

Conciliationism and Its Commitments

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Abstract

Conciliationism is often motivated by appealing to intuitive cases. I argue that this is a mistake and obscures the real commitments of the conciliationist. Instead, I motivate conciliationism by appealing to a plausible picture of belief formation and four intuitive principles: the Independence Principle, the Enkratic Principle, the Equal Weight View, and the Opaque Evidence Principle. I see three upshots to this approach. First, it clarifies the nature of conciliationism and shows that it is not committed to, for example, the Uniqueness Thesis. Second, it clarifies the positions of the opponents of conciliationism. Third, it easily incorporates non-ideal cases, such as cases where interlocutors are not peers.

1 Introduction

Conciliationists argue that in cases of peer disagreement one should revise one's opinion in the direction of the opinion of one's peer. They often motivate their position by appealing to a number of intuitive, well-established cases in which belief revision is clearly called for. In this paper, I argue that this strategy for defending conciliationism is a mistake. Instead, I motivate conciliationism by appealing to a plausible picture of belief formation. By doing so, I hope to clarify the precise commitments of the conciliationist.

Here's how I'll proceed. In section two, I'll describe the usual method for motivating conciliationism and discuss some problems with this method. In section three, I will give a brief sketch of the picture of belief formation that I think is sufficient for defending conciliationism. In section four, I'll extract the precise commitments of conciliationism from this picture by showing which parts of the picture the most frequent objections to conciliationism deny. I'll close in section five by discussing some further advantages to motivating conciliationism this way.

2 The Standard Defense of Conciliationism

As mentioned above, conciliationists have traditionally appealed to highly intuitive cases in order to motivate their view. Here's one¹ such case:

Mental Math: You and a friend are eating at a restaurant. You have eaten at this restaurant with your friend many times before, and you always split the check at the end of the meal. Most of the time, you and your friend agree about how much each person's shares are after calculating the tip. When you disagree, you and your friend are each right about 50% of the time. This time, you receive the check and calculate the tip and shares in your head, then announce to your friend that each person owes \$26. Your friend (who has also calculated the tip and shares in his head) disagrees; he thinks each person owes \$28. You know your friend is not drunk or suffering from any other cognitive impairment, nor are you.²

There's good reason to try to motivate conciliationism by means of cases like Mental Math. For there's nearly universal agreement that in Mental Math and other related idealized cases, conciliation is obviously called for. Given the way the case is set up, how could you maintain that \$26 is the correct answer while discounting your friend's answer? Intuitively, you should become equally confident in your friend's view until you are able to resolve the disagreement (perhaps by recourse to a calculator).

Furthermore, crossing the bridge from intuitive cases to a full-fledged conciliatory theory is relatively easy. All that is required is to describe the conditions that must obtain to make a disagreement identical in the relevant ways to the cases. Usually, this takes the form of giving some definition of *peerhood* in terms of ability and access to evidence. Once the relevant conditions are specified, the conciliationist can draw a general epistemic theory that looks something like:

Conciliationism: In a revealed peer disagreement over p , each thinker should give at least some weight to her peer's attitude. That is, each thinker's confidence should change to some extent: neither thinker is justified in staying exactly as confident as she initially was regarding whether p .³

¹Oppy (2010) provides a good list of the cases commonly found in the literature.

²This example resembles Christensen (2007, 193).

³This definition belongs to Ballantyne and Coffman (2012, 657).

In many cases, conciliationism is spelled out in stronger terms; it's not just that "each thinker's confidence should change to some extent," but rather that each thinker should suspend judgment on the issue at hand or adopt the average of the credences at play in the disagreement.

Here's one rough way to spell out the peerhood requirement: two people are epistemic peers regarding the relation of a total body of evidence⁴ E to a proposition p if and only if they are equally likely to form a rational belief about p on E . I should consider you my peer with respect to a proposition if I am justified in believing both that we have a shared total body of evidence and that we are equally skilled, intelligent, reliable, etc. when it comes to issues like p . In short, "epistemic peers are equally likely to get it right."⁵

That settles the *peer* part of peer disagreement. What counts as a disagreement? For two peers to disagree, they must take different *doxastic attitudes* toward the proposition in question. As I've already hinted, doxastic attitudes are generally formulated either in terms of coarse-grained states (belief, disbelief, withholding belief, and suspension of judgment)⁶ or in terms of fine-grained credence levels - levels of confidence or subjective probabilities.⁷ To remain at an intuitive level, I'll usually talk in terms of the coarse-grained states here.

2.1 Some Problems for the Standard Defense

There's no doubt that the standard way of motivating conciliationism is effective. In fact, it's so effective that conciliationism has been granted a sort of "default status"⁸ in the literature, at least insofar as most articles are focused on the truth or implications of conciliationism. Since virtually everyone shares the intuitions about the idealized cases, it's easy to feel the force of the conciliatory position. Even so, the standard defense faces some serious problems and ambiguities. I'll briefly describe three.

First, this way of motivating conciliationism turns it into a general epistemic principle apart from other principles. But this way of looking at things makes conciliationism subject to being refuted by a single counterexample.

⁴On the nature of evidence, see Conee and Feldman (2008). I'm inclined to think that 'total body of evidence' can be accounted for by any plausible theory of evidence. Whatever a total body of evidence is, however, it must be able to be shared. See Ballantyne and Coffman (2011, 2) for one way to understand sharing evidence on any theory of evidence.

⁵Matheson (2009, 270).

⁶E.g. Feldman (2006).

⁷E.g. Christensen (2007).

⁸This terminology is borrowed from Lee (2013, 162).

Indeed, all the opponent of conciliationism needs to do to reject it is to describe a single case of peer disagreement in which conciliation is intuitively not called for.⁹ The conciliationist can, of course, deny the possibility of the described case or chisholm the principle by adjusting the definition of peerhood (for example), but with either move conciliationism obviously loses some of its intuitive plausibility.¹⁰

The second worry for conciliationists is related. In describing conciliationism as a general principle, conciliationists obscure the genuine commitments that conciliationism carries with it. It is frequently asserted, for example, that the conciliationist is committed to the *Uniqueness Thesis*, which states that a body of evidence makes exactly one doxastic attitude toward a proposition uniquely rational.¹¹ The Uniqueness Thesis is a serious (and implausible, in the eyes of many) theoretical commitment, and many conciliationists are hesitant to concede that it is true. When conciliationism is formulated as a principle, however, there are good arguments to be made in favor of its commitment to the Uniqueness Thesis. As I will argue later, on my way of viewing conciliationism there are no intuitively implausible commitments.

To put this worry about commitment in a different way, the conciliatory principle does not say anything about *why* conciliation is called for in cases of peer disagreement. It's unclear what sort of justificatory machinery is operating behind the scenes in a disagreement. So one might worry that the conciliationist is just saying that the whole body of evidence ultimately favors a conciliated doxastic attitude, bringing along a commitment to evidentialism. Even if this commitment is considered acceptable, one still might wonder why the evidence does favor a conciliated attitude, when prior to the disagreement it favored one of the disagreeing peer's original position. The principle is silent on such issues, leading to serious ambiguities in the conciliatory position.¹²

The third worry for the standard defense involves the idealization of peerhood and evidence. The opponent of conciliationism can plausibly argue that the idealized condition of peerhood is never or only rarely met.¹³ The conciliationist has few resources for making judgments about what to

⁹One example of such a case is the permissive case given in Kelly (2010, 118-119).

¹⁰See Feldman (2009), where it is argued that there are no principles about disagreement aside from the most general epistemic principles. My worry about describing conciliationism as a principle mirrors Feldman's own.

¹¹See Kelly (2010, 119-121).

¹²Note to self: Rewrite this paragraph.

¹³For an argument along these lines regarding moral disagreements, see Vavova (2014).

do in cases of almost-peer disagreement or in cases of disagreement with incompletely shared bodies of evidence. After all, no intuitive cases of this sort have yet been given by conciliationists. Since the principle only applies to the idealized cases, the conciliationist is left without a response to the majority of real-world instances of disagreement. But conciliationism is often intended to be a kind of practical, easily-applicable principle for when we encounter disagreement. It instead starts looking more like a theoretical construct with little to say about real life.

None of these complaints are knockdown arguments against the standard way of motivating conciliationism. But they do point to a serious flaw with the usual defense: conciliationists have not made the nature of conciliationism entirely clear. In the next three sections, I hope to remedy this defect. I'll begin with a quick and rough sketch of my own way of motivating conciliationism.

3 The New Defense of Conciliationism

Consider how we usually form beliefs. We encounter evidence, and that evidence seems to us to support various propositions. I see a tree and (most often implicitly or dispositionally) form the belief "There is a tree right there." I read several papers with arguments about the nature of free will and responsibility, and I form the belief "Compatibilism is false." If you ask me why I think compatibilism is false, I'll respond by citing the arguments that I found persuasive, giving reasons why I think the arguments in favor of it are not persuasive, and so on. If you ask me why I think there's a tree right there, I'll tell you that I see a tree right there. We don't intend to form beliefs in the absence of any evidence whatsoever; if you ever ask me why I believe something, and I find that I can't cite any evidence or reasons for my belief, I'm inclined to abandon that belief until I can find reasons for it.¹⁴

Evidence that supports a proposition is *first-order* evidence for that proposition. This is the kind of evidence that we most often deal with. But there's another kind of evidence: *higher-order evidence*.

¹⁴Note that I am not here committing myself to evidentialism, if evidentialism is the view that the justificatory facts about our beliefs are determined entirely by the evidence that we have. I'm merely describing the phenomenon of forming a belief and talking about it. Even if you are, e.g., a reliabilist about justification, you should still agree that we form beliefs on the basis of evidence. When I ask you why you believe something, you don't say "I formed that belief with a reliable process," even if this is the explanation for why your belief is justified. We *just do* cite reasons for our beliefs.

Higher-Order Evidence: Higher-order evidence for a proposition p is first-order evidence for the proposition “The evidence supports the adoption of doxastic attitude D toward p .”

Suppose that after I tell you I believe there’s a tree there because I see a tree there, you ask me why I think my seeing a tree there supports there being a tree there. I’ll tell you a number of things about reliability and track-record: in the past, when I’ve seen a tree, there has been a tree; perception is for the most part reliable when it comes to seeing trees; most people think seeing a tree is good evidence for there being a tree. All these reasons will be higher-order evidence for the proposition “There is a tree right there.” Put another way, higher-order evidence is like the ‘link’ between our first-order evidence and our beliefs. It tells us why that first-order evidence supports (or fails to support) our beliefs.

Whenever I form a belief that p , I possess some higher-order evidence. In typical cases without disagreement, my higher-order evidence for my beliefs consists in my knowledge of my reliability when determining what the evidence supports, my evidence about how I should weigh various kinds of evidence, and my own view (my “intellectual seeming”) about what the evidence seems to support. Let’s call the conjunction of these pieces of evidence (and related higher-order evidence that I may have) my *higher-order bundle*. Ostensibly, the entirety of my higher-order evidence is my higher-order bundle for most cases without disagreement.

Now consider a case of peer disagreement. I consider you my peer about matters like p and I believe p . You and I discuss p , making sure to share our evidence, and then you tell me that you disbelieve p . What evidence do I receive from this report? While the fact that you disbelieve p is first-order evidence for not- p , the most important thing that happens is that I gain new higher-order evidence. You and I disagree about what the evidence supports. Your higher-order bundle supports the proposition “The evidence does not support p ,” whereas my higher-order bundle supports the proposition “The evidence supports p .” After your report, my total higher-order evidence includes not just my own higher-order bundle, but yours as well. But what does this total body of higher-order evidence support?

Well, you’re my peer, and it seems like peers have equally weighty higher-order bundles. So when I weigh my higher-order evidence, I should accord just as much weight to your bundle as to my own. Since our bundles support opposite propositions, it seems like they’ll cancel each other out. In other words, my higher-order evidence after disagreement becomes neutral or counterbalanced with respect to the proposition “The evidence supports

p .” Given that, in the first place, I intended my belief to accord with the evidence, now that I don’t think it accords with the evidence it seems I should abandon my belief. Nor does your belief accord with the evidence; according to the higher-order evidence, the first-order evidence supports neither p nor not- p . So it seems I should suspend judgment on p .

We’ve arrived at a conciliatory conclusion. I’ve tried to give a highly plausible description of the evidential situation of a person before and after disagreement. That description seems to clearly support conciliationism. So it seems like the opponent of conciliationism will need to deny some part of the description. Indeed, this is precisely what we find the opponents of conciliationism doing, albeit rarely explicitly. In the next section, I’ll discuss the disputable parts of my description by focusing on the major objections to conciliationism. In the course of this discussion, four key commitments of the conciliationist will be made clear. It is my view that the conjunction of these four commitments is sufficient for establishing conciliationism.

4 Objections and Commitments

Here’s how the discussion will go. I’ll give an objection to my descriptive picture. I’ll then identify the plausible commitment of the conciliationist that rebuts the objection. I’ll conclude the explanation of each commitment with a brief note on what sort of things the conciliationist will need to say more about to have more than a *prima facie* case in favor of the commitment.

4.1 The Independence Principle

Here’s how one response to my description might go. “Sure,” says the non-conciliationist, “you *could* take your peer’s higher-order bundle at face value and so suspend judgment. But there’s another option. Your peer telling you that they disagree with you is evidence not that you were wrong about p , but rather that you were wrong about her being your peer. Once she tells you she disagrees with you, you get evidence that she’s not your peer. So you should demote her status and be steadfast in your original belief.”

The idea here should be pretty clear. Why not just take the disagreement as evidence that your peer made a mistake and therefore was not, after all, just as likely as you to get the right answer? The conciliationist denies that this is a legitimate way to demote a peer. In other words, the conciliationist is committed to the *Independence Principle*:

The Independence Principle: In evaluating the epistemic

credentials of an epistemic peer’s expressed belief about p , in order to determine how (or whether) to modify my own belief about p , I should do so in a way that doesn’t rely on the reasoning behind my initial belief about p .¹⁵

The intuitive force behind the Independence Principle is that it would be in some sense question-begging to demote a peer in the way just described. For to think that someone is my peer regarding p seems to be to think that, *even if we disagree*, we’re equally likely to get it right about p . To then cast doubt on this view that the person is my peer just on the basis of the disagreement seems plainly irrational.

We can strengthen the case for the Independence Principle by considering a situation where I’m dealing with a superior (someone who, in my view, is more likely than I am to get it right) than a peer. Consider this line of reasoning: “Well, I thought Dr. X was my superior regarding matters like p - indeed, he’s widely recognized as the foremost expert in the field of p . But he thinks p and I think not- p . I guess he isn’t my superior after all, since p isn’t true. I must be his superior.” There is obviously a serious worry with permitting this kind of reasoning. The Independence Principle, which prevents this reasoning and the analogous reasoning about peers, therefore seems more plausible than its denial.

Nevertheless, the conciliationist still has some work to do. For one, it’s not clear what counts as “the reasoning behind my initial belief.” Put another way, what sort of reasoning might I have access to beyond my initial reasoning? After all, it seems like peer demotion must be justified in some cases - “once a peer, always a peer” doesn’t make much sense. What do these cases look like? Finally, Errol Lord has persuasively argued that there are cases where the original evidence is so strongly in favor of your own view that you’re justified in demoting anyone who disagrees with you.¹⁶ The conciliationist will have to demonstrate that there are no such cases.

4.2 The Equal Weight View

According to some, the necessity of self-trust trumps considerations of peerhood.¹⁷ The idea is this: we are entitled to give our own views priority over the views of others, either because without self-trust we would be unable to believe anything at all or because our own beliefs are relevantly different

¹⁵This definition is close to Christensen’s formulation in Christensen (2011, 1-2).

¹⁶See Lord (2014).

¹⁷I am thinking here of the sorts of positions argued for in Wedgwood (2010) and Schafer (2015).

from the beliefs of others in the way they function as evidence for us. In order to function as an epistemic agent, I must be “egocentric” and privilege my own views over the views of others. Thus, in a peer disagreement, my view trumps the view of my peer (and my peer’s view trumps my view for her own deliberation). I therefore don’t have to suspend judgment.

In contrast to this line of thinking, the conciliationist is committed to the *Equal Weight View*:

The Equal Weight View: One should give equal weight to the higher-order bundle of a peer and to one’s own higher-order bundle.¹⁸

Seasoned veterans of the disagreement debate may be surprised to find that I am identifying the Equal Weight View as a commitment of the conciliationist. For it is usually thought that the Equal Weight View is a strong formulation of conciliationism itself.¹⁹ Conflating conciliationism and the Equal Weight View, however, is a mistake. One can endorse the idea that equal weight should be given to a peer’s opinions while denying one (or several) of the other commitments that I am giving here, and the result will not be a conciliatory position. The point is that the Equal Weight View does not have any normative force when it comes to adjusting your own view in the face of disagreement. It simply says how two pieces of evidence – the higher-order bundles of peers – should be weighed.

Just given the definition of peerhood, the Equal Weight View should seem extremely intuitive. Peers, by definition, are equally likely to get things right. So it seems their their respective results when considering a body of evidence are equally likely to be right, and if they are equally likely to be right, then they should be given the same weight when it comes to probabilistically determining what the higher-order evidence ultimately supports.

The conciliationist also has a ready response to the proponent of self-trust. No doubt self-trust is essential for our operating as epistemic agents! But self-trust applies just as well to my judgment that someone is my peer.

¹⁸This definition is close to Kelly’s from his Kelly (2010, 112).

¹⁹Here’s a short list of papers in which this mistake is made: Cohen (2013), Ballantyne and Coffman (2012), Kelly (2010), and Jehle and Fitelson (2009). When Elga first formulated the Equal Weight View in Elga (2007) he also conflated conciliationism and the Equal Weight View. But since Elga was the first to use the name “Equal Weight View,” and since he did not define it in the same way as I have done here, I do not think it is correct to call his conflation a mistake – rather, he simply misleadingly named his position.

By calling you my peer, I'm saying that if we disagree, it's just as likely that you're right as it is that I'm right. To maintain my opinion in the face of disagreement, then, is to undermine the self-trust I should have in my evaluations of peerhood. In other words, other-trust is founded on self-trust and should therefore be accredited the same status as self-trust.

More needs to be said to fully rid ourselves of worries about self-trust. We might, for example, wonder if calling someone a peer is fundamentally a violation of self-trust, for it too readily admits of fallibility. In other words, we might think that all evaluations of others should be slightly "downgraded" so as to privilege our self-trust. The conciliationist will have to show that it is not the case that we need to privilege our self-trust in this way, or more ideally, that there is in fact a great epistemic virtue in freely considering others our peers.

4.3 The Enkratic Principle

A number of epistemologists have recently argued that epistemic *akrasia* is sometimes rational.²⁰ Epistemic *akrasia* occurs when there is a mismatch between what one is justified in believing on the higher-order and what one is justified in believing on the first-order; we can receive *misleading* evidence about what the evidence supports. And this is just what happens in cases of peer disagreement. Assume that you believe p and the evidence really does support p . Then I, your peer, tell you that the evidence supports not- p . According to these epistemologists, here's what happens: your higher-order evidence no longer supports "The evidence supports p ." But your first-order evidence still supports p . So you should abandon your belief that the evidence supports p , but continue believing p .

The conciliationist denies that this mismatch can ever be rational. She is committed to the *Enkratic Principle*:

The Enkratic Principle: One must rationally believe that the evidence supports p in order to rationally believe p . One must rationally believe that the evidence is neutral with respect to p in order to rationally suspend judgment on p .

The intuition behind the Enkratic Principle stems from the seeming irrationality behind saying " p , but the evidence doesn't support p ." Or even worse: " p , but the evidence supports not- p ." If I am right in stating that we have proportioning our beliefs to the evidence as an epistemic goal, we

²⁰See, e.g., Lasonen-Aarnio (2014), Coates (2012), and Rotondo (2013).

should find something deeply troubling about these sorts of statements. And indeed, there is a clear incoherence in the epistemic akratic's views. Suppose that I once believed that the evidence supported p but after engaging in a peer disagreement no longer believe this, while maintaining my belief in p . If you ask me why I believe p , what can I say? It seems like I'd have to say something like this: "Well, I once would have cited a number of reasons for believing p . Those reasons were why I formed the belief that p in the first place. But after a recent disagreement, I no longer believe that those reasons really support p . But still: p !" This line of reasoning – if it can even be called reasoning – seems extremely implausible.

The challenge for the conciliationist with respect to the Enkratic Principle is in showing just how higher-order evidence exerts its influence on first-order evidence. The natural impulse is to appeal to a notion of defeat: a higher-order attitude will defeat the first-order evidence. But specifying this notion of defeat is much harder than it may at first seem.²¹ Indeed, it might ultimately appear that the conciliationist will have to claim the higher-order evidence actually acts as first-order evidence that just weighs more than the rest of the first-order evidence. But this view may be subject to some of the bootstrapping worries introduced by Tom Kelly.²²

4.4 The Opaque Evidence Principle

²³ Here's a final objection to the motivating description that I have appealed to. The opponent of conciliationism may argue that, while it's true that higher-order and first-order attitudes should match, we lack reason to suppose that the first-order attitude should be adjusted rather than the higher-order attitude. Perhaps, that is, first-order evidence is actually to some extent *transparent* about what it supports.²⁴ The higher-order evidence does not, then, just include my higher-order bundle; it includes the first-order evidence itself! The idea is that the evidence I gain from seeing a tree is itself evidence for the proposition "the evidence (i.e. this piece of evidence) supports the proposition 'there is a tree here' " in addition to being evidence for the proposition "there is a tree here." If the first-order evidence also counts as higher-order evidence, then I've misdescribed what

²¹See Lasonen-Aarnio (2014) for a persuasive argument against the notion of defeat.

²²See Kelly (2010, 125-132).

²³This section needs quite a bit of work! I would be especially interested in hearing your intuitions about this idea and any arguments you can come up with.

²⁴I think that this is the view Kelly has in mind when he talks about "upward" epistemic push in Kelly (2010, 159).

happens in disagreement. For our higher-order bundles cancel each other out, but what is left in the higher-order evidence is the original evidence itself, which does support p or not- p . So the right response to disagreement is not conciliation, but rather adopting whatever the evidence supported in the first place.²⁵

The conciliationist has to deny that this is possible. So the conciliationist is committed to the *Opaque Evidence Principle*:

The Opaque Evidence Principle: Evidence is completely opaque about what it supports.

What can we say in favor of the Opaque Evidence Principle? Well, it just seems clear that, say, an argument in favor of compatibilism is not itself an argument in favor of the proposition that the evidence supports compatibilism. To be clear, I'm not denying that evidence does in fact support something. That is undisputed: an argument in favor of compatibilism does in fact support compatibilism. It just doesn't support that it supports compatibilism. Instead, the evidence for higher-order beliefs is entirely determined by psychological facts about us as believers. If our higher-order bundles are empty of content, then we won't be justified in believing any higher-order propositions. After all, suppose that after reflecting on a body of evidence, you had no intuitions about what the evidence supported and no beliefs have how evidence of this sort ought to be weighed, and you had no track-record of evaluating evidence like this. Doesn't it just seem clear that you're not justified in believing anything about what the evidence supports, even if the evidence in fact supports something?

For what it's worth, it appears to me that the commitment of the conciliationist to the Opaque Evidence Principle has so far gone completely unnoticed by epistemologists. This stands in contrast to the other three commitments that I have given here, all of which have received at least moderate attention in the literature. The main challenge for the conciliationist is therefore simply to find ways to defend the principle's plausibility.

²⁵The opponent of conciliationism could argue that evidence is not fully transparent. In this case, *some* conciliation might be called for, but the point is that the first-order evidence will still play a substantial role after the disagreement.

5 Advantages for the New Defense of Conciliationism

I've identified four key commitments for the conciliationist. It's my opinion that these four commitments are sufficient to establish a conciliatory position; the conciliationist need not be committed to anything else. I've also tried to argue that each commitment is at least *prima facie* more plausible than its denial. If I'm right about all this, then I've established that conciliationism is *prima facie* more plausible than its denial – the same conclusion that the standard defense establishes. So my new defense is at least as good as the standard defense.

But in fact, I think it's better than the standard defense, and for three reasons. First, it clarifies the nature of conciliationism and shows that it is not committed to, for example, the Uniqueness Thesis. Second, it clarifies the positions of the opponents of conciliationism. Third, it easily incorporates non-ideal cases, such as cases where interlocutors are not peers. I'll briefly argue for each of these ideas.

5.1 Conciliatory Non-Commitments

As it should be clear by now, I don't think the conciliationist is committed to any implausible principles or views. This stands in contrast to one widespread idea in the literature. For it is frequently thought that the conciliationist is committed either to the Uniqueness Thesis or something even more implausible than the Uniqueness Thesis:

The Uniqueness Thesis: For a given body of evidence and a given proposition, there is some one level of confidence that it is uniquely rational to have in that proposition given that evidence.²⁶

Here's the impulse for thinking that the conciliationist is committed to the Uniqueness Thesis. There are some cases in which conciliationism is very obviously not called for, but these cases are not possible if the Uniqueness Thesis is true. The cases I have in mind look like this: suppose that you and I (peers) disagree about p , but I think that we are both perfectly rational, and you think that we are both perfectly rational, and we are both right about this. What plausibility is there to the idea that we should conciliate

²⁶This matches the definition in Kelly (2010, 119).

about p ? None whatsoever, it seems.²⁷ But conciliationism says we should conciliate. So if this case is possible, then conciliationism is wrong. So if conciliationism is right, then this case is not possible, and therefore the Uniqueness Thesis is true.

On my way of looking at things, we need not be tempted by this argument. The picture that I've used to motivate conciliationism plainly shows that we don't need to conciliate in this case. Think about what's going on in terms of higher-order evidence: you're reporting that your higher-order bundle supports both "The evidence supports p " and "The evidence supports not- p ." I report the same thing to you. What does our higher-order evidence support after our respective reports? Quite clearly, it still supports both propositions. But then belief in p is still rational and belief in not- p is still rational. So there's no reason at all to conciliate. This explanation of the case strikes me as eminently plausible. The standard defense of conciliationism doesn't have access to this explanation, however, since it puts conciliationism forward as a general principle for which there can be no counterexamples.

5.2 Conciliatory Opponents

One of my aims in clarifying the commitments of conciliationism is to also clarify the nature of the objections to conciliationism. If I am right that these four commitments are jointly sufficient for conciliationism, then any worthwhile objection to conciliationism will have to target one of these four commitments. I hope I have already shown how several of the major objections do in fact target these commitments, even if the authors of the objections have not explicitly put things in such terms.

Clarifying the nature of the objections is really no service for the opponents of conciliationism, however. If the conciliationist can identify the commitment that an objection targets, then the conciliationist can better defend conciliationism from the objection. After all, the conciliationist can focus her defense on the targeted commitment and show how the intuitive nature of that commitment rebuts the objection. Of course, it may well turn out that there are decisive arguments against one or more of the commitments. Such arguments will be equally decisive against conciliationism. But if conciliationists have any hope against the strongest objections to their view, it'll be through specifying the precise nature of the objections in terms of the core commitments.

²⁷Well, David Christensen has recently argued that there might be some reason to conciliate in this case. See Christensen (2014).

5.3 Non-Idealized Cases

As I noted when discussing the standard defense, the conciliationist apparently has some trouble with saying much about cases in which the standard for peerhood is not met. The new defense does not suffer from this defect. The account of higher-order evidence that I have specified in the new defense applies even in cases where someone is slightly my inferior. Here's how that sort of case should look. Suppose that I'm slightly your inferior regarding p and you find out that we disagree about p . How should you revise your belief? Well, it simply depends on how likely you initially thought it was that I would be right instead of you. So if prior to the disagreement you thought I was only 80% as likely as you to be right about the proposition, then my higher-order bundle should only weigh 80% of what your higher-order bundle weighs in your total higher-order evidence. This may still call for conciliation – if we are thinking of doxastic attitudes in terms of credences, then it will certainly involve you adjusting your credence to one that is somewhat closer to mine – but not as radical conciliation as in the peer case.²⁸

The lesson to be drawn from the ability of the new defense to handle non-idealized cases is as follows. The four commitments I've given are not really about peer disagreement at all. Instead, they are principles about evidence. The Independence Principle states what sort of evidence is admissible when deciding if someone is your peer. The Equal Weight View states how higher-order bundles are to be weighed. The Enkratic Principle states what sort of pressure higher-order evidence puts on first-order beliefs. The Opaque Evidence Principle states that first-order evidence doesn't put any pressure on higher-order beliefs. Because these commitments are not specifically dealing with disagreement, their implications for non-idealized cases are much clearer than the implications of a general conciliatory principle. Indeed, their implications for epistemology outside of the peer disagreement debate entirely are much clearer than the implications of a general conciliatory principle.

6 Conclusion

Here's what I take myself to have done. I've given some problems with the standard defense of conciliationism. These problems, as I said, are

²⁸Of course, this view of non-peer disagreement is nothing new. It was articulated as early as Elga (2007). But I do think there is a case to be made for saying that this view is far more motivated by the new defense than it could be by the standard defense.

not damning, but they are worrisome enough to encourage us to look at a new defense of conciliationism. I've given just that sort of a new defense by identifying conciliationism in terms of four commitments paired with an unproblematic distinction between first-order and higher-order evidence. The new defense is not a knock-down argument in favor of conciliationism; each of the four commitments requires a much more sophisticated defense than the intuitive, *prima facie* reasons for accepting them that I've given here. But the new defense does make conciliationism a highly plausible position. Furthermore, it has several benefits over the standard defense and no glaring deficiencies. The new defense is therefore a more promising route for motivating conciliationism than the standard defense.

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