.¹³

It turns out, then, that Conciliationists can reject Case without also accepting Uniqueness. This finding bears directly on Kelly's larger argument that Conciliationists enjoy no dialectical advantage over their opponents. That larger argument fails due to its false premise that Conciliationism commits theorists to Uniqueness. Of course, it does not follow from the failure of Kelly's argument that Conciliationism *is* dialectically advantageous. Indeed, coming up next, we will contend that Kelly's overall conclusion was right: Conciliationism is an extremely strong and unobvious position. In contrast to Kelly's argument, ours will thoroughly explore the combination of Conciliationism and Permissivism.

3. A Dilemma for Conciliationism

We will begin by stating a new (but Kelly-inspired) argument that Conciliationists have no significant dialectical advantage over their opponents. A piece of terminology will help us proceed: let's say that a *Permissivism-entailing proposition* depicts a body of evidence as fully justifying more than one attitude to some proposition. The new anti-Conciliationist argument:

- (1) Conciliationists must deny that some thinker can know a Permissivism-entailing proposition.

- (2) Either Conciliationists deny this by endorsing Uniqueness *or* they deny that some thinker can know a Permissivism-entailing proposition while also endorsing Permissivism.

¹² Notably, this alternative Conciliationist response to Case assuages White's [2005: 450–1] worry that there could be no motivation for the view that 'there are possible (and even actual) permissive cases, but... one cannot tell, for any case, that it is a permissive one.' Given what we've said, there is at least one clear motivation for the view White describes: the commonplace combination of Conciliationism with Permissivism.

¹³ Christensen [2009: 764] suggested that objecting to Case in this way—by denying both Uniqueness *and* Possible Recognition—only brings along the uncontroversial view that 'people cannot always tell directly what their evidence supports' (cf. Williamson [2000: 164ff.]). In fact, theorists who object to Case like that must say something much stronger—namely, that regardless of how pervasive permissive evidence may be, a thinker cannot ever know *more than one* of the credences for P that her permissive evidence justifies. We return to this thought below.

(3) If Conciliationists endorse Uniqueness, what results—call it *Unique Conciliationism*—is an extremely strong and unobvious position.¹⁴

(4) If Conciliationists instead deny that some thinker can know a Permissivism-entailing proposition while also endorsing Permissivism, what results—call it *Permissive Conciliationism*—is a different but comparably strong and unobvious position.

Therefore,

(5) Conciliationism is an extremely strong and unobvious position.

It follows directly that Conciliationists do not enjoy a dialectical advantage over their opponents, initial appearances notwithstanding.

(1) and (4) are the argument's only questionable steps; we'll turn now to their defence. Here is our subargument for (1), with supporting commentary as necessary:

(6) Assume for conditional proof that a thinker T can know a Permissivism-entailing proposition—specifically, $\langle E \text{ justifies both } C \text{ and } C^* \text{ for } P \rangle$ (call this proposition PEP).

(7) If T can know that PEP, then T can learn that T justifiedly holds C to P (on E) while maintaining knowledge that PEP.

Supposing it's possible T recognizes that PEP, T can justifiedly take one of the attitudes that E justifies—C, let us say—*because* T recognizes that PEP.¹⁵ Furthermore, T can come to know T justifiedly takes C because T recognizes that PEP. That puts (7)'s consequent in hand.

(8) If T can learn that T justifiedly holds C to P while maintaining knowledge that PEP, then T can learn that a peer T* takes C* to P without losing any of T's prior knowledge.

¹⁴ Cf. Kelly [2010: 120–1], White [2005: 446–7], and Ballantyne and Coffman [forthcoming]. Earlier on, we flagged one reason for (3): Uniqueness is logically stronger than Evidentialism, which is itself controversial among theorists.

¹⁵ As Kelly [2010: 156] notes, 'in a given case, one might very well take up [an attitude] because one *recognizes* that this is what one's evidence supports'.

To begin to appreciate that (8) is true, consider the basic structure of any objection to it. The objector will claim that your learning about your peer's different attitude must destroy your prior knowledge that PEP and that you justifiedly hold C. But why must learning about your peer's different attitude defeat your knowledge of that conjunction? Here's the only obvious way in which your new knowledge about your peer is relevant to your prior knowledge of the conjunction: what you learn about your peer delivers additional justification to believe $\langle E \text{ justifies } C^* \text{ to } P \rangle$, thereby strengthening your justification to believe PEP. It is exceedingly hard to see how your knowledge of the relevant conjunction must be defeated simply by gaining justification to believe one of its conjuncts. And so any objection to (8) looks hopeless from the start.¹⁶ Provided you can know that PEP and that you justifiedly hold C, surely it's possible this knowledge survives learning that a peer takes C*.

(9) If T can learn that a peer T* takes C* to P without losing any of T's prior knowledge, then Conciliationism is false.

Note that (9)'s antecedent entails that T justifiedly holds T's original attitude C even upon learning about the disagreement with peer T*—which clearly entails that Conciliationism is false. So, by conditional proof: if T can know a Permissivism-entailing proposition, then Conciliationism is false. Conciliationists must deny that some thinker can know such a proposition.¹⁷

Having concluded our defence of (1), we'll turn now to (4), the second critical step in our dilemma for Conciliationism. We will justify (4) by drawing out a problematic commitment of Permissive Conciliationism. What commitment is that? To close in on it, we will first consider an unsuccessful objection to Permissive Conciliationism.¹⁸

Initially, you might think that Permissive Conciliationists must point to some particular body of evidence E, and claim that E is permissive but that no one can know this about E. Suppose they

¹⁶ What attitude should *Conciliationists* take toward (8), given that Conciliationism obviously entails the denial of (8)'s consequent? Conciliationists should deny (8)'s antecedent along with its consequent, and so judge (8) vacuously true. Otherwise—by the reasoning just presented—they'll have to say one's knowledge that PEP and that one justifiedly holds C must be defeated simply by gaining justification to believe one of PEP's conjuncts. This position is quite strong and unobvious indeed.

¹⁷ It's worth noting how our argument for (1) relates to the key insight of Kelly's argument that Conciliationism depends dialectically on Uniqueness. Kelly's idea is that Possible Recognition entails the denial of Conciliationism. Our argument for (1) combines that insight—see step (9)—with an argument [steps (6)–(8)] that the possibility of a known Permissivism-entailing proposition entails Possible Recognition.

¹⁸ For helping in assessing this objection, thanks to two anonymous referees for this journal.

must indeed do that. Then minimally reflective adherents of the position would recognize that it has an unknowable consequence—namely, E is permissive and no one can know E is permissive. Since ascribing unknowability to a particular belief you hold threatens that belief's epistemic status (see Huemer [2011]), minimally reflective Permissive Conciliationists fall into a rationally untoward position. This sure seems like trouble.

The objection is mistaken about what Permissivism Conciliationism entails. Proponents of that position needn't say, about some particular body of evidence E, that E is permissive and unknowably so. Rather, they're only committed to a weaker existential generalization that we will call

Opaque Evidence ('OE'): There is a body of evidence E that justifies credences C and C* for P. But no one can know of E that it justifies C and C*.

OE is knowable. To begin to see this, notice you can know there is a real barn in Fake Barn Country while also recognizing that no one can know of the barn that it is real. Likewise, you can know there is a body of permissive evidence out there while also recognizing that no one can know of that evidence that it's permissive. So OE can be known, and commitment to it doesn't induce the trouble suggested above.

The objection we just considered fails, but Permissive Conciliationists aren't off the hook. We are inclined to think that any body of evidence's full justificatory profile is knowable at least in principle: so, for us, OE is implausibly skeptical from the get-go. But we intend our dilemma for Permissive Conciliationism to reach those sympathetic with the position; and presumably, such theorists won't be moved by our assertion that an obvious consequence of their view is implausible. We won't justify (4) by leaning on the initial implausibility of OE. Instead, we'll demonstrate that OE brings serious trouble in its wake, trouble that is not apparent on first glance. For one, OE has an unexpectedly strong skeptical implication. For another, it brings a significant theoretical liability. Let us explain these problems in order.

4. Against OE

On plausible assumptions, OE entails a rather strong 'higher-order' skepticism that should give pause even to sympathizers of Permissive Conciliationism. Note that their denial of Uniqueness—

which concerns credences—would seem to commit them to denying a counterpart thesis for ‘all-or-nothing’ or ‘coarse-grained’ attitudes, which we’ll call

Coarse Uniqueness: For any given proposition and total body of evidence, some all-or-nothing attitude is the one the evidence justifies toward that proposition.

The denial of Uniqueness does not all by itself entail the denial of Coarse Uniqueness. That is, the following is at least coherent: while a body of evidence can justify different credences, the range of justified credences can’t be located along the ‘credence spectrum’ so as to justify more than one all-or-nothing attitude. Even so, that position is mysterious, which we can appreciate by raising the obvious, uncomfortable question: ‘Why *can’t* the range of justified credences be located so that it justifies more than one coarse-grained attitude?’ As best we can tell, that question has no good answer. We see no promising explanation for why permissiveness at the fine-grained level could *never* underwrite permissiveness at the coarse-grained level.¹⁹

It would seem, therefore, that those committed to OE must also endorse

Opaque Evidence + (‘OE+’): There is a body of evidence E that justifies more than one coarse-grained attitude toward P. But no one can know of E that it justifies more than one such attitude.

We think that even proponents of Permissive Conciliationism should regard OE+ as a rather strong skeptical thesis. That is, we think such theorists should find the following anti-skeptical thought appealing: if E justifies more than one coarse-grained attitude, it is at least *possible* that someone know that E justifies those attitudes. So, given that Permissive Conciliationists must endorse the unattractively skeptical OE+, their position is, to put it politely, strong and unobvious. Here is one problem for Permissive Conciliationism, then: commitment to a necessary skepticism about knowledge of epistemic propositions that should strike Permissive Conciliationists as knowable at least in principle (so long as they are true, as Permissivists will generally think).

¹⁹ Cf. Douven [2008: 347–50], who argues that Uniqueness ‘is at odds with what most philosophers working in the area of confirmation theory regard as our current best candidates for a correct confirmation theory [namely, Bayesianism and Inference to the Best Explanation]’ [347]. Douven then raises the question whether proponents of Coarse Uniqueness also face this trouble, offering this on behalf of his affirmative answer: plausible ‘bridge principles connecting graded and categorical beliefs’ [350] strongly suggest that Coarse Uniqueness will commit its adherents to Uniqueness as well.

A second problem for Permissive Conciliationists is that OE brings a notable theoretical liability. According to OE, there are epistemic propositions—namely, ones depicting a body of evidence as justifying more than one attitude to a proposition—which have as an *essential feature* that no one knows them. Earlier, we called this sort of proposition a *Permissivism-entailing proposition*. OE implies there is a necessary connection between the intuitively distinct properties of *being a Permissivism-entailing proposition* and *being unknown*. Yet this necessary connection seems *inexplicable*, at least against the backdrop of Permissive Conciliationists' wider commitments. How might they try to explain the posited necessary connection between *being a Permissivism-entailing proposition* and *being unknown*?

Obviously not by way of the claim that all Permissivism-entailing propositions are necessarily false. And not by way of the claim that *being a Permissivism-entailing proposition* is necessarily connected to some further negative epistemic property. The main candidates would be: *being gettiered* and *being unjustified*. Drawing a necessary connection between *being a Permissivism-entailing proposition* and one of those properties simply exchanges one necessary connection between intuitively distinct properties for another. The property of *being a Permissivism-entailing proposition* is no more intuitively unified with *being gettiered* or *being unjustified* than it is with *being unknown*.²⁰

Things are worse than we've let on. There is really only one candidate for a negative epistemic property that might help explain the posited necessary connection between *being a Permissivism-entailing proposition* and *being unknown*. This is because Conciliationists cannot explain the target necessary connection by way of one between *being a Permissivism-entailing proposition* and *being unjustified*. Such an explanation divorces justificatory levels and thereby conflicts with Permissive Conciliationism. To see why, notice that the resulting position entails there are true Permissivism-entailing propositions—that is, there are bodies of evidence that justify each of (at least) two credences for a proposition. Consider such a permissive body of evidence, E. The considered explanation of the necessary connection at issue has it that no one can be justified in believing that E is permissive. So, those who invoke this explanation must deny that a body of evidence's

²⁰ White [2005] argues that unwelcome consequences follow from regarding an attitude as based on permissive evidence. Might Permissive Conciliationists try explaining the necessary connection they posit between *being a Permissiveness-entailing proposition* and *being unknown* by way of some or other of White's arguments? We doubt it. White's arguments are designed to *defeat belief in Permissivism*. These arguments, if successful, push theorists toward Uniqueness. So *Permissive* Conciliationists employing White's arguments risk undermining Permissivism itself. According to us, then, White's arguments won't help Permissive Conciliationists explain the necessary connection at issue. (For critical discussion of some of White's arguments against Permissivism, see Ballantyne and Coffman [forthcoming].)

justificatory profile is constrained by what one is justified in believing about that profile. But Conciliationists characteristically take on precisely that sort of higher-order constraint. Witness Christensen, for example [2007b: 18; cf. 2010]: ‘the rationality of first order beliefs cannot in general be divorced from the rationality of certain second order beliefs that bear on the epistemic status of the first order beliefs’ (cf. Kelly [2010: 158] and Feldman [2005: 100]). It is no accident that Conciliationists acknowledge this tie between justificatory levels: such a ‘level connection’ figures prominently in the standard story of how revealed peer disagreement renders one’s original attitude unjustified—roughly, by defeating one’s justification for thinking the shared evidence justifies one’s original attitude toward the disputed proposition. So, explaining the target necessary connection—again, between *being a Permissivism-entailing proposition* and *being unknown*—by positing a connection between *being a Permissivism-entailing proposition* and *being unjustified* seems off limits to Permissive Conciliationists. As a result, the only necessary connection available to them is between *being a Permissivism-entailing proposition* and *being gettiered*.

The bottom line: Permissive Conciliationists must posit a brute necessary connection between intuitively distinct properties. This is a second problem they face given their commitment to OE. For there is a broad consensus among philosophers of all persuasions that a commitment to brute necessary connections between intuitively distinct properties is a significant strike against a philosophical position (cf. McPherson [forthcoming]). Our present purpose—specifically, bolstering (4) of the dilemma for Conciliationism—does not demand an argument that Permissive Conciliationism is not ultimately worth the cost of commitment to the relevant necessary connection. We can rest with this: the commitment is costly enough to make Permissive Conciliationism extremely strong and unobvious.

We’ve argued that Permissive Conciliationism faces a pair of problems stemming from OE. The first problem attempts to rebut the position: OE will lead theorists to OE+ and thus to an unappealing ‘higher-order’ skepticism. The second problem attempts to undermine Permissive Conciliationism: its proponents must posit a brute necessary connection between intuitively distinct properties. Importantly, the problems we’ve pointed out are distinct. One problem alone will establish the conclusion that Permissive Conciliationism is extremely strong and unobvious even if the other is somehow dissolved.

Step back and notice where the argument leaves us. We have argued that Conciliationists must deny that some thinker can know a Permissivism-entailing proposition *either* by endorsing Uniqueness *or* by denying that some thinker can know such a proposition while also endorsing

Permissivism. Either way, Conciliationism ends up looking extremely strong and unobvious. Kelly correctly appreciated that Unique Conciliationism has significant liabilities. And now we have argued that Permissive Conciliationism is *at least* as strong and unobvious as Unique Conciliationism.

5. Conclusion

According to us, Conciliationism does not commit its advocates to Uniqueness. Conciliationists must instead accept a disjunction, one of whose disjuncts is Uniqueness, that amounts to an extremely strong and unobvious position. As a result, Conciliationism does not deserve default status in debates over the epistemic significance of peer disagreement. Though it is natural to treat Conciliationism as the default view, generalizing to it from some simple cases, that is a mistake. Conciliationism merits no dialectical special treatment.²¹

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