

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY AND SEMIOTICS

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

Tamaz Tokhadze

**Does Conciliationism Carry a Problematic Commitment to
Uniqueness?**

MA Thesis

Supervised by Alexander Stewart Davies

Tartu 2017

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
1. Kelly’s Argument against Conciliationism	4
1.1. Kelly’s Argument for the Entailment Thesis.....	4
1.2. Kelly on Uniqueness.....	7
2. Clarifying Kelly’s Argument.....	8
2.1. <i>Two Versions of Permissivism.....</i>	<i>9</i>
2.2. <i>Which version of Uniqueness, if any, does Conciliationism imply?.....</i>	<i>12</i>
3. Assessing Kelly’s Argument against Conciliationism: when Permissivism is interpreted as Options Permissivism (OP)	13
3.1. <i>The Entailment Thesis is True when Permissivism is interpreted as OP.....</i>	<i>13</i>
3.2. <i>Commitment to Options Uniqueness is not a liability</i>	<i>17</i>
3.2.1. <i>Options Uniqueness is a Moderate Position</i>	<i>18</i>
3.2.2. <i>The Implausibility of Options Permissivism</i>	<i>20</i>
4. Assessing Kelly’s Argument against Conciliationism: when Permissivism is interpreted as Background-Relative Permissivism (BP).....	23
4.1. <i>BU is an Extremely Strong and Unobvious View, or Something Near Enough.....</i>	<i>24</i>
4.2. <i>Kelly’s Argument for the Entailment Thesis is Unsound: when Permissivism is interpreted as BP.....</i>	<i>26</i>
4.2.1. <i>Doubts about Kelly’s Argument for the Entailment Thesis.....</i>	<i>26</i>
4.2.2. <i>Conciliationism is Compatible with BP: NEG is False</i>	<i>28</i>
4.2.3. <i>Objections</i>	<i>34</i>
Conclusion.....	39
Bibliography.....	40
Abstract	43

Introduction

You are asked to perform a non-trivial arithmetic calculation in your head. You do the task and come up with 26.5. Your friend, however, who is equally good at math, thinks that the answer is 25.7. An important epistemological question that arises here is: what kind of doxastic response is called for in such disagreements?

Conciliationism is an intuitive view about the epistemic significance of disagreement with a well-qualified other. Briefly, it says that, when equally competent and informed people disagree, they should make, at least, some doxastic conciliation. More fully, Conciliationism can be characterized as follows:

Conciliationism: For any agent *S*, proposition *H*, and doxastic attitude *D1*, if (i) *S*, at *t1*, has adopted *D1* towards *H*, (ii) *S*, at a later time *t2*, finds out that her epistemic peer adopted a competing doxastic attitude towards *H*, and (iii) *S*, at *t2*, does not have a dispute-independent reason to discount her peer's conclusion, then *S* is rationally required to lower her confidence in the disputed conclusion or revise her doxastic attitude.¹

Some clarifications are appropriate here. The definition lists three antecedent conditions. When satisfied, they are jointly sufficient to issue a conciliatory requirement for any arbitrary agent. Conciliationism is neutral with regard to a content of disputed propositions: they can range from matters of religion and politics, to matters of science and philosophy. Condition (ii) introduces the notion of an epistemic peer. It should be understood as follows:

Epistemic Peers: Two people are epistemic peers relative to some proposition, *H*, iff (i) they have the same evidence which bears upon *H*, (ii) they are equally good at evaluating the evidence, and (iii) they are equally open-minded and impartial in evaluating the evidence.

So, epistemic peers are epistemic equals: people who are equally likely to get it right.

Conciliationism does not imply that a party to a peer disagreement needs to conciliate in all possible situations. If one has an *undefeated reason* to think that, one's peer, on this particular occasion, is an unreliable judge of a given evidence, then there is no need to be epistemically modest. For instance: if one's peer is not in a good epistemic shape on this particular occasion (due to intoxication, tiredness, irritation, etc.), or she is susceptible to irrelevant influences on a

¹ My definition of Conciliationism closely follows Matheson's (2009, 2015) characterization of the view.

belief (a disputed proposition has to do with the attractiveness of her lover, the future success of her child, etc.), then one is not required to conciliate, anymore. Regarding the consequent of the definition: this version of Conciliationism is very general and comparatively weak. It does not specify to what extent doxastic revision is called for.² Thus, it's compatible with any Conciliatory position which demands at least some doxastic conciliation in response to a peer disagreement.

While Conciliationism has been criticized extensively over the past decade, no rival view can claim the same adherence. The type of epistemic modesty that Conciliationism advocates strike many as 'extremely natural and appealing' (Elga 2010, 175). Even its critics agree that reflecting on certain cases of disagreement 'can make it [Conciliationism] seem almost trivial or obviously true.' (Kelly 2010, 113). To illustrate this, consider an example from 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 defence?

Inwagen seems to be highly justified in regarding Lewis as his epistemic peer relative to the disputed propositions. Lewis had all the same evidence as Inwagen, relevant to the disputed claims. Yet, he held very different opinions on these matters. It seems obvious that Inwagen should not be as confident in the disputed propositions as he was before he gained the evidence of disagreement with Lewis. Considerations of this sort have gained Conciliationism a kind of default status in the epistemology of disagreement.

Conciliationism, however, is not free of controversies either. Recently, there has been much discussion about the relationship between Conciliationism and, what has come to be known as, the Uniqueness thesis:

The Uniqueness Thesis (Uniqueness, for short): For any given proposition, a body of evidence justifies at most one doxastic attitude towards it.

² A stronger version of Conciliationism is called the Equal Weight View.

The Equal Weight View: In a peer disagreement over H, both parties should split the difference regarding H.

For any two agents S and S*, to split the difference regarding any given proposition, H, is to adopt the doxastic attitude toward H which is halfway between S's original doxastic attitude toward H and S*'s original doxastic attitude toward H. Therefore, according to the Equal Weight View, when epistemic peers disagree over H, in such a way that, one affirms H while another denies it, they should both suspend judgment over H and end the disagreement. The definition of Conciliationism which I provide is compatible with the Equal Weight View, as well as with other weaker versions of Conciliationism.

Bracketing some subtleties, Ballantyne and Coffman (2011, 2012), Feldman (2007), Kelly (2005, 2010, 2014), Schoenfield (2014) and White (2014) have argued that Conciliationism is not compatible with the denial of Uniqueness, that is, with Permissivism.

Permissivism: For some propositions, a body of evidence justifies more than one doxastic attitudes toward it.

In contrast, Christensen (2009, 2016) Cohen (2013), Lee (2013), Levinstein (forthcoming), Peels and Booth (2014), and Titelbaum and Kopec (forthcoming) have questioned the dependency of Conciliationism on Uniqueness. For instance, Christensen (2016) has argued that various Conciliatory views can nicely flourish in Permissive environments.

Let us call the thesis, which these authors disagree about, the Entailment Thesis:

The Entailment Thesis: If Conciliationism is true, then Uniqueness is true as well.

A discussion of the Entailment Thesis which has received the most attention in the relevant literature is due to Kelly (2010). He argues for the Entailment Thesis: Conciliationism is not compatible with Permissivism, and, for that reason, Conciliationists are committed to Uniqueness.³ Kelly sees this as a significant liability, because, as he (*ibid.*, 121) writes Uniqueness is ‘an extremely strong and unobvious claim’. Clearly, when a thesis, which initially might have seemed intuitive and plausible, implies an extremely strong and unobvious view, then its initial plausibility is seriously damaged. Thus, Kelly sees the Entailment Thesis as a part of a larger argument that aims to demote Conciliationism from a default position in the epistemology of disagreement.

In my thesis, I defend Conciliatory views in the epistemology of disagreement. I argue that Kelly’s argument fails to pose a problem for Conciliationism. I begin by reconstructing Kelly’s argument for the Entailment Thesis. I show that it is ambiguous between two versions of Permissivism: Options Permissivism (OP) and Background-Relative Permissivism (BP). When this distinction is kept in view, we can see that the relationship between Conciliationism, Uniqueness, and Permissivism is more complicated than has usually been acknowledged. As I

³ When presenting his case for the Entailment Thesis, Kelly is focused on a strong version of Conciliationism - the Equal Weight View (for the definition see footnote 2). The focus on the Equal Weight View is inessential to the argument that Kelly is making. As he himself (2010, 121) points out: ‘Because I believe that the Uniqueness Thesis is false, I believe that the... No Independent Weight View [the negation of Conciliationism] is true, and (therefore) that the Equal Weight View is false’. So, Kelly’s argument that the Equal Weight view commits one to Uniqueness is *derived* from the claim that Conciliatory views, in general, commit one to Uniqueness. For a more detailed discussion of this see Ballantyne and Coffman (2012, 659). All the above-listed authors, who have addressed Kelly’s argument have also understood it as an argument for the Entailment Thesis.

argue, when Permissivism is understood as OP, Conciliationism will imply a version of Uniqueness – Options Uniqueness. However, this result does not support Kelly’s claim that Conciliationists are committed to an implausible version of Uniqueness. I give two reasons for this:

- (i) Options Uniqueness is a moderate and plausible position.
- (ii) OP, itself, is a highly implausible view: there are good reasons to reject OP and endorse Options Uniqueness.

By contrast, when Permissivism is understood as BP, the Entailment Thesis, if true, will seriously damage Conciliatory views. However, on this interpretation, Kelly’s argument is unsound. Thus, I conclude that Kelly’s argument fails to pose a problem for Conciliationism.

1. Kelly’s Argument against Conciliationism

In this chapter, I reconstruct Kelly’s argument against Conciliationism. It has two parts. First, Kelly tries to establish the Entailment Thesis: if Conciliationism is true, then Uniqueness is true as well. Next, Kelly argues that this is a significant liability of Conciliationism, because, as he contends, Uniqueness is an extremely strong and unobvious position. For this reason, he thinks that Conciliationism should not be treated as a default position in the epistemology of disagreement. Kelly makes his point within a graded framework of belief. On this picture, beliefs are treated not as an all-or-nothing matter but, rather, as a matter of different credences. A credence is a real number between 0 and 1 which measures how confident a thinker is in the truth of a given proposition. The higher a thinker’s credence, the higher her confidence in the belief in question. In order to present the case against Conciliationism in a way that appears most convincing to Kelly, in what follows, I will talk about beliefs as a matter of different degrees. The term “doxastic attitude” will be used to refer to any attitude that doxastically relates an agent to a proposition. Believing that H, having a credence of C in H, and being agnostic toward H are all examples of doxastic attitudes. Sometimes I use the term “fine-grained doxastic attitude” in order to talk specifically about graded beliefs.

1.1. Kelly’s Argument for the Entailment Thesis

Kelly begins his argument for the Entailment Thesis by reflecting on a scenario which is very similar to this:

You and I, two equally competent and intelligent individuals, try to find out to what extent, if any, evidence E supports some proposition, H. You and I think of each other as epistemic peers. We do our analysis independently. At t1, my credence in H is C*. This credence is in fact perfectly justified on E. However, I *correctly* recognize that a slightly lower credence in H - a credence of C, is also perfectly justified on E. At t1, you do your calculation as well: your credence in H stands at C. You also recognize that a credence of C*, given E, is perfectly justified. At t2, we encounter each other and find out about the disagreement.

Call this case “Permissive Disagreement”. The question is whether or not we should revise our original credences in H or should we stick to our guns. Before I start considering the case and its implications, let us fix some more definitions. Permissive Disagreement is an instance of what is usually referred to as, an “acknowledged permissive case”. That is, you and I not only find ourselves in an epistemically permissive environment, but we also recognize that this is so. All acknowledged permissive cases should satisfy three necessary and jointly sufficient conditions:

For some agent, S:

- (i) S’s credence in H is C.
- (ii) S correctly believes that credence C in H is justified on E.
- (iii) S correctly believes there is another credence C* in H which is also justified on E.

When all of these three conditions are satisfied, we will say that an agent, S, is in an acknowledged permissive environment. Now, back to the question: what does Conciliationism say regarding Permissive Disagreement? It should be clear that according to Conciliationism, both you and I are rationally *required* to revise our credences in H. You and I have a genuine disagreement. We assign different credences to the same proposition, H. Conciliationism says that, when two epistemic peers disagree and they lack a dispute-independent reason to suspect each other of some epistemic mistake, then doxastic conciliation is called for. However, Kelly thinks that Conciliationism gets acknowledged permissive cases in general and Permissive Disagreement in particular completely wrong. Why? Here is what Kelly (2010, 119) has to say about this: ‘...ex hypothesi, the opinion that I hold about H is within the range of perfectly reasonable opinion, as is the opinion that you hold. Moreover, both of us have recognized this all along. Why then would we be rationally required to change?’ The key idea behind the quote is

that, you and I, at t_2 , do not gain any evidence that calls into question the justification of our original fine-grained doxastic attitudes. As Kelly (ibid) writes, even before the disclosure of the disagreement ‘both of us have recognized this [recognized that: there is more than one fine-grained doxastic attitude which E fully justifies] all along’. So, if it was justified for you to stand at C in H, then this justification will not be destroyed or diminished when the disagreement is disclosed. I will explicitly characterize the intuition which Kelly uses to argue for the incompatibility of acknowledged permissive cases and Conciliationism as follows:

No Evidence is Gained (NEG): If (i) at t_1 S is justified in adopting doxastic attitude D1 toward proposition H on E and (ii) at t_1 S correctly believes that there is another doxastic attitude, D2, which is also justified on E, and (iii) at a later time t_2 , S is justified in believing that her epistemic peer S^* has adopted doxastic attitude D2 toward H on E, then at t_2 , S *gained no evidence* which *negatively affects justification* of D1 toward H on E.

Kelly thinks that something very similar to NEG is obviously true. He is not alone in thinking that NEG is a very plausible epistemic principle. Ballantyne and Coffman (2012, 663) fully agree with Kelly on that: ‘We agree with Kelly that defending Conciliationism [from the possibility of acknowledged permissive cases] by endorsing *that* [the denial of NEG] is a non-starter’. However, if NEG is true, then Conciliationism seems to be in trouble: whenever an agent is in an acknowledged permissive environment, the fact of disagreement with an epistemic peer will not affect the agent's justification in a disputed proposition. Therefore the requirement for doxastic conciliation in Permissive Disagreement is not issued. This constitutes a clear counterexample to Conciliationism. You and I are epistemic peers. We disagree and we lack a dispute-independent reason to suspect each other of error, however, we are not required to conciliate. This is contrary to what Conciliationism demands. But, how is it, exactly, that the above-given considerations establish the Entailment Thesis? The dialectic is as follows: according to Kelly (2010, 119), Permissivism is both a necessary and sufficient condition for the possibility of Permissive Disagreement. Because, as Kelly claims, Conciliationism gets Permissive Disagreement wrong, the only way for the supporter of Conciliationism to respond to the challenge which is posed by the existence of such cases, is to deny Permissivism. Because the denial of Permissivism is Uniqueness, by denying Permissivism, one is inevitably committed to Uniqueness. Here is a neater presentation of Kelly's argument:

P1. Permissive Disagreement is possible iff Permissivism is true.

P2. If Permissive Disagreement is possible and NEG, then Conciliationism is false.

P3. NEG.

P4. If Permissivism is true, then Conciliationism is false. [From P1-P3]

P5. If Conciliationism is true, then Permissivism is false. [The contrapositive of P4]

P6. If Permissivism is false, then Uniqueness is true. [By definition]

Therefore:

C1. If Conciliationism is true, then Uniqueness is true. [The Entailment Thesis]

1.2. Kelly on Uniqueness

As I already wrote, Kelly uses the Entailment Thesis in order to weaken the plausibility of Conciliationism by connecting it (Conciliationism) to what he sees as an extremely strong and unobvious position – Uniqueness. But why think that Uniqueness is such a strong and unobvious view? In his (2014, 299-301) more recent paper, Kelly sums up some problems with Uniqueness as follows:

- 1) Uniqueness does not permit any slack between the evidence and what one is justified in believing given that evidence. Permissivists can happily concede that in many cases (maybe, even in most cases) evidence justifies one, and only one doxastic attitude toward any given proposition, H. In that respect, Permissivism is a modest position. While according to Uniqueness: ‘there is never any slack [between the evidence and what one is justified in believing], ever’ (ibid., 299).
- 2) Uniqueness gives some extreme and counterintuitive results when we think of belief in an increasingly fine-grained manner. It’s highly counterintuitive, according to Kelly, to think that the evidence justifies only one specific degree of confidence in any given proposition. However, if Uniqueness is true, it is possible, in principle, that some evidence E, justifies a credence of .302649 in some proposition, H. However, if Uniqueness is true, then, intuitively, no real human being can hold a rational belief toward H, given E (it seems to be psychologically impossible to have such a fine-grained doxastic attitude).
- 3) Uniqueness implies that, if any two agents, S and S*, slightly deviate from a uniquely rational credence in H, given E, they both fail to be epistemically rational. Kelly sees this as a bizarre consequence of Uniqueness.

4) Uniqueness is inconsistent with many attractive views in epistemology: most notably, with Subjective Bayesianism. Bayesians, in general, are committed to the following claims:

- (i) For any proposition, H, one can assign a credence, C, to H.
- (ii) Credences are real numbers between zero and one and credences behave like mathematical probabilities.
- (iii) For any rational agent, S, there is a probability function P, called “hypothetical prior”, which assigns each belief that S has a unique credence.
- (iv) When S gains some new evidence, E, S should conditionalize on E.

Sometimes it is convenient to differentiate between Objective Bayesianism and Subjective Bayesianism. The former is a view according to which, there is only one, unique rational hypothetical prior. According to Subjective Bayesianism, by contrast, multiple hypothetical priors can be equally justified. What this means is that, two agents, S and S*, who adhere to different hypothetical priors and share all the same evidence, can justifiably assign different credences to the same proposition. Because Uniqueness is incompatible with such a possibility, friends of Uniqueness should reject all forms of Subjective Bayesianism. But it seems plausible that at least some version of Subjective Bayesianism is true. So, we have one more reason to think that Uniqueness amounts to an extremely strong and unobvious thesis.

To recap: in this section, I have presented Kelly’s case against Conciliationism. First, Kelly argues that Conciliationism implies Uniqueness. Then he gives reasons to think that this seriously damages Conciliationism: if Conciliationism implies Uniqueness and Uniqueness is an extremely strong and unobvious view, then Conciliationism should not be treated as the default position in the epistemology of disagreement. In the next section, I show that Kelly’s argument, P1-C1, as it stands, is in need of some important clarifications.

2. Clarifying Kelly’s Argument

In this chapter, I show that Permissive Disagreement can be read in two different ways. These two readings of Permissive Disagreement correspond to two versions of Permissivism: Options

Permissivism (OP) and Background-Relative Permissivism (BP). Given that we have two versions of Permissivism, we also have two versions of the argument, P1-C1, as well.

2.1. Two Versions of Permissivism

Permissive Disagreement directly motivates the key premises in Kelly's argument: P2, P3, and P4. Despite the key role in the argument, some potentially important nuances of the described situation are unarticulated or obscure. It is not clear how to answer the following questions related to Permissive Disagreement (for the sake of simplicity, from now on, I will only focus on "your" side of the situation which is described in Permissive Disagreement): is it the case that you, in Permissive Disagreement, have no reason to favor a credence of C in H, over the competitor credence? After all, at t1, you correctly recognize that there is more than one justified fine-grained doxastic attitude in response to E - C and C*. Or, if there is some reason for you to favor one credence over another, then in what sense do you think that a different doxastic response to the same evidence is also perfectly justified? This suggests that there are two different ways to interpret Permissive Disagreement:

- A. While you correctly recognize that there is more than one justified fine-grained doxastic attitude in response to E - C and C*, there is no reason why you favor a credence of C in H over a credence of C* in H.
- B. You correctly recognize that there is more than one justified fine-grained doxastic attitude in response to E - C and C*, and there is a reason why you favor a credence of C in H over a credence of C* in H.

For the sake of brevity, I will refer to the first interpretation of Permissive Disagreement as the "A-reading", and to the second interpretation as the – "B-reading". Now, which one of these two different readings of the case is correct or intended? There is no explicit textual evidence for either the A-reading or the B-reading. My view is that, Kelly's written words shift toward the A-reading. In his (2014) more recent paper, however, he has explicitly endorsed a version of Permissivism that justifies the B-reading of the case. But we are primarily interested in whether or not Permissive Disagreement presents Conciliationism with a problem, not in what Kelly might have meant. For this reason, I'll look at these two interpretations of Permissive Disagreement one at a time.

Can we say more about how these two readings of Permissive Disagreement are different and what exactly these differences amount to? Fortunately, recent discussions of Permissivism (Titelbaum 2010; Titelbaum and Kopec forthcoming; Podgorski 2016; Schoenfield 2014; Simpson 2016) can shed light on the issue. In the recent literature on Permissivism, philosophers (Titelbaum *ibid*; Titelbaum and Kopec *ibid*; Schoenfield *ibid*) who defend the view, do so by appealing to an *intermediary relatum* between bodies of evidence and doxastic attitudes. For example, Titelbaum (*ibid*) has argued that the evidential support between a given piece of evidence, E, and a proposition, H, is always relative to a fixed set of predicates. Therefore, for Titelbaum, a set of predicates is a third relatum relative to which E can support H. Schoenfield (*ibid*) and Titelbaum and Kopec (*ibid*) make evidential support relative to, what they call, epistemic standards. To quote Schoenfield (*ibid.*, 199) an epistemic standard is ‘a function from bodies of evidence to doxastic states which the agent takes to be *truth conducive*’. A familiar version of epistemic standards are prior and conditional functions employed in Subjective Bayesianism. Within the framework of Bayesianism, a prior probability function assigns each proposition that one holds a unique credence. After you receive a new piece of evidence, E, Bayesianism tells you that your new subjective probability for any arbitrary proposition, H, should be equal to the probability of H given E, denoted $P(H|E)$. This means that two people with different prior probability functions can justifiably assign different credences to the same proposition, given the same body of evidence. Different, but equally rational, prior and conditional functions can be *extensionally non-equivalent*: given the same evidence, as an input, they will not yield the same doxastic output.

The introduction of a third relatum into the discussion of evidential support in general, and Permissivism in particular, is pertinent to our understanding of the two incompatible readings of Permissive Disagreement. If we adopt Schoenfield’s and Titelbaum and Kopec’s terminology of epistemic standards to talk about the third relatum between evidence and doxastic states, then we can understand the B-reading of Permissive Disagreement as follows: you, in Permissive Disagreement, have a reason to prefer a credence of C in H over a credence of C* in H. Why? Because the *epistemic standards* that you adopt at the time justify a credence of C in H, given the evidence that you possess. Therefore, within the B-reading of the case, the difference in epistemic standards explains the difference in the fine-grained doxastic attitudes that you and I hold, at t2. Within the A-reading of acknowledged permissive cases, in contrast, the difference in epistemic

standards doesn't explain the difference in the fine-grained doxastic attitudes that you and I hold. What explains the difference in the doxastic performances, according to the A-reading, is the evidence that we share and our *decision* to hold one doxastic attitude over another, without any epistemic reason whatsoever. The evidence that you have, according to the A-reading, gives you a kind of *epistemic opportunity* to justifiably adopt one of the two inconsistent credences in H. It's up to you which epistemic choice you make.

The difference between the A-reading and the B-reading of acknowledged permissive cases points to a more general distinction between two *different* versions of Permissivism. On the one hand, we have the view that, there are bodies of evidence which fully justify two inconsistent propositions, at the same time, to the same extent and for the same person. Following Podgorski (2016), I call this version of Permissivism – Options Permissivism. More fully, Options Permissivism says that:

Options Permissivism (OP): There is some agent S, given body of evidence E, and proposition H, such that there is more than one justified doxastic attitude that S can take toward H.

So, according to OP, some evidence entails a kind of epistemic opportunity: if you recognize that E is the permissive body of evidence, then you are presented with an *epistemic choice* to believe any one of two inconsistent propositions. On the other hand, we have a version of Permissivism which relates evidence to propositions relative to agents' epistemic standards. Again, following Podgorski (ibid) I call this version of Permissivism: Background-Relative Permissivism.

Background-Relative Permissivism (BP): For some two agents, S and S*, and a proposition, H, sometimes, the same body of evidence, E, justifies some doxastic attitude, D1, toward H, relative to S's epistemic standards and another doxastic attitude, D2, toward H relative to S*'s epistemic standards.

The distinction between two forms of Permissivism, OP and BP, shows that Kelly's argument for the Entailment Thesis, P1-C1, can be interpreted in two different ways. On one interpretation, if the argument is successful, Conciliationism implies a version of Uniqueness, which is contradictory to OP. On the second interpretation, if the argument is successful, Conciliationism implies a version of Uniqueness, which is contradictory to BP. So, because we have the two versions of the Entailment Thesis, we should also evaluate them independently. It's possible that

the truth-value of the Entailment Thesis will vary with regard to which version of Permissivism we are dealing with.

2.2. Which version of Uniqueness, if any, does Conciliationism imply?

The argument, P1-C1, aims to show that Conciliationism implies Uniqueness. But which Uniqueness? Well, it depends. On one interpretation, the condition that makes Permissive Disagreement possible is OP. The negation of OP is, in fact, tantamount to a version of Uniqueness, which we can refer to as “Options Uniqueness”:

Options Uniqueness (OU): For any agent, S, given body of evidence, E, and proposition, H, there is at most one justified doxastic attitude that any given agent can adopt toward H. It is easy to see why OU is the negation of OP. The latter has, what Kelly (2014, 305) calls, *Intrapersonal Import*. It affirms the existence of intrapersonal slack: for any given individual, and a proposition, H, evidence can justify more than one doxastic attitude toward H, to the same extent, and for the same person. By contrast, OU rejects *intrapersonal* slack, yet, leaves open the possibility of *interpersonal* slack. If OU is true it is still perfectly possible that two agents, who share the same evidence, adopt some inconsistent doxastic attitudes towards the same proposition. For this reason, it is important not to confuse OU with, what I refer to as, “Interpersonal Uniqueness”.

Interpersonal Uniqueness: Given any body of evidence, E, and proposition, H, there is at most one justified doxastic attitude that any agent can adopt toward H. Interpersonal Uniqueness is logically stronger than OU. The former does not permit any slack between evidence and what is justified to believe given the evidence. No two agents can share the same body of evidence and justifiably adopt different doxastic attitudes towards the same proposition. OU, as we saw, leaves such possibility open. Thus, what one interpretation of Kelly’s argument will show is that Conciliationism implies the negation of OP, that is OU.

What about the other interpretation of the argument, P1-C1? Applying the same reasoning as above: when Permissive Disagreement is understood in accordance with BP, the argument, P1-C1, if successful, will show that Conciliationism implies the negation of BP, which is tantamount to the following:

Background-Relative Uniqueness (BU): For any two agents, S and S* and a proposition, H, it's never the case that, the same body of evidence, E, justifies some doxastic attitude,

D1, toward H, relative to S's epistemic standards and another doxastic attitude, D2, toward H, relative to S*'s epistemic standards.⁴

To summarize chapter 2: I have argued that Kelly's argument, P1-C1, can be interpreted in two different way. On one interpretation: if the argument is successful, Conciliationism implies a version of Uniqueness, which is the negation of OP i.e., OU. On the second interpretation: if the argument is successful, Conciliationism implies a version of Uniqueness, which is the negation of BP i.e., BU. Because we have the two versions of the Entailment Thesis, we should also evaluate them independently. As I've already noted, it's possible that the truth-value of the Entailment Thesis would vary with regard to two different versions of Permissivism.

3. Assessing Kelly's Argument against Conciliationism: when Permissivism is interpreted as Options Permissivism (OP)

In this chapter, I assume that the version of Permissivism which is presupposed in Kelly's discussion of the Entailment Thesis is OP: for any agent, S, given body of evidence, E, and proposition, H, there is at most one justified doxastic attitude that any given agent can adopt toward H. As I'll argue, when Permissivism is understood as OP, then Kelly's argument for the Entailment Thesis will work. It will show that Conciliationism implies OU, i.e., the negation of OP. However, as I contend, Kelly's larger claim will be still defeated: Conciliationism will not imply a contentious version of Uniqueness. I argue this in two steps. First I defend the claim that OU is a moderate position. Next, I show that the negation of OU i.e., OP, is an extremely implausible view indeed. There are strong, independent, reasons to reject OP and endorse OU. This will establish the claim that OU is not only a moderate but a plausible position as well.

3.1. The Entailment Thesis is True when Permissivism is interpreted as OP

To begin with: why think that Kelly's argument P1-C1 is sound when Permissivism is understood as OP? In order to see this, let us start to look at each premise of the argument, P1-C1, one at a time.

⁴ The definition of BU is equivalent to the following: For any two agents, S and S* and a proposition, H, the same body of evidence, E, justifies at most one and the same doxastic attitude toward H, relative to S's epistemic standards and relative to S* epistemic standards.

Defense of P1:

Should we believe that OP is both a necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of Permissive Disagreement? It's unobjectionable that OP is a necessary condition for there to be cases like Permissive Disagreement (understood as OP says it should). After all, if some given body of evidence cannot justify adopting two inconsistent doxastic attitudes, for the same person, at the same time, then how can epistemic peers, or anybody else, correctly recognize this? While it's silly to deny that OP is a necessary condition for such acknowledged permissive cases, one can well question whether or not OP is also a sufficient condition. In fact, Ballantyne and Coffman (2012) have pointed out, that the truth of any version of Permissivism does not guarantee the existence of acknowledged permissive cases of any sort. Their claim is that, even if some version of Permissivism is true, this will not imply the possibility of *knowing* that a concrete body of evidence is permissive. Yet, as they (*ibid.*,664-666) also note, such an argumentative move is not promising. Ballantyne and Coffman are only denying that Permissivism (in general) logically or conceptually implies acknowledged permissive cases (of any sort).⁵ They still conclude that it is *highly likely* that Permissivism will imply the existence of such cases. They provide a good reason for thinking this. In order to explain their argument, we need to introduce a new piece of terminology. Let "Permissiveness-entailing proposition" (or "PEP", for short) be the proposition that, E justifies credence C in H as well as credence C* in H. Now, somebody who denies P1 should endorse the following:

Opaque Evidence: There are true propositions of the form PEP, but nobody can know such propositions.

Opaque Evidence attributes all propositions of the form PEP the property of being *unknowable in principle*. Now, it is very hard to see what might explain this connection. A paradigm of unknowable propositions is, of course, false propositions. Knowledge is factive. Therefore, nobody can know H, if H is false. Surely, a proponent of Opaque Evidence cannot claim that all propositions of the form PEP are false (see the definition of Opaque Evidence). Maybe, what explains the connection between PEP and being unknowable is that, it is always unjustified to believe such propositions. This answer will not do. We want to explain why PEP is unknowable,

⁵ From now on, the term "Permissivism" will function as an umbrella term that covers both OP and BP. Whenever I talk about Permissivism, in general, I'm interested in whether or not some particular claim is true of all versions of Permissivism. At this moment, I'm interested in the plausibility of attributing to all permissive body of evidence the property of being unknowable.

in principle. Explaining this by appeal to the other property - being unjustified, raises the same worry: how can one explain the connection between PEP and being unjustified? Why should we think that while it is possible to have a true belief in PEP, this can never achieve the status of knowledge? This is as unexplained as connecting PEP to being unknown. To quote Ballantyne and Coffman (ibid., 668): ‘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*.’

Thus, Opaque Evidence is wholly undermotivated. There seems to be no reason to think that PEP is, somehow, essentially unknowable. This, I think, suffices to conclude that P1 is true: the truth of Permissivism does imply the existence of Permissive Disagreement.

Defense of P2 and P3:

The second premise seems to be true as well. If NEG is true, i.e., if in Permissive Disagreement, at t2, you gain no evidence which *negatively affects* the justification of the fine-grained doxastic attitude that you hold, then why conciliate? If in certain circumstances peer disagreement does not affect negatively what one believes, then there is no *requirement* to conciliate, as well. The more interesting part of the argument is the third premise, P3. It says that NEG is true. Should we believe this? To remind the reader, according to NEG:

NEG: If (i) at t1 S is justified in adopting doxastic attitude D1 toward proposition H on E and (ii) at t1 S correctly believes that there is another doxastic attitude, D2, which is also justified on E, and (iii) at a later time t2, S is justified in believing that her epistemic peer S* has adopted doxastic attitude D2 toward H on E, then at t2, S *gained no evidence* which *negatively affects justification* of D1 toward H on E.

In order to see why NEG should be true, when OP is true, consider how your evidence looks at time t1: your evidence at t1, includes the following:

- (i) The original first-order evidence E.
- (ii) The higher-order evidence that E justifies credence C in H as well as credence C* in H.⁶

By contrast, at time t2, your evidence looks as follows:

- (i) The original first-order evidence E.

⁶ First-order evidence directly bears on an ordinary proposition, like: “It will rain tomorrow” or “Tom is married”. Second-order evidence, in contrast, does not directly bear on an ordinary proposition, but on an evidential relation between a body of evidence and some ordinary proposition (Rasmussen et al. forthcoming).

(ii) The higher-order evidence that E justifies credence C in H as well as credence C* in H.

(iii) The fact that your peer's credence stands at C in H.

Now, at t1, your credence stands at C in H because you believe that E justifies credence C in H and credence C* in H. This means that you believe PEP. When at t2, you learn that I adopt a credence of C* in H, it actually nicely *fits* with the evidence that you have at t1 and t2. Here is why: the reason why your credence stands at C is because you believe PEP. When you learn about the disagreement, at t2, you actually gain an additional justification for believing PEP. Why? because you gain an additional justification in believing one of its conjuncts, namely, that E justifies credence C* in H. Your epistemic peer, somebody who is highly likely to get it right, adopts credence C* in H based on E. The discovery that your peer adopts credence C* in H, is the evidence that credence C* in H is a justified doxastic response on E. The proposition that E justifies credence C* in H is one of the conjuncts of PEP and PEP is the *basis* of the fine-grained doxastic attitude that you adopt at times t1 and t2. So, the evidence of disagreement nicely fits with the evidence that justifies your doxastic attitude. This means that the disclosure of disagreement cannot affect negatively the justification of your doxastic attitude.

In fact, NEG, on condition that Permissivism is understood as OP, is so obvious that denying it implies an absurdity (as it was already noted by Ballantyne and Coffman *ibid.*, 665). Your credence, at t2, stands at C because you believe PEP – a certain conjunctive proposition. Now, if one insists that in Permissive Disagreement the evidence of disagreement diminishes the justification for PEP, then one is committed to the following: the likelihood of Q and Q* given Q, is less than the likelihood of Q and Q*. More formally, someone who denies P3, when Permissivism is interpreted as OP, should endorse the following: $P(Q \text{ and } Q^*|Q) < P(Q \text{ and } Q^*)$. This, however, is absurd. How can my subjective probability for a certain conjunction be diminished if I gain an additional evidence for one its conjuncts? If Q and Q* are contradictory propositions, then $P(Q \text{ and } Q^*)$, according to the axioms of probability, should be zero. Thus, even in such cases, the probability of $P(Q \text{ and } Q^*|Q)$ will not be less than $P(Q \text{ and } Q^*)$. Of course, they will each be equal to zero. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that NEG is true, when Permissive Disagreement is understood in accordance with OP.

Defense of P4, P5, and P6:

Now, if the truth of OP implies the existence of certain cases (similar to Permissive Disagreement) and these cases are incompatible with Conciliationism (as we saw from P2), then we should conclude the following: if OP is true, then Conciliationism is false. This is exactly what P4 says, when Permissivism is interpreted as OP. Therefore, we should conclude that P4 is true.

When P4 is established all the next steps in the argument, P1-C1, are just a matter of a logical inference and definition. P5 - if Conciliationism is true, then Permissivism is false - follows logically from P4. P6 – if Permissivism is false, then Uniqueness is true, is true by definition. So, when we interpret Permissivism as OP, all premises of the argument, P1-C1, are true.

Overall, we can conclude that the Entailment Thesis is true, on the condition that Permissivism is interpreted as OP: Conciliationism does imply a version of Uniqueness. Further, as we saw, the negation of OP is Options Uniqueness (OU): For any agent, S, given body of evidence, E, and proposition, H, there is at most one justified doxastic attitude that any given agent can adopt toward H. However, as I contend, this does not get Kelly the desired result. His argument does not show that Conciliationism implies an extremely strong and unobvious thesis.

3.2. Commitment to Options Uniqueness is not a liability

In this section, I will show that the argument, P1-C1, does not support Kelly's claim that Conciliationists are committed to an implausible version of Uniqueness. Therefore, as I contend, Kelly's larger argument is defeated: when Permissivism is understood as OP, the argument, P1-C1, fails to demote Conciliationism from a default position in the epistemology of disagreement. I give two kinds of reasons for thinking this:

- (i) OU is a moderate and plausible position.
- (ii) OP is a highly implausible view: there are good reasons to reject OP and endorse OU.

3.2.1. Options Uniqueness is a Moderate Position

As we saw from section 1.2., Kelly gives four reasons to think that Uniqueness amounts to an extremely strong and unobvious position. In what follows, I go through all of the objections. I argue that either they do not apply to OU or, fail to show that OU is a controversial position.⁷

A Challenge from Evidential Slack:

Kelly's first worry was that if Uniqueness is true, then there is never any slack between the evidence and a justified response toward it. This, however, does not apply to OU. As we saw, it rejects the existence of *intrapersonal* slack: if E is all the evidence that you have, at some time t1, then E cannot permit you to adopt one of two inconsistent doxastic attitudes toward a proposition, H. This being said, OU does not have *interpersonal* import: we can share the same evidence, E, and E can justify one doxastic attitude for you toward H, and another doxastic attitude for me, toward the very same proposition. Such a possibility is left open by OU. Thus, Kelly's first worry simply doesn't apply to Options Uniqueness: if OU is true, then there can be *interpersonal slack* between evidence and justified response toward it.

A Challenge from the Degreed Framework of Belief:

Kelly's second objection to Uniqueness is that, it gives some extreme and counterintuitive results when we think of belief in an increasingly fine-grained manner. How can one reply to this? Firstly, Uniqueness does not necessarily have such a counter-intuitive consequence. Uniqueness is compatible with so-called "mushy credence". Some (Joyce, 2010) argue that evidential probabilities can be unsharp or mushy. So, if evidence can justify a degree of confidence in H which is a range from, let us say, .3 to .5, then an agent should assign H this range interval probability. But, even if evidential probabilities are sharp and not mushy, this does not put OU (or any other form of Uniqueness) in a more disadvantaged position than OP itself. If OP is true, it's also possible, in principle, that some evidence, E, relative to an agent, S, justifies both a credence of .34532 in H and a credence of .34533 in H. However, knowing such epistemic facts seems to be as psychologically impossible as to know that evidence justifies only one credence in H. Therefore, I conclude that, if sharp credences are problem for Uniqueness, then

⁷ In one of his more recent paper, Kelly (2014, 304) himself notes that, what I call Options Uniqueness is '...significantly weaker than [Interpersonal] Uniqueness' and "certain views in epistemology that everyone would be inclined to treat as paradigms of "permissive" views seem to be consistent with uniqueness principles that lack interpersonal import'.

they are also problem for OP.

A Challenge from Intrapersonal Slack:

The third problem with Uniqueness, according to Kelly, is its interpersonal import: The denial of interpersonally inconsistent yet equally justified doxastic attitudes, relative to the same body of evidence. This cannot apply to OU, for the reasons that were stated in response to Kelly's first objection. OU does not reject the existence of interpersonal slack.

Incompatibility with a Plausible view in Epistemology: Subjective Bayesianism

Kelly's fourth objection against Uniqueness is that, Uniqueness is inconsistent with many attractive views in epistemology: most notably, with Subjective Bayesianism. This objection also does not apply to OU. In fact, contrary to Kelly's conviction, OP itself is not compatible with any forms of Bayesianism. According to Bayesianism, for any rational agent, *S*, there is a prior probability function – represented as “*P*”, and posterior probability function, which can be represented as “*P_E*”, such that whenever *S* get some new evidence, *E*, her posterior probability in *H*, represented as $P_E(H)$, should be equal to $P(H|E)$. What this means is that, *S* should update her probabilities by means *conditionalization*. However, if the value of $P_E(H)$ is not uniquely determined, then P_E is not a well-defined function (Obviously, P_E cannot be a function, if P_E , for any given input gives more than one output). However, if OP is true, then we cannot represent a rational agent, *S*, as adhering to a function P_E . Because, if OP is true, then P_E is not a well-defined function when *S* conditionalizes on some permissive evidence, *E*.

To recap, in this section I have presented four reasons which Kelly uses to argue that Uniqueness is an extremely strong and unobvious position. However, in relation to OU, these reasons are all wanting. OU allows the existence of interpersonal slack, however, it rejects the possibility of intrapersonal slack. This is a *moderate position* on how slack is a requirement of evidence and rationality. Regarding worries from a graded framework of beliefs: Uniqueness is compatible with unsharp credences. Also, as I concluded, if a finely cut sharp credences is a problem for OU, then it is also a problem for OP, as well. Regarding worries from intrapersonal slack and incompatibility with Bayesianism, as we saw, these objections miss the target altogether. From this, we can conclude that OU is a moderate position: it does not commit one to extreme and contentious views. However, at this point, I did not give an explicit reason to think that OU is, not only a moderate, but also a plausible position. This is exactly what I'm going to

show next. I argue that there are strong reasons to reject OP and endorse OU. This will establish the claim that OU is a plausible principle.

3.2.2. The Implausibility of Options Permissivism

Arguments against a form of Permissivism that I refer to as OP abound in the relevant literature. In this section, I reconstruct three of these arguments: the evidence pointing problem, problems in practical decision-making, and the arbitrariness objection. These considerations, taken together, provide a powerful evidence against OP. So, I conclude, we have some excellent reasons to reject OP and endorse Options Uniqueness instead.

The Evidence Pointing Problem:

The first type of argument against OP that I will consider has been put forward by Feldman (2007), Sosa (2010) and White (2005, 2014). The argument exploits the intuition that evidential support is necessarily *unidirectional* (White 2014, 314): if a given piece of evidence, E, justifies H, then, necessarily, it is also the case that E justifies H *over its negation*. According to this line of reasoning, to think that evidence can *point* at both H and its negation is incoherent. If a given piece of evidence, E, justifies H, then, necessarily, it is also the case that E justifies H over its negation. However, OP is in tension with such an understanding of the evidential support. If OP is true, then evidence is not always unidirectional: it can point in two directions at once. This, however, seems counterintuitive.

Problems in Practical Decision-making

The next problem with OP was pointed out by Simpson (2016). He has made the case that a version of Permissivism that I refer here to as “OP” gives some inconsistent recommendations regarding an agent’s betting behavior.

Suppose you possess some permissive body of evidence. It justifies a credence of .6 in H as well as a credence of .2, at the same time and to the same extent. You know this perfectly well. At a later time, I offer you a wager on H’s being true at odds 1:1. Should you accept it? Now, if you think that it’s rationally permissible to stand at .6 in H, then by your own lights, the offered wage is a good deal. Your expected gain for each euro that you bet is €2.⁸ In contrast, if you

⁸ The calculation goes as follows: $(1 \times .6) + (-1 \times .4) = .2$.

think that it's also rationally permissible to stand at .2 in H then you should expect to lose €6.⁹ What this shows is that, permissive evidence (understood in accordance with OP) does not seem to be a good guide for making practical decisions. By your own lights, it's equally justified for you to accept bets with very different and mutually inconsistent outcomes. It seems very plausible that when a rational agent performs an action, her expected utility for the action is greater than some of the alternative actions available. However, in permissive environments, this truism does not hold anymore. If you decide to accept the wager, it is not because you believe that the expected utility of accepting it is greater than any other relevant alternative. But, maybe what a Permissivist should say here is that, agents should not act on permissive reasons. That is, while it is permissible for you to adopt either one of these credences in H (.6 or .2), it's better if you don't act as if both of these credences were justified by the evidence (after all, if you do this, then you will surely lose money, which is not good¹⁰). It is also better if you don't act as if only one of these credences were justified on E (after all, you cannot reasonably expect that your action will get you money). So, It's better if you don't act when you are in permissive environments at all! However, you can still adopt any of these credences in H (.6 or .2). Let's evaluate this answer. So, even if one won't dismiss this as an ad hoc move, this line of defense commits OP to an even more bizarre position. Namely: supporters of OP are compelled to cut the link between what one *believes* and what one *does*. All of these looks really bad for OP. In what way a given body of evidence can justify some doxastic response if you are not allowed to act on that belief? So, I conclude that OP encounters serious problems in explaining the link between justified actions and justified beliefs.

The Arbitrariness Objection:

The final argument that I consider against OP is due to White (2005). He argued that forming beliefs in certain permissive environments is not relevantly different to forming beliefs via some arbitrary, random process. White asks the reader to consider a situation that is very similar to this:

A Magical Pill: At t₁, S knows some proposition of the form PEP: evidence E justifies a credence of C in H and a credence of C* in H. At a later time, t₂, S discovers a magical

⁹ $(1 \times .2) + (-1 \times .8) = -.6$.

¹⁰ If you are willing to bet in accordance with these credences, then a Dutch Book can be made against you. You think that H is .6 likely. So, you are willing to bet on H up to 1.5 euro to win 1 euro. On the other hand, if you think that H is .2 likely, then you are willing to bet on ~H up to 4 euro to win 1 euro. If H is true, you will lose 3.5 euro and if ~H is true, you will lose .5 euro.

belief-inducing pill. The pill has the following curious property: if one takes the pill, there is a 50% chance that one will start believing H with confidence C and a 50% chance that one will start believing H with confidence C*.

It should be obvious that to induce a belief via the magical pill is irrational, *even if* a doxastic result of the pill-popping is *guaranteed to be justified* by the evidence. It is irrational because, if S takes the pill, then it is up to a random, arbitrary process which credence S will have in H. It is epistemically problematic to willfully allow some random, arbitrary event to fully determine what you believe. The crucial part of the argument is that, even if S forms her belief in an ordinary way – S makes an epistemic decision to have a credence of C in H because of the evidence that she has – this will be no different from randomly picking one of the two belief-inducing pills. After all, if evidence equally justifies two inconsistent credences in H, and you know this, then it's unexplained what reason you have, except some arbitrary reason, to pick one particular credence instead of another. So, making a doxastic decision in an epistemically permissive environment seems to be no different than to form a belief via the pill-popping method. This, however, is a really bad result for OP. It seems to be obviously true that, the evidence is a better guide to truth than some arbitrary, random processes. Yet, OP is committed to rejecting this truism. If evidence is permissive, in the sense that it equally justifies two inconsistent doxastic responses for the same person, then forming beliefs via the pill-popping method is as good as forming beliefs after careful weighing of the evidence.

How one can respond to this? One way to challenge the argument is to make the distinction between beliefs that are maximally rational, given some evidence, E, and beliefs that are less than maximally rational but still justified or Okay on E. So, according to this line of defense, OP is not in fact committed to the rationality of such a form of arbitrariness. The thought is: permissive evidence should be understood as fully justifying only one doxastic attitude, however, permitting as rationally Okay, other attitudes, as well.

Can this proposal work? I think it cannot. When OP is understood in this way, then it will inevitably collapse into some version of Uniqueness. It will still be the case that there is only one maximally rational response to any given evidence. There is nothing in the formulations of the different versions of Uniqueness which will not enable us to distinguish between maximally justified belief, given some evidence, and beliefs which are simply Okay, given the evidence.

Therefore, such modifications of OP will be self-defeating: OP will collapse into some version of Uniqueness.

Another possible response to the arbitrariness challenge is to accept the conclusions of the argument but to deny that these forms of arbitrariness are epistemically problematic. I do not see any promise in such a response. Philosophers (Schoenfield 2014, Simpson 2016, Titelbaum and Kopec forthcoming), who try to defend Permissivism from the arbitrariness objection do so by re-defining the view in a way that these objections simply do not apply to it. However, because, at this point, we are fully preoccupied with OP and its plausibility, such a move is simply not available. If we re-define OP, then we will talk about another version of Permissivism, not about OP.

So, as we saw, there are some sound considerations which directly cast doubt upon OP. To summarize the problems with OP: it rejects the unidirectional view of the evidence, gives inconsistent recommendations regarding practical decision-making, and endorses the permissibility of arbitrarily formed beliefs. So, we have some excellent reasons to reject OP and endorse Options Uniqueness instead.

To wrap up our long chapter 3: first, I have argued that the Entailment Thesis, when Permissivism is interpreted as OP, is true. Conciliationism will carry a commitment to a version of Uniqueness – Options Uniqueness. Then I showed that this does not establish any significant liability for Conciliationism. This is so for two kinds of reasons:

- (i) Options Uniqueness is a moderate and plausible position.
- (ii) OP is a highly implausible view: there are good reasons to reject OP and endorse OU.

Regarding (i): the basic idea is that, because OU leaves the possibility of interpersonal slack open, this makes a quite moderate position about how slack the requirements of rationality is. Regarding (ii): I showed that OP is susceptible to at least three very serious objections, which, jointly, are more than sufficient for rejecting the view altogether. For these reasons, I conclude that, while the Entailment Thesis is true, when Permissivism is understood as OP says it should, Kelly's larger argument is still defeated: Conciliationism has not been shown to carry a commitment to a problematic version of Uniqueness.

4. Assessing Kelly's Argument against Conciliationism: when Permissivism is interpreted as Background-Relative Permissivism (BP)

In this chapter, I will evaluate Kelly's argument against Conciliationism when Permissivism is understood as Background-Relative Permissivism (BP): for some two agents, S and S*, and a proposition, H, sometimes, the same body of evidence, E, justifies some doxastic attitude, D1, toward H, relative to S's epistemic standards and another doxastic attitude, D2, toward H relative to S*'s epistemic standards. On this interpretation, what Kelly's argument needs to show is that Conciliationism is committed to Background-Relative Uniqueness (BU), i.e., the negation of BP. In what follows, first I explain why BU is, in fact, an extremely strong and unobvious view, or something near enough. Yet, as I argue, this interpretation of the argument still falls short of establishing the liability of Conciliationism. This is so because, when Permissivism is interpreted as BP, the argument, P1-C1, will not be sound anymore. It will involve false premises, P3 and P4. Thus, I conclude that, on both interpretations, Kelly's argument fails to show that Conciliationism commits one to a contentious version of Uniqueness.

4.1. BU is an Extremely Strong and Unobvious View, or Something Near Enough

In this section, I show that the reasons that Kelly gives for thinking that Uniqueness is an extremely strong and unobvious claim, apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to BU, as well. To remind the reader, BU is the view that: for any two agents, S and S* and a proposition, H, it's never the case that, the same body of evidence, E, justifies some doxastic attitude, D1, toward H, relative to S's epistemic standards and another doxastic attitude, D2, toward H, relative to S*'s epistemic standards. So, let's start with the first worry that Kelly has against Uniqueness.

A Challenge from Evidential Slack:

Kelly has claimed that if Uniqueness is true, then there is never any slack between the evidence and a justified response toward it. Is this true of BU? It looks that way. If different epistemic standards are not good enough to allow interpersonal disagreements where both parties adopt justified doxastic attitudes in response to the same evidence, then what is? Given that BU is true, it is exceedingly hard to see how two individuals can hold inconsistent, yet equally justified doxastic attitudes toward the same proposition, and the same body of evidence.

Of course, it's still *conceptually possible* that two people can hold different yet equally justified doxastic attitudes in response to the same body of evidence, when they adopt *the same epistemic standards*. But, as I already said: if different epistemic standards are not good enough to allow certain types of justified interpersonal disagreements, then why should we think that the

same epistemic standards can save this possibility? Thus, we have good reason to think that, if BU is true, then there is never any slack between the evidence and a justified response toward it.

One can retort here by saying that, while BU might not be compatible with the existence of *interpersonal slack*, it can still be compatible with the existence of *intrapersonal slack*. This will not work. Assume for the sake of argument that the impossibility of interpersonal slack does not imply the impossibility of intrapersonal slack. When one assumes this, however, then one will get an absurd result: given any body of evidence, E, there is *at most one* doxastic attitude D1, which is justified toward H *for every agent in the world* and there is an agent, S, and she is justified in adopting D1 toward H as well as some competitor doxastic attitude, D2 toward H. This, however, cannot possibly be true. So, I conclude that BU does not allow any slack between the evidence and what one is justified in believing.

A Challenge from the Degreed Framework of Belief:

Kelly's second objection to Uniqueness is that, it gives some extreme and counterintuitive results when we think of belief in an increasingly fine-grained manner. As we saw from section 3.2. this is not a promising way to attack any version of Uniqueness (I will not reiterate these considerations here. For a more detailed discussion, see pages 18-19). However, dodging one objection will not constitute a big achievement for BU. As we will see, other two objections apply to BU with full force.

A Challenge from Intrapersonal Slack:

The third problem that Kelly raises against Uniqueness has to do with its Interpersonal import. Uniqueness, as Kelly claimed, rejects the possibility of interpersonally inconsistent yet equally justified doxastic attitudes, relative to the same body evidence. This is true of BU as well. As we saw from discussing a challenge from evidential slack, BU rejects the existence of both intrapersonal and interpersonal slack. Therefore, BU is vulnerable to this challenge.

Incompatibility with a plausible view in Epistemology: Subjective Bayesianism:

The fourth worry that Kelly raises against Uniqueness is that it is incompatible with Subjective Bayesianism. This objection, as I show, also applies to BU. I have already written that people (Schoenfield, 2014; Titelbaum and Kopec, forthcoming) model their characterization of epistemic standards in accordance with the prior probability functions employed in Bayesianism. Thus, if prior probabilities are a kind of epistemic standards, then, given UB, it is never the case that doxastic outcomes of different prior probability functions are equally justified. As the

definition of BU goes, no two individual can hold different doxastic attitudes in response to the same evidence, even if they adhere to different epistemic standards. This is contrary to the core of Subjective Bayesianism. Subjective Bayesians, as we saw, claim that multiple prior probabilities are rationally permissible. For this reason, two people, who adhere to different priors, can justifiably evaluate the same body of evidence in a very different way. Therefore, BU is, in fact, not compatible with Subjective Bayesianism.

To recap, there are good reasons to regard BU as an extremely strong and unobvious view (or something near enough). BU rejects the existence of both intrapersonal and interpersonal slack between evidence and justified response toward it and it is incompatible with Subjective Bayesianism. So, if Kelly is successful in establishing the dependency of Conciliationism on UB, this will, in fact, be a significant liability for Conciliatory views.

However, next, I show that Kelly's argument for the Entailment Thesis, when Permissivism is interpreted as BP, is unsound. Its two key premises: P3 and P4, are false. Thus, Kelly larger argument against Conciliationism is still defeated.

4.2. Kelly's Argument for the Entailment Thesis is Unsound: when Permissivism is interpreted as BP

The overall aim of this section is to show that Kelly's argument for the Entailment Thesis is unsound when Permissivism is interpreted as BP. I start by contrasting two different interpretations of Permissive Disagreement. This will enable me to show that the considerations that supported the Entailment Thesis when Permissivism was interpreted as OP, fall short of establishing the same when Permissivism is understood as BP. After this, I show that the key steps in Kelly's argument, premises P3 and P4 are false. Thus, I conclude that this interpretation of the argument, P1-C1, is unsound.

4.2.1. Doubts about Kelly's Argument for the Entailment Thesis

As the reader will remember: when Permissivism is understood as OP, your degree of belief in H is determined by the fact that you recognize PEP: evidence E justifies credence C in H and credence C* in H. The situation will be different when we interpret Permissiveness as BP. Your evidence, at t1, will include:

- (i) The original first-order evidence E.

(ii) The higher-order evidence that E justifies a credence of C in H, relative to epistemic standard S1.

(iii) The higher-order evidence that E justifies a credence of C* in H, relative to epistemic standard S2.

(iv) Your belief that you adopt epistemic standard S1.

Notice that, while (I) and (ii) and (iv) are pertinent in explaining and justifying why your credence stands at C in H, (iii) is not. Your recognition that E justifies a credence of C* in H, relative to epistemic standard S2 does not explain or justify what you believe at t2. This is an important asymmetry between the two readings of Permissive Disagreement. To see this, consider a version of PEP, within the framework of BP:

PEP*: Evidence E justifies a credence of C relative to epistemic standard S1 and a credence of C* in H relative to epistemic standard S2.

Now, given that you, at t1, believe PEP* and adopt epistemic standard S1, you cannot justifiably adopt *any other credence in H*, at t2, *other than credence of C*. The situation is different when Permissivism is interpreted as OP. When one correctly believes PEP, one is free to justifiably adopt either a credence of C in H or a credence of C* in H. PEP both explains and justifies these doxastic responses. Because of this, we concluded that gaining the evidence for one of PEP's conjuncts cannot negatively affect the justification for believing what you do. Why? Because this new evidence nicely fits with what explains and justifies your doxastic behavior at t1 and t2 (for a more detailed discussion see section 3.1.). This gave good support to the third premise of Kelly's argument, i.e., NEG. To remind the reader, NEG says the following:

If (i) at t1 S is justified in adopting doxastic attitude D1 toward proposition H on E and (ii) at t1 S correctly believes that there is another doxastic attitude, D2, which is also justified on E, and (iii) at a later time t2, S is justified in believing that her epistemic peer S* has adopted doxastic attitude D2 toward H on E, then at t2, S *gained no evidence* which *negatively affects justification* of D1 toward H on E.

Kelly used NEG to argue for P4 (if Permissivism is true, then Conciliationism is false). The idea was that: if finding out that S* adopts D2 toward H gives S no evidence which *negatively affects* the justification of the doxastic attitude that S holds, then why conciliate? A peer disagreement can be a reason for conciliation only because it *negatively affects* one's justification

for a disputed proposition. When a peer disagreement does not affect negatively what one believes, then there is no *requirement* to conciliate, as well.

Now, NEG seemed to be obviously true when Permissivism was understood as OP. However, one cannot appeal to a type of considerations which were used in section 3.1. to back up NEG. There is an important asymmetry between the two interpretations of Permissive Disagreement. When Permissivism is understood as BP, the discovery of disagreement, at t_2 , *does not* fit nicely with the basis of your fine-grained doxastic attitude toward H. So, clearly, the evidence of disagreement does not strengthen the justification of your belief. Intuitively, the new piece of evidence that you gain upon discovering the disagreement is not irrelevant either. It should have some impact on whether or not you are justified in continuing to believe what you do. So, if this new piece of evidence neither strengthens the justification of your belief nor it's irrelevant, then we seem to have a *prima facie* reason to think that the discovery of disagreement, at t_2 , should negatively affect the justification for believing what you do (when Permissivism is understood as BP).

While I think the above-given reasoning is sound, it might be too quick to dismiss the Entailment Thesis with these considerations alone. Yet, this still clearly indicates that reasons that were used to back up NEG when Permissivism was understood as OP, fall short of establishing the same results when Permissivism is interpreted as BP. The argument of the next section goes into more depth. I show that not only we lack a good reason for believing NEG, when Permissivism is interpreted as BP, but there are strong reasons for rejecting it.

4.2.2. Conciliationism is Compatible with BP: NEG is False

Here, I push the argument of the previous section further. The basic strategy is as follows: first, I show that when Permissivism is interpreted as BP says it should, then Permissive Disagreement (contrary to what Kelly thinks) will be compatible with Conciliationism. This conclusion, if true, shows that P4 (if Permissivism is true, then Conciliationism is false) is false. Note: P4 follows from P1, P2, and P3. So, if P4 is false, then at least one of these premises should be false as well. As I argue, the culprit is P3 (NEG is true).

Why should we believe that BP and Conciliationism are compatible? As I have already noted, when Permissive Disagreement is understood in accordance with BP, then, at t_1 , your evidence includes the following:

- (i) The original first-order evidence E.
- (ii) The higher-order evidence that E justifies a credence of C in H, relative to epistemic standard S1.
- (iii) The higher-order evidence that E justifies a credence of C* in H, relative to epistemic standard S2.
- (iv) Your belief that you adopt epistemic standard S1.

Further, in the previous section, we have also seen that all these individual pieces of evidence are relevant in explaining and justifying your doxastic behavior at t1, *except* (iii). Given your epistemic standard, S1, and your evidence, E, there is simply no other justified fine-grained doxastic attitude to adopt toward H. You recognize this perfectly well. This is why you adopt a credence of C in H. Having said that, next, I will argue that, when you, at t2, encounter the peer who adopts a different doxastic attitude in H, you, in fact, gain an additional piece of evidence that negatively affects the justification of your belief. Briefly, my argument is that, the evidence of disagreement constitutes, at least, a partial defeater for privileging your epistemic standard over a relevant alternative. The partial defeater is gained upon discovering the actual disagreement. This is so because actual disagreement is more significant, from the epistemic point of view, than merely possible one.

Here is a detailed presentation of my argument: you, in Permissive Disagreement, adopt epistemic standard S1. Because of this, you should believe that your way of reasoning about the given evidence is better (in a sense that it is more truth-conducive) than any relevant alternative. For instance, if your epistemic standards warrant theism instead of agnosticism, then you should also believe that your way of reasoning about the theological issues is more truth-conducive than some alternatives that lead to agnosticism or atheism. If you do not believe this, then it is unexplained what reason you have, except some arbitrary reasons, to be a theist instead of agnostic or atheist. Thus, adopting a particular epistemic standard, S1, commits you to affirming a comparative worth of this standard over any relevant alternatives.

Yet, the fact of disagreement with the epistemic peer, at t2, calls that belief into question. Here is why: an epistemic peer is your epistemic equal, someone who is as likely as you to get it right. When, at t2, you find out that the epistemic peer disagrees with you, a new piece of evidence is gained. It indicates that an alternative way of reasoning about the evidence is more truth-conducive than the one you have favored. Whether or not this new evidence (the discovery

of peer disagreement) should fully defeat the belief in the comparative worth of your epistemic standard depends on further circumstances. The important thing, however, is that, the evidence of peer disagreement constitutes, at least, a partial defeater for the comparative worth of your way of reasoning about the evidence: on balance, a credence of C in H becomes less justified for you than it was before discovering the disagreement.

At this point, one might object in the following manner: if, prior to the disagreement, you already knew that there is an alternative way of reasoning about the same evidence, S2, why does the discovery of the disagreement make you less justified in believing what you do? After all, even prior to disagreement, you knew perfectly well that S2 justifies a competitor doxastic attitude toward H.

Answering this brings me to highlight the epistemic difference between actual and merely possible disagreement: actual disagreement, is more epistemically significant than merely possible disagreement. Why believe this? Here is why: while this piece of evidence - the different epistemic standard, S2, justifies the different credence in H, C* - is irrelevant in explaining or justifying what you believe at t1, the recognition of this is still informative. It indicates that you are a fallible agent. It might be true that, generally, you are a reliable judge of evidence by using your epistemic standards, but, still, you are epistemically imperfect. In most cases, at least, there is always a risk of some epistemic mistake.

Now, while (iii) carries the information that you are sometimes liable to err, it is still perfectly justified for you to believe what your epistemic standard mandates. After all, the fact that some other reasoning method can yield a different doxastic outcome is *consistent* with the belief that you are fallible, non-ideal epistemic agent. It should not surprise us that our way of reasoning about evidence can steer us wrong. Recognition of this is a sign of epistemic maturity, which calls for epistemic modesty and open-mindedness, not for epistemic pessimism and skepticism. So, one can consistently believe H, while recognizing that somebody (even an epistemic peer) could have believed its negation. Yet, the discovery of actual disagreement with an epistemic peer has more epistemic value than the mere recognition that the disagreement is possible. When, at t2, you find out that your epistemic peer adopts the competitor credence in H, based on his epistemic standards, this *not only* flags your *fallibility* but gives you the evidence that you *actually have made some epistemic mistake*. Christensen (2007, 208) has aptly summarized this:

The fact that disagreement by epistemic peers is possible is a constant and inevitable consequence of our being non-ideal thinkers. So the mere possibility of disagreement by peers tells us only what we already

know. Actual disagreement with peers is informative because it provides evidence that a certain possibility – the possibility of our having made an epistemic error – has been actualized. It makes what we already know possible more probable.

Now, Christensen’s basic point can be summarized as follows:

Christensen’s Point: The belief in the mere possibility of disagreement over H is no additional piece of evidence with regard to H, while discovering an actual disagreement is a genuinely new piece of evidence.

Next, I’ll use a formal apparatus of modern Bayesianism in order to argue why Christensen’s Point should be accepted.

First, let me introduce some new definitions. Let B be the proposition: an epistemic peer could have believed $\sim H$. Further, let’s say that, for any arbitrary agent, S, she is fallible with respect to a proposition, H, if S believes B (that is, if S believes that an epistemic peer could have believed $\sim H$). A motivation for the definition is as follows: one is fallible with respect to H, iff the truth of H does not imply that S believes H, i.e., S could have believed H even if H is false. Given that, an epistemic peer is somebody who one justifiably considers a reliable indicator of truth, one should be rationally certain that an actual or possible peer believes $\sim H$.¹¹

Now, if S is rationally certain to be fallible with respect to H, as we think she should, then the probability of H given B, at some time t_1 , denoted as $P_{s, t_1}(H|B)$, equals to 1. From the definition of conditional probability: if $P_{s, t_1}(H|B) = 1$, then $P_{s, t_1}(H|B) = P_{s, t_1}(H)$.¹² Assume that S, at some later time t_2 , has gained evidence of disagreement with her epistemic peer (call this person “J”). She believes $\sim H$, denoted as $J = \sim H$. If $J = \sim H$ is all the evidence that S has gained at t_2 , then her new credence in H should be equal to $P_{s, t_2}(H|J = \sim H)$. Now, $J = \sim H$ is a genuinely new piece of evidence that S gets at t_2 . So, if one claims that there is no epistemically significant difference between actual and merely possible disagreements one is committed to the following: $P_{s, t_2}(H|J = \sim H) = P_{s, t_1}(H)$. This is tantamount to, what might be called, Extreme Steadfastness: the view that, one should always stick to one’s guns upon discovering a peer disagreement.

Why is it, exactly, that $P_{s, t_2}(H|J = \sim H) = P_{s, t_1}(H)$ is equivalent to Extreme Steadfastness? Here is why: the probability of H, for any agent, S, denoted $P_s(H)$, remains the same as the

¹¹ An assumption of rational certainty (in being fallible with respect to H), is inessential to the argument that I’m making. One can assign this belief any degree of confidence one likes. The assumption of rational certainty, which I think is highly justified, just makes things more tidy and easy to follow.

¹² The conditional probability is defined as follows: $P(H|B) = P(H \text{ and } B)/P(B)$. When $P(B)=1$, then we get the following: $P(H|B)=P(H)$.

probability of H given the disagreement with an epistemic peer, denoted $P_s(H|J = \sim H)$. We know from the Bayesian Confirmation Theory that, for any body of evidence E, if $P(H|E) = P(H)$, then evidence E is neutral with respect to H. That is, E does not confirm or disconfirm the given proposition, H. Thus, if peer disagreement over H is neutral with respect to $P_s(H)$, then one is rationally required *not* to change one's original credence in H upon discovering a peer disagreement.

It is worth pausing to highlight just how strong and implausible Extreme Steadfastness is. It is logically stronger than the negation of Conciliationism. The latter is the view that it is *sometimes* permissible to stand firm upon discovering a peer disagreement. Extreme Steadfastness is also logically stronger than, what might be called, the Global Steadfastness, the view that it is *always* permissible to stand firm upon discovering a peer disagreement. By contrast, Extreme Steadfastness does not permit any doxastic conciliation in response to peer disagreement, ever!

The assimilation of the evidential value of actual and merely possible disagreements has this unwelcome consequence because we are *unable* to differentiate an epistemic import of the *old evidence* from a genuinely new piece of evidence. $J = \sim H$ is a new piece of evidence that one gets from the evidence of disagreement. By contrast, the recognition of one's fallibility with regard to H is already there, when one forms one's belief in H. This efficiently shows Christensen's Point: '...the mere possibility of disagreement by peers tells us only what we already know' (ibid), while evidence of disagreement is a new piece of evidence – the evidence that we have actually made some epistemic mistake. Thus, one is required to re-adjust one's credence in a disputed proposition in light of this new piece of evidence. Otherwise one is just ignoring an important piece of evidence that is gained upon the discovery of the disagreement.

To recap: I have argued that when Permissive Disagreement is interpreted in accordance with BP, the discovery of peer disagreement should be epistemically troubling. The evidence of disagreement is evidence against privileging your epistemic standard S1 over the relevant alternative. In order defend this claim, I have highlighted and explained the difference between actual and merely possible disagreements. Thus I concluded that, upon discovering the disagreement, you are, on balance, less justified in standing at C than you were prior to the discovery of the disagreement. For this reason, you are rationally required to make, at least, some doxastic conciliation.

Now, if, at t_2 , the discovery of disagreement calls for, at least some, doxastic conciliation, this means that P4 (if Permissivism is true, then Conciliationism is false) is false: you, in Permissive Disagreement, are rationally required to re-adjust the doxastic attitude in question. As the reader will remember, P4 directly follows from these premises:

P1. Permissive Disagreement is possible iff Permissivism is true.

P2. If Permissive Disagreement is possible and NEG, then Conciliationism is false.

P3. NEG.

Now, if P4 is false, then at least one of these premises should be false as well. So, where did Kelly's argument go wrong? The culprit is P3, i.e., NEG. Here is why. To remind the reader, according to NEG:

No Evidence is Gained (NEG): If (i) at t_1 S is justified in adopting doxastic attitude D1 toward proposition H on E and (ii) at t_1 S correctly believes that there is another doxastic attitude, D2, which is also justified on E, and (iii) at a later time t_2 , S is justified in believing that her epistemic peer S* has adopted doxastic attitude D2 toward H on E, then at t_2 , S *gained no evidence* which *negatively affects justification* of D1 toward H on E.

What the above-given considerations have shown is that, when Permissive Disagreement is interpreted in accordance with BP, then *the consequent* of NEG *does not follow* from the three antecedent conditions. As we saw (from this and the previous section), the evidence of disagreement negatively affects the justification of privileging your epistemic standard, S1, over the relevant alternative. This piece of evidence is not available prior to the discovery of disagreement. Why? Because actual and merely possible disagreements have different evidential value. As we saw from the discussion of Christensen's Point, the mere reflection on the possible disagreement tells us what we already know (or should know). By contrast, encountering an actual flesh-and-blood peer 'makes what we already know possible more probable' (ibid).

To wrap up the section: I've argued that, when Permissive Disagreement is understood in accordance with BP, then encountering the epistemic peer, at t_2 , negatively affects justification of the doxastic attitude that you adopt. The dialectic was as follows: first I showed that upon discovering the actual peer disagreement you gain a partial defeater for privileging your epistemic standard, S1, over a relevant alternative. This, on balance, makes you less justified in adopting a credence of C in H than you were before gaining the evidence of disagreement. Thus, I concluded that (i) BP is perfectly compatible with Conciliationism: discovering the

disagreement, in Permissive Disagreement, calls for, at least, some doxastic conciliation. (ii) NEG is false, when Permissivism is understood as BP: even if prior to disagreement, you knew that there was an alternative way of reasoning about the same body of evidence, the discovery of actual disagreement stills demands doxastic conciliation.

How can one respond to this? Next, I'll consider four objections, which, if successful, will make these conclusions either false or unwarranted.

4.2.3. Objections

Objection 1: how come Conciliationism is not Compatible with OP, yet it is Compatible with BP?

At this point, one might worry that if the above-given argument works in the case when Permissive Disagreement is interpreted in accordance with BP, then it should work when the case is interpreted in accordance with OP, and vice versa: if the argument does not work on one interpretation it should not work on the other interpretation, as well.

Answer:

This objection is not successful. As I've pointed out (see sections 4.2.1. and 4.2.2.), there is an important asymmetry between the two interpretations of Permissive Disagreement. And it is simply not true that any argument for or against some hypothesis, *h*, which works on one interpretation of *h*, should, by default, apply to other interpretations of *h*, as well.

When Permissive Disagreement is interpreted in accordance with OP, the new piece of evidence that you gain, at *t*₂, about the disagreement does not have a negative epistemic import. As I've argued at some length, the basis of your doxastic attitude, PEP, is *additionally confirmed* (or, at least, the justification for holding PEP is not diminished) by finding out that your peer has adopted a credence which PEP also justifies. The situation is very different when the case is interpreted in accordance with BP. The evidence that there exists the different epistemic standard, S₂, which justifies another credence in H, is not *the basis* of your doxastic behavior at *t*₂. Therefore, when you gain a new piece of evidence, *t*₂, it *enriches your evidence* in a way that negatively affects the justification of the doxastic attitude that you have adopted.

Objection 2: A Challenge from the Irrelevancy of Actual Disagreements

Another way to object to my argument against P1-C1 is as follows: it seems that whether or not there is an actual disagreement about some issue is completely irrelevant with regard to how

we should behave doxastically. After all, if the proposition that, free will and determinism is not compatible (I will call this proposition “ p ”) is not currently held by any actual individual, this should not swamp the arguments and evidence in favor of p . Given that there are formidable evidence and reasons in favor of p , it is simply irrelevant whether or not any flesh-and-blood person adopts p . The reasons and evidence in favor of p are all that we should take into account.¹³

Answer:

It is true that my argument relies on the assumption that actual disagreements carry more epistemic weight than merely possible disagreements. So, the objection should be answered.

In order to do this, I will introduce some new definitions. A possible world in which no flesh-and-blood person hold p will be denoted as “W1”. A possible world in which opinions on p are evenly divided between those who affirm p and those who deny it will be denoted as “W2”. The truth value of p is the same in W1 and W2.

Now, as Objection 2 goes, if all evidence and arguments which bear upon p are the same in W1 and W2, then the overall evidential situation should also be the same in these worlds. Therefore, one should conclude that there is no epistemically significant difference between actual and merely possible disagreements.

The problem with this objection is that the term “evidence” is used equivocally: the distinction between first-order and higher-order evidence is blurred. The first-order evidence bears on ordinary propositions, like “Jon is a murderer” or “Free will and determinism is not compatible”. Second-order evidence, in contrast, does not directly bear on an ordinary proposition, but on, what might be called, a higher-order proposition: a proposition about an *evidential relation* between a body of evidence and some ordinary proposition. For instance, the propositions that “Evidence, E, supports that Jon committed a crime” or “E is not a good evidence for incompatibilism” are higher-order propositions. Now, when this distinction is duly recognized, then we can see that evidential situation with respect p is the same in W1 and W2, in the sense that in both possible worlds there is *the same amount of first-order evidence* which bears upon p . This being said, however, it is simply not true that W1 and W2 are also identical with respect to the higher-order evidence relative to p . In W1, there is a massive amount of higher-order evidence, the consensus among epistemic peers, that supports the claim that all first-

¹³ This type of consideration was explicitly articulated by Kelly (2005), in order to argue against Conciliationism.

order evidence in favor of p is *misleading*. Therefore, epistemically relevant evidence for p , in $W1$, is very different than it is in $W2$. For this reason, objection 2 fails as well.

Objection 3: Higher-order evidence is irrelevant

Still, one might retort to what I have said above in the following manner: The answer to objection 2 relies on the fact that higher-order evidence is relevant in assessing whether or not some proposition, H , is justifiably held or not, given one's total evidence. So, maybe first-order evidence is the only kind of evidence that we should be concerned about.

Answer:

This line of objection will not work. It is very easy to construct a case in which two individuals, S and S^* , share all the same first-order evidence, E , that bears upon a given proposition, H , but still, because S has some higher-order evidence E_h , that S^* lacks, their total evidence justify different doxastic attitudes toward H . Consider the following:

Drug: S and S^* are taking part in an experiment. They are placed in different rooms with no means to communicate with each other. At t_1 , they are presented with the logical puzzle: suppose that all pink elephants are happy and John is not happy. The question is, which one must follow from this:

- a. John is not pink.
- b. John is not an elephant.
- c. John is not a pink elephant.

S thinks about the problem and becomes extremely confident that (c) is true. S^* comes to the same conclusion. But, later, S finds out that she was given a drug, that, in 80% of cases, radically diminishes one's ability to reason correctly. The drug, however, does this in a way that its victims still feel quite sharp and do not notice any change in their reasoning ability. S^* is ignorant of this fact. S suspends judgment on the correct answer to the puzzle, while S^* continues to believe that (c) is true.¹⁴

The evidence of the performance diminishing drug is the higher-order evidence. It bears upon whether or not one is justified in thinking that the evidence supports any of the three answers. The first-order evidence, the declarative sentence that, all pink elephants are happy and John is not happy, in fact, implies (c). However, because S has a relevant sort of higher-order evidence,

¹⁴ This type of scenario is due to Christensen (2010).

her justification in believing (c), is defeated. The same is not true of S*. She is not aware of the relevant sort of the higher-order evidence. For this reason, she is still justified in believing that (c) follows from the evidence.

Now, the first-order evidence that S and S* share necessarily entail (c). What the first-order evidence supports *cannot vary* with respect to who is evaluating it. However, S is not justified in believing that (c) is true, while S* is. This is so because they possess different higher-order evidence with regard to the logic puzzle.

This shows that two agents can share all the same first-order evidence, but they can still differ with respect to what they are justified in believing. Thus, the higher-order evidence is relevant in assessing whether or not an agent is justified in believing what she does.

Objection 4: Fragility of Higher-order Evidence

The last objection that I will consider is due to Kelly (2005), as well. He argues that actual and merely possible disagreements should not be given different epistemic weight, because, whether or not one gains evidence about disagreement can depend on contingent and epistemically irrelevant factors. For this reason, the higher-order evidence that depends on social factors, are too fragile to be considered as epistemically relevant. This objection will become more vivid if we picture the following situation:

Community: There is a community that used to spend lots of time reflecting on whether or not free will is compatible with determinism. At some point, there was a massive disagreement on this issue between equally informed and intelligent individuals. This community, however, is ruled by a tyrant, who decided to wipe out all incompatibilists. Some decades after, people forget that incompatibilists ever existed.

Now, because evidence of disagreement can be lost very easily and sometimes by immoral means, this should prompt us to conclude that *actual* disagreements are not more significant than merely possible disagreements.

Answer:

It is hard to see what this objection establishes. It should not be surprising that evidence can be lost or gained through some lucky or epistemically irrelevant events. I know that $\sim(p \text{ and } q)$ is equivalent to $(\sim p \text{ or } \sim q)$. If I had not attended a logic class, I would have been ignorant of this logical truth. Should this diminish my confidence in this belief? Or, maybe, I should not give too much epistemic weight to those beliefs which I acquired through the logic class. After all, It's

possible that I had never gone to that class. It's also possible that, just before my birth, an evil tyrant had killed all logic teachers and burned all logic textbooks.

Of course, this looks preposterous. If I know some proposition, H, because of some event, V, and it is possible that V might not have happened, this shouldn't diminish my confidence in believing H. As White (2010, 597) has put it:

If I hadn't studied philosophy I would not believe that Hume was born in 1711. I would, if not disbelieve it, give little credence to that particular year being his birth date. And in fact I just learned this fact by randomly flipping open one of many books on my shelf and reading where my finger landed. I was lucky indeed to be right on this matter! Of course there is nothing unsettling about this. There is nothing problematic about being lucky in obtaining evidence for one's belief.

But, maybe what is worrisome in attaching more epistemic value to actual disagreements, rather than to merely possible disagreements, is that the evidence of disagreement can be lost by immoral, or ethically problematic ways.

Still, I do not see how this is relevant. Yes, it is an unfortunate fact of life that evidence can be hidden, destroyed or gained by immoral means. This, however, applies to all sorts of evidence. Evidence of disagreement is not, by no means, particularly susceptible to this. If an eyewitness says that John killed Jane, this is a formidable evidence that John, in fact, did it. However, the eyewitness could have been intimidated or killed by John. Should this make us somehow uncomfortable in attaching an epistemic significance to the testimony of the eyewitness? Of course not. So, the fragility of certain kind of evidence should not undercut its epistemic significance.

To recap chapter 4: the overall aim was to show that Kelly's argument against Conciliationism, when Permissivism is interpreted as BP is not successful. First, I gave some reasons to think that if Kelly is successful in establishing the incompatibility between Conciliationism and BP, this would, in fact, be a significant liability for Conciliatory views of disagreement. The negation of BP, i.e., BU is extremely strong and unobvious view (or something close enough). However, next, I've argued that the argument, P1-C1, is unsound when Permissivism is interpreted as BP: on this interpretation of Permissivism, the encounter with the dissenting epistemic peer should negatively affect the justification of what one believes. This concludes my defense of the claim that Kelly's argument fails to pose a problem for Conciliationism.

In the concluding part of the thesis, I will briefly summarize the subject matter of my thesis and outline its central arguments.

Conclusion

In my thesis, I have considered an objection to Conciliationism that has been put forward by Kelly (2010). First, he tries to establish, what I call, the Entailment Thesis: if Conciliationism is true, then Uniqueness is true as well. According to Uniqueness, there is at most one rational doxastic response to any given body of evidence. Uniqueness contrasts with, what has come to known as, Permissivism: sometimes, there is more than one rational doxastic response to a body of evidence. For Kelly, the commitment to Uniqueness is a significant liability, because, as he (*ibid.*, 121) writes, Uniqueness is ‘an extremely strong and unobvious claim’. Thus, Kelly sees the Entailment Thesis as a part of his larger argument that aims to weaken Conciliatory views by connecting it to a controversial position.

In my thesis, I have argued that Kelly cannot achieve both of these desiderata. I showed this by differentiating between two relevant types of Permissivism:

Options Permissivism (OP): There is some agent *S*, given body of evidence *E*, and proposition *H*, such that there is more than one justified doxastic attitude that *S* can take toward *H*.

Background-Relative Permissivism (BP): For some two agents, *S* and *S**, and a proposition, *H*, sometimes, the same body of evidence, *E*, justifies some doxastic attitude, *D1*, toward *H*, relative to *S*’s epistemic standards and another doxastic attitude, *D2*, toward *H* relative to *S**’s epistemic standards.

I have argued that when Permissivism is interpreted as OP, Kelly establishes the Entailment Thesis, yet fails to connect Conciliationism with a contentious version of Uniqueness. By contrast, when Permissivism is understood as BP, his argument for the Entailment Thesis will be unsound.

Thus, I conclude that Kelly’s argument fails to pose a problem for Conciliationism.

Bibliography

- Ballantyne, N., & Coffman, E. J. (2011). Uniqueness, Evidence, and Rationality. *Philosophers' Imprint* 11, 1–13.
- Ballantyne, N., & Coffman, E. J. (2012). Conciliationism and Uniqueness. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 90, 657–70.
- Christensen, D. (2007). Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News. *Philosophical Review* 116, 187–217.
- Christensen, D. (2009). Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy. *Philosophy Compass* 4, 756–767.
- Christensen, D. (2010; 81.1). Higher-Order Evidence. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 185–215.
- Christensen, D. (2011). Disagreement, Question-Begging and Epistemic Self-Criticism. *Philosophers' Imprint* 11, 1-22.
- Christensen, D. (2016). Conciliation, Uniqueness and Rational Toxicity. *Noûs* 50, 584-603.
- Cohen, S. (2013). A Defense of the (Almost) Equal Weight View. In D. Christensen, & J. Lackey (Eds.), *The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays* (pp. 98–120). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Elga, A. (2007). Reflection and Disagreement. *Noûs* 41/3, 478-502.
- Elga, A. (2010). How to Disagree about How to Disagree. In R. Feldman, & T. Warfield (Eds.), *Disagreement* (pp. 175–86). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Feldman, R. (2007). Reasonable religious disagreements. In L. Antony (Ed.), *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life* (pp. 194–214). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Inwagen, P. v. (1996). It is Wrong Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything upon Insufficient Evidence. In J. Jordan, & D. Howard-Snyder (Eds.), *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality*.
- Joyce, J. M. (2010). A defense of imprecise credences in inference and decision making. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 24(1), 381-323.

- Kelly, T. (2005). The epistemic significance of disagreement. In J. Hawthorne, & T. Gendler (Eds.), *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kelly, T. (2010). Peer Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence. In R. Feldman, & T. Warfield (Eds.), *Disagreement* (pp. 111-175). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kelly, T. (2014). Evidence can be permissive. In M. Steup, J. Turri, & E. Sosa (Eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (2nd ed., pp. 298-312). Wiley Blackwell.
- Kopec, M., & Titelbaum, M. G. (2016). The Uniqueness Thesis. *Philosophy Compass* 11, 189-200.
- Kopec, M., & Titelbaum, M. G. (Forthcoming). When Rational Reasoners Reason Differently. In B. Balcerak-Jackson, & B. Balcerak-Jackson (Eds.), *Reasoning: Essays on Theoretical and Practical Thinking*. Oxford University Press.
- Lee, M. (2013). Conciliationism Without Uniqueness. *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 88, 161-88.
- Levinstein, B. (forthcoming). Permissive Rationality and Sensitivity. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, DOI:10.1111/phpr.12225.
- Matheson, J. (2009). Conciliatory Views of Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence. *Episteme*, 6(3), 269-279.
- Matheson, J. (2011). The Case for Rational Uniqueness. *Logos & Episteme* 2, 359-373.
- Matheson, J. (2015). *The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Peels, R., & Booth, A. (2014). Why Responsible Belief Is Permissible Belief. *Analytic Philosophy* 55, 75-88.
- Podgorski, A. (2016). Dynamic permissivism. *Philosophical Studies* 173, 1923-1939.
- Rasmussen, M. S., Steglich-Petersen, A., & Bjerring, J. C. (Forthcoming). A Higher-Order Approach to Disagreement. *Episteme*.
- Rasmussen, M. S., Steglich-Petersen, A., & Bjerring, J. C. (Forthcoming). A Higher-Order Approach to Disagreement. *Episteme*.
- Schoenfield, M. (2014). Permission to Believe: Why Permissivism Is True and What It Tells Us About Irrelevant Influences on Belief. *Noûs* 48, 193-218.
- Simpson, R. M. (2016). Permissivism and the Arbitrariness Objection. *Episteme*, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2016.35>.

- Sosa, E. (2010). The Epistemology of Disagreement. In *Armchair Philosophy*. Princeton: NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Titelbaum, M. G. (2015). Rationality's fixed point (or: In defence of right reason). In J. Hawthorne, & T. Gendler (Eds.), *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* (pp. 253-294). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- White, R. (2005). Epistemic permissiveness. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 445-459.
- White, R. (2014). Evidence Cannot Be Permissive. In M. Steup, J. Turri, & E. Sosa (Eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (Vol. 2nd, pp. 312-23).

Abstract

In my thesis, I defend Conciliationism from an objection first articulated by Kelly (2010). He argues that Conciliationism is not compatible with Permissivism, and, for this reason, Conciliationism commits one to the Uniqueness Thesis (Uniqueness). Kelly sees this as a significant liability, because, as he argues, Uniqueness amounts to an extremely strong and unobvious view. I show that Kelly's argument is ambiguous between two incompatible versions of Permissivism: Options Permissivism and Background-Relative Permissivism. When Permissivism is understood in the former way, Kelly, in fact, establishes that Conciliationism implies a version Uniqueness. However, this version of Uniqueness is a moderate and plausible position. The other reading of Permissivism will be compatible with Conciliationism and will not imply Uniqueness. I conclude that Kelly's argument fails to pose a problem for Conciliationism.

The Thesis title in Estonian:

Kas kontsiliatsioonism on problemaatilises seoses unikaalsusega?

Non-exclusive licence to reproduce thesis and make thesis public

I, Tamaz Tokhadze

1. herewith grant the University of Tartu a free permit (non-exclusive licence) to:

1.1. reproduce, for the purpose of preservation and making available to the public, including for addition to the DSpace digital archives until expiry of the term of validity of the copyright, and

1.2. make available to the public via the web environment of the University of Tartu, including via the DSpace digital archives until expiry of the term of validity of the copyright,

“Does Conciliationism Carry a Problematic Commitment to Uniqueness?”

Supervised by Alexander Stewart Davies

2. I am aware of the fact that the author retains these rights.

3. I certify that granting the non-exclusive licence does not infringe the intellectual property rights or rights arising from the Personal Data Protection Act.

Tartu, 15.05.2017