RESOLUTE CONCILIATIONISM

By John Pittard

'Conciliationism' is the view that disagreement with qualified disputants gives us a powerful reason for doubting our disputed views, a reason that will often be sufficient to defeat what would otherwise be strong evidential justification for our position. Conciliationism is disputed by many qualified philosophers, a fact that has led many to conclude that conciliationism is self-defeating. After examining one prominent response to this challenge and finding it wanting, I develop a fresh approach to the problem. I identify two levels at which one may show epistemic deference—the level of one's credences and the level of one's reasoning—and show that in disagreements over conciliationism, deference at one level results in non-deference at the other. A commitment to epistemic deference therefore does not provide a rational reason to reduce confidence when conciliationism itself is disputed. After presenting the case for 'resolute conciliationism', I address two objections.

Keywords: disagreement, conciliationism, self-defeat.

I. INTRODUCTION

Most of us can point to some proposition that we believe with confidence despite the fact that many people who seem as qualified as ourselves to assess the proposition's plausibility hold it to be false. According to 'conciliationists', such confidence in the face of informed disagreement is prima facie irrational: if dispute-independent considerations strongly support the conclusion that my disputants are just as qualified and well positioned to assess the disputed proposition as those on my side of the dispute, then (absent mitigating factors) I ought to adopt a level of confidence that gives significant weight to the views of my disputants.[1] But this conciliatory position seems to impugn itself. For however strong the arguments for conciliationism may be, many apparently qualified and informed philosophers remain unconvinced (e.g., Bergmann 2009; Enoch 2010; Kelly 2010). It would seem, then, that according to the conciliationists' own theory, they cannot reasonably maintain a confident belief in this theory

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[1] This characterization of 'conciliationism' is most directly inspired by Christensen (2011). For arguments in favour of conciliatory positions, see Christensen (2007), Elga (2007) and Feldman (2006). The term 'conciliationism' is taken from Elga (2010).

and perhaps ought to abandon it altogether. What's worse, some have argued that a conciliatory norm that can impugn itself in this way will in some situations issue inconsistent advice and is for this reason positively incoherent (Elga 2010; Weintraub 2013). If this is right, then even a modest conciliatory view will be unable to command rational assent if it is so much as possible for that view to be applied to itself. One response to these pressing objections to conciliationism would be to endorse a conciliatory norm that requires conciliation in most disagreements but not in disagreements where conciliationism itself is at issue. Such a self-exempting norm would seem to avoid problems associated with actual or potential self-undermining. But restricting the scope of conciliationism in this way seems unacceptably arbitrary: Why, after all, should conciliationism be the sole topic where disagreement has no sceptical implications?[2]

Elga (2010) has recently attempted to defend self-exempting conciliationism against this arbitrariness objection. Unfortunately for the conciliationist, Elga fails to properly characterize the arbitrariness objection, and his discussion ultimately does not provide the resources for meeting it. But I will argue that, despite Elga's failure to meet the objection, he is nonetheless correct that the resolute conciliationist who remains firm in disagreements over conciliationism need not be unacceptably arbitrary. As I will seek to show, the conciliationist who remains firm in a dispute over conciliationism is being no less deferential to her disputant than one who decreases her confidence in conciliationism. A commitment to epistemic deference therefore does not provide a rational basis for reducing confidence in conciliationism when that view is disputed. If conciliationism is motivated by a commitment to epistemic deference to qualified thinkers, then the most reasonable conciliationism is a resolute conciliationism.

After spelling out the non-arbitrary basis for resolute conciliationism, I will go on to address two objections. The first objection is that my argument, if translated to other contexts, would seem to imply that no self-defeat argument presents a serious worry to any epistemic norm; yet clearly some self-defeat arguments *do* present a serious worry. The second objection is that the resolute conciliationism I defend commends a degree of steadfastness with respect to conciliationism that is absurdly immodest.

II. ELGA ON THE 'SELF-UNDERMINING PROBLEM' AND SELF-EXEMPTING CONCILIATIONISM

I begin by summarizing Elga's presentation of what he calls the 'self-undermining problem' facing unrestricted conciliationism and assessing his

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[2] Self-exemption is considered and dismissed as unacceptably arbitrary in Thune (2010: 17) and Weintraub (2013: 742).

argument for the acceptability of self-exempting conciliationism.[3] While Elga's defence of self-exemption is ultimately unsuccessful, an evaluation of his argument provides an opportunity to clarify what is at issue here and sets the stage for my own argument to follow.

II.1 The self-undermining problem

Elga claims that 'one's view on disagreement is part of one's *inductive method*', where an inductive method is 'one's fundamental method for taking evidence into account', describing what one ought to believe in response to various possible experiences (2010: 179–80). What makes an inductive method *fundamental* is that its application 'is not governed or evaluated by any other method' (185 fn.). According to Elga, any inductive method that includes a conciliatory view that can apply to itself will, upon encountering the relevant type of disagreement over this conciliatory view, end up recommending the adoption of some other competing inductive method. But any inductive method that recommends some competing inductive method will offer inconsistent recommendations.[4] To see this, suppose that I_1 is my inductive method and that it requires conciliation in all disagreements with apparent 'epistemic peers'.[5] (For our purposes, we can say that two people are epistemic peers with respect to p just in case their epistemic credentials, including the quality and quantity of their evidence and their capacities for rationally assessing that evidence, make them equally qualified to assess the plausibility of p.) It is possible that someone who appears to be my epistemic peer with respect to the epistemology of disagreement might disagree with conciliationism, advocating instead some opposed 'steadfast' view. Because I_1 is conciliatory, it would recommend that, upon encountering this disagreement over conciliationism, I lower my credence for conciliationism and increase my credence for the opposed steadfast view. But this amounts to recommending that I adopt some *other* inductive method, I_2, that is less conciliatory in its approach to disagreement than I_1. Clearly, I_1 and I_2 will differ in some of their recommendations, since they recommend different doxastic responses to peer disagreement. There will, therefore, be some possible circumstance C involving peer disagreement to which I_1 and I_2 offer mutually incompatible recommendations R_1 and R_2, respectively. So if I_1 says to follow I_2, then I_1 implicitly recommends R_2 in response to C. But I_1 also recommends R_1 in response to C. Thus, I_1 is an incoherent inductive method.

Strictly speaking, the fact that I_1 recommends that I increase my credence in a steadfast view does not entail that I_1 recommends that I stop following

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[3] Note that Elga uses 'conciliationism' to refer only to *unrestricted* conciliatory policies; I use the term to apply to a broader array of views that may include self-exempting as well as unrestricted policies.

[4] Elga's argument for this conclusion (pp. 179–82) is adapted from Field (2000: 131).

[5] The term 'epistemic peer' was first introduced by Gutting (1982).

my initial policy in favour of some less conciliatory approach (Christensen 2013: 84; Weatherson 2013: 58). For it is certainly possible for I_1 to recommend that I increase my credence for a steadfast view while continuing to perfectly conform to I_1. But arguably, a *reasonable* inductive method will require that my reliance on competing methods be proportioned to my credences for those methods. By taking on board this additional premise (which admittedly is not uncontroversial), Elga's argument could be reframed as an argument applying to any *reasonable* inductive method: since a reasonable inductive method will require that reliance on methods be proportioned to credence for those methods, and since this requirement cannot be coherently combined with a fundamental conciliatory policy that could apply to disputes over the policy itself, we can conclude that this sort of unrestricted conciliatory policy cannot be part of any reasonable inductive method.

II.2 Elga's defence of self-exempting conciliationism

A *self-exempting* conciliationism that did not recommend conciliation in cases where conciliationism itself is under dispute would avoid the self-undermining problem. But Elga acknowledges that self-exempting conciliatory views 'seem to require arbitrary and ad hoc restrictions' (p. 183). And if the only coherent versions of conciliationism are objectionably arbitrary, this would seem to give us a good reason for rejecting conciliationism altogether. But Elga goes on to argue that the apparent arbitrariness of self-exemption is an 'illusion' and that self-exemption is in fact well motivated (pp. 184–6). Self-exempting conciliationism is not unacceptably ad hoc, according to Elga, since the requirement that conciliationism be self-exempting follows from 'the completely general constraint' that 'in order to be consistent, a fundamental policy, rule, or method must be dogmatic with respect to its own correctness' (p. 185). A method is 'dogmatic with respect to its own correctness' only if under no circumstances does it recommend abandoning the method. Since *any* fundamental epistemic method must be dogmatic in this sense if it is to be consistent, Elga thinks that it is not arbitrary for a conciliatory policy to exclude conciliationism itself from its scope.

I will develop two criticisms of Elga's defence of self-exempting conciliationism: first, he overlooks alternative ways that the conciliationist could preserve consistency; secondly, he fails to properly characterize (and address) the objection that self-exemption is unacceptably arbitrary or ad hoc.

II.3 Criticism one: overlooked ways to preserve consistency

Consider the following 'rule of thumb': believe what the *New York Times* says.[6] Clearly, this policy could lead to irrational outcomes if strictly followed in all

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[6] I take this example from Field (2000: 130).

situations. One such situation would be where the *Times* says that believing something on the authority of the *Times* is nearly always irrational. It would be unreasonable to believe this while continuing to believe everything else that the *Times* says. But the fact that the policy of believing what the *Times* says would be irrational in this possible situation is not a criticism of the policy *considered as a rule of thumb*. Someone who endorses this rule of thumb does not commit herself to trusting the *Times* in situations where the *Times* impugns such trust.

While a good rule of thumb need not avoid inconsistency or irrationality in any *possible* situation, a viable inductive method (which is understood to apply in any possible evidential situation) *must* avoid inconsistent or irrational prescriptions. So someone who endorses trusting the *Times* as a rule of thumb cannot build absolute trust of the *Times* into her inductive method. Her inductive method may prescribe such trust in the large majority of situations she takes to be likely, but there will have to be exception cases, including the case where the *Times* says that believing something on the authority of the *Times* is nearly always irrational. How should this case be handled? Importantly, while rational coherence demands some departure from the rule of thumb in this case, there are multiple ways to depart from the rule of thumb that would preserve coherence. One way would be to refuse to believe the *Times'* claim that trusting the *Times* is usually irrational and to go on believing almost everything else that the *Times* says. This is analogous to the self-exempting conciliationism endorsed by Elga. But coherence could also be preserved by believing the *Times'* assertion that trusting it is nearly always irrational and ceasing to believe much else of what the *Times* says. Since each of these approaches preserves coherence, the concern for coherence is not by itself sufficient to motivate any one of these approaches. In order to argue for the 'self-exempting' option over the second option, one would need to appeal to considerations beyond those of coherence.

Now let's return to conciliationism. Elga is right, I think, in maintaining that a coherent and reasonable inductive method cannot include a uniform conciliatory policy that applies to all disagreements, including disagreements over the policy itself. So any conciliationist who thought that a peer's credence should *always* be given equal weight, for example, stands refuted. But such a conciliationist might continue to be convinced that, *absent special circumstances*, the most rational approach to peer disagreement is to give equal weight to the disputant's credence. We could say that such a conciliationist endorses the equal weight rule as a 'default rule' (Field 2000: 135, 147), where a default rule is one that is applied unless one encounters evidence of its unreliability or is in a situation where application of the rule violates some rational requirement. As with a rule of thumb, the fact that there are situations where consistent application of a default rule would result in incoherence is no criticism of the rule *considered as a default rule*. For someone who endorses a default rule is not committed to following the rule in all circumstances.

Elga's argument establishes that there is at least one special circumstance where a default conciliatory rule like the equal weight rule cannot be followed across the board: namely, the circumstance where an epistemic peer denies that this conciliatory rule has merit and advocates some alternative. In such a circumstance, rational coherence rules out applying the equal weight rule to every disagreement. The question now is what the conciliationist's inductive method should prescribe in such a situation. And there are multiple options available that preserve coherence. The conciliationist could, as Elga suggests, remain steadfast in the disagreement over the merits of the default equal weight rule while continuing to apply that rule to other disagreements. But it seems that he could also preserve coherence by decreasing his credence in the merits of the default equal weight rule *and* in the weight he gives to that rule's prescriptions in other disputes (so that he only partially conforms to the equal weight rule in other disagreements).[7] Or, he might reject the equal weight view altogether and adjust his responses to other disagreements accordingly. It's important to see that none of these approaches involves having an inductive method that is uniformly conciliatory about absolutely everything. So a method that recommended departing from a default equal weight rule in one of the aforementioned ways would *not* thereby recommend the adoption of some competing inductive method. Such a method could be perfectly 'dogmatic' as to its own correctness, thus avoiding the incoherence that afflicts self-undermining inductive methods, while *not* being dogmatic in its endorsement of the default conciliatory policy.

While Elga is right that a self-exempting conciliatory policy is *one* way for the conciliationist to preserve coherence, he has not given us a good reason for thinking that this is the *only* way. Once we see that conciliatory policies can be accepted as a default rule rather than being built right into the fundamental inductive method, it seems that a dogmatic and coherent inductive method can be non-dogmatic with respect to conciliationism. Thus, considerations of coherence alone are not adequate to motivate self-exempting conciliationism.[8]

II.4 Criticism two: a failure to properly characterize (and address) the arbitrariness objection

Even if my argument of the last section is wrong and self-exemption *is* the only coherent option for a conciliationist, a second and more important objection is that Elga's defence of self-exemption does not actually address the legitimate concern expressed by the charge that self-exemption is unacceptably 'arbitrary'. To show why, we will need to spell out this concern more explicitly. The arbitrariness objection is *not* that the conciliationist has absolutely no

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[7] For an argument that this response can be probabilistically coherent, see Weatherson (2013) and Weiner (2007).

[8] Thanks to a referee for criticisms that helped me to clarify this section.

reason for adding self-exemption to her theory, nor is the objection that the reason for self-exemption is not general enough. For it is obvious that the conciliationist has a reason for adding a self-exemption clause: namely, avoiding epistemic self-defeat and (possibly) incoherence. And avoiding self-defeat and incoherence are essential concerns for *any* position. Rather, the arbitrariness objection is that *from the perspective of the concerns motivating conciliationism*, there is no reason to restrict conciliatory requirements to topics other than conciliationism. Arguments for conciliationism seek to show that disagreements generate a kind of sceptical pressure, and if self-exempting conciliationism is correct, there must be an explanation for why this sceptical pressure does not arise or is somehow overcome in disagreements over conciliationism itself. But the fact that adding a self-exemption clause would preserve the coherence of conciliationism in no way explains why disagreements over conciliationism do not generate sceptical pressure. The 'high level' concern of coherence does not rebut or undermine the 'ground level' reasons for disagreement-based scepticism, reasons that seem to apply to disagreements over conciliationism as much as to any other type of disagreement.[9]

Of course, if we knew that some form of conciliationism was correct and that (as claimed by Elga) self-exempting conciliationism was the only coherent form of conciliationism, then we would have good reason for accepting self-exempting conciliationism. But even so, we would still be left with the puzzle of explaining at the 'ground level' why disagreements over conciliationism do not generate sceptical pressure. And given that we do *not* know that conciliationism is correct, the lack of such a ground-level explanation for self-exemption, taken together with the putative incoherence of unrestricted conciliationism, amounts to an objection against conciliationism as a whole.

The challenge to the conciliationist, then, is to explain why the sceptical pressures typically presented by disagreement are absent or overcome in controversies over conciliationism. Elga does not meet this challenge. He mistakenly understands the arbitrariness objection against self-exemption as being that self-exemption is arbitrary *absolutely*, when instead the objection is that self-exemption is arbitrary from the point of view of the ground-level concerns used to motivate conciliationism in the first place.

III. WHY RESOLUTE CONCILIATIONISM IS NOT ARBITRARY

Given that disagreement with qualified disputants normally generates worries that can defeat one's initial justification, why would this not be the case in disagreements over conciliationism? I will now attempt to successfully meet the

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[9] Christensen (2013: 88–9) argues along similar lines in response to Elga's position.

arbitrariness objection by answering this question. My argumentative strategy will be as follows. I will first characterize a commitment to epistemic deference that is arguably fundamental to conciliationism, and then argue that while this commitment supports reducing confidence in *most* disagreements with qualified thinkers, it does not support reducing confidence in disagreements over the merits of this basic conciliatory commitment. So the specific conciliatory policies that rightly follow from this commitment to deference will not treat disagreements over conciliationism in the same way as disagreements over unrelated matters.

More basic to conciliationism than any particular policy for adjusting credences is, I suggest, a commitment to showing epistemic deference that is proportionate to the epistemic qualifications of different thinkers, so that the views of an epistemic peer are given equal weight to one's own views, while the views of an epistemic superior are accorded more weight. (Though we don't normally speak of 'deferring to oneself', I will in this paper speak of one's own pre-disagreement perspective as one of the perspectives to which one may show more or less 'deference'.) I will consider an objection to this characterization of the fundamental conciliatory commitment later. But first, the main argument.

My contention is that a commitment to epistemic deference of the sort just described does *not* give me a basis for reducing my credence in conciliationism when I am in a dispute over conciliationism. To see this, let's first consider a normal case of disagreement, one where my disputant contests some belief of mine that p and where p has nothing to do with the epistemology of disagreement. In this case, the deferential response that accords with my conciliatory commitment is quite clear: I ought to reduce my credence for p. When I do reduce my credence for p, my new credence for p will be based (in part) on my commitment to conciliationism. We might say that my newly reduced credence for p has a *conciliatory rationale*.

Now consider a case where my disputant contests my belief that conciliationism is correct. We can imagine that my initial credence for conciliationism is close to one, whereas my disputant's well-considered credence for conciliationism is close to zero. To simplify the discussion somewhat, let's further suppose that I do not know anyone else's view on conciliationism before the disagreement, and that I know my disputant to be my epistemic peer on philosophical matters, so that my conciliatory policy would normally recommend that I defer equally to myself and to this disputant when we disagree on some philosophical question. My suggestion is that in this dispute over conciliationism, unlike disputes over unrelated matters, decreasing my credence for conciliationism is no more deferential to my disputant than remaining steadfast in my conciliatory views. To see why, suppose that I reduce my credence for conciliationism to one half in an attempt to exhibit the sort of epistemic deference that conciliationism requires. Does this response result in my

deferring equally to the views of myself and my disputant? Well, my *credence* accords with equal deference, since it gives equal weight to each of our initial credences for conciliationism; but my *reasoning* that is the basis for this lowered credence is completely *non-deferential* to my disputant, since this is exactly the sort of conciliatory reasoning that my disputant maintains is illegitimate. In relying on such reasoning, I seem to simply ignore any worries raised by the disagreement. So at one level (the credence level) I show equal deference, but at another level (the reasoning level) I show my peer no deference at all.

When both the credence and reasoning levels are taken into account, my adopting a credence of one half (on the basis of a conciliatory rationale) does not look like a response that accords well with a commitment to equal deference. Moreover, a response that involves no credence adjustment arguably has at least as good a claim to be a response of equal deference. Suppose that I refuse to treat the disagreement as a reason for lowering my credence for conciliationism, keeping my credence at its initial high value. While this response is completely non-deferential to my disputant at the level of my credence for conciliationism, this response is *fully* deferential to my disputant inasmuch as I give *no weight at all* to contested conciliatory reasoning in setting my credence for conciliationism. Because this response defers fully to myself at one level (the credence level) and defers fully to my disputant at another level (the reasoning level), the response does not clearly privilege either party to the disagreement.

The above reasoning suggests that when I encounter a disagreement over the merits of conciliationism, reducing my credence is not obviously more deferential than remaining steadfast. This is because deference at the credence level trades off with deference at the reasoning level. To the extent that I attempt to defer to my disputant by moving towards a mid-point credence as typically required by conciliationism, I will be non-deferential in my reasoning that grounds the new credence; and to the extent that I attempt to defer to my disputant by minimizing my reliance on any conciliatory rationale, my credence will be non-deferential. And since there is no evident reason for privileging deference at either the credence level or the reasoning level, it seems that the conciliatory commitment to epistemic deference does not supply a reason for favouring any particular response to a disagreement over conciliationism. Conciliatory commitments yield no determinate prescription in this case, leaving me free to base my credence for conciliationism entirely on other evidential and rational factors.

I've been speaking of deference at the reasoning level and at the credence level, but the argument just rehearsed works as well if we are thinking of a disagreement as a conflict of beliefs, rather than as an instance of divergent credences. If I believe that conciliationism is true and discover that my epistemic peer believes it to be false, showing equal deference at the level of my beliefs would seem to demand that I suspend judgement. But in suspending

judgement, I would of course be revising my beliefs on the basis of reasoning that my disputant rejects and that is therefore is completely deferential to myself and non-deferential to my peer. If on the other hand I maintain my belief in conciliationism, then while my belief state will not be deferential to my peer, the reasoning behind this belief state will be fully deferential to my peer inasmuch as it gives no weight to any contested conciliatory reasoning. So suspension of judgement has no claim to being the response that best accords with equal deference.

This argument for resolute conciliationism also applies to disagreements with epistemic superiors. Suppose that Elle is my clear philosophical superior, so that conciliationism would normally recommend that I defer fully to her in philosophical disputes. I now learn that Elle has a credence of zero for conciliationism. Were I to lower my credence in conciliationism in an attempt to defer to Elle, I would be giving weight to a conciliatory rationale that Elle takes to be illegitimate. And the more I lower the credence, the more weight I would be giving to the disputed rationale. Because deference at the credence level trades off with deference at the reasoning level, a commitment to epistemic deference does not motivate any particular response.

It is important at this point to stave off a potential misunderstanding.[10] I've argued that in a dispute over conciliationism, a steadfast response is deferential to my disputant at the reasoning level. One might protest that steadfastness is deferential only if my dispute is with someone who advocates a 'steadfast view' according to which one ought to 'stick by one's guns' in the face of disagreement. Many opponents to conciliationism do not endorse such a view. Advocates of the 'right reasons view' (RR), for instance, endorse a steadfast response only when one has responded correctly to the pre-disagreement evidence (Kelly 2005). If RR is right, then conciliationism is an irrational position and my remaining steadfast in the face of disagreement over conciliationism is not reasonable. So if my disagreement is with a proponent of RR, why would my remaining steadfast be deferential at the reasoning level? The answer is that it is not steadfastness per se that is deferential; rather, it is the *non-reliance on a conciliatory rationale* that is deferential. Steadfastness merely results from such non-reliance. So consider again my dispute with my superior Elle, who we can take to be an advocate of RR. Even though Elle thinks that I ought to adopt a credence of zero for conciliationism, she does not think that I ought to adopt this credence *on the basis of a conciliatory rationale*. She takes such a rationale to be illegitimate. Rather, she thinks that I ought to adopt a credence of zero for conciliationism because this is what the first-order evidence supports. So my adopting a credence of zero for conciliatory reasons would rely on reasoning Elle rejects and would on this count be non-deferential. And inasmuch as I avoid relying on such reasons, I defer to Elle.

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[10] Thanks to a referee for alerting me to this potential misunderstanding.

At this point, one might retort that there is a more thoroughgoing form of deference to Elle at the reasoning level that is *fully compatible* with deference at the credence level: namely, moving my credence for conciliationism to zero *not* for conciliatory reasons, but because philosophical reflection leads me to think that RR is correct and that conciliationism is wrongheaded. Were I to respond in this way, I would have a deferential credence, and my reasoning would be deferential both because it does not employ any contested conciliatory rationale *and* because I would share Elle's perspective on the merits of RR. I grant that this is a maximally deferential state and that conciliationism does give me a reason for preferring this state. Even so, the reason that conciliationism provides for preferring this state cannot be my basis for *adopting* this state. If conciliationism were my basis for the complex action of 'adopting a credence of zero for conciliationism (and a credence of one for RR) while refraining from relying on a conciliatory rationale', then I would have to both rely on a conciliatory rationale and refrain from relying on a conciliatory rationale. And this is clearly incoherent. So my main conclusion remains secure: in disputes over conciliationism, my commitment to conciliationism does not give me a rational basis for reducing my credence for conciliationism.

A practical analogy might help one to appreciate the point just made. Suppose that Hugh's principal desire in life is to do what his mother wants him to do. So when deliberating over what career to choose, Hugh asks his mother what she'd like. Hugh's mother responds by telling him that she wants him to be a farmer, but that what she most wants is for Hugh to base his career decision on reasons that have *nothing to do* with what she wants. She does not want her desire to play *any* role (however indirect) in explaining Hugh's career choice. Hugh's desire to do what his mother wants gives him a reason for preferring a specific action, namely, becoming a farmer for reasons that have nothing to do with his mother's wants. This is the action that results in his doing all that his mother wants. But even though Hugh's desire to do what his mother wants gives him a reason for preferring this complex action, it is impossible for this desire to be Hugh's basis for performing this action. For if it was true that Hugh performed the action of 'becoming a farmer for reasons that have nothing to do with Mother's wants' *for the reason that this is what his mother wanted*, then it would have to be true that his mother's wants both did and did not play a role in explaining why he became a farmer, which is obviously incoherent. It seems that in this case, the only action that could rationally be based on Hugh's desire to do what his mother wants is the decision to set considerations of her wants aside when deciding what career to pursue. This action satisfies his mother's main wish, and it at least leaves open the possibility that he will ultimately choose to be a farmer for reasons that have nothing to do with his mother's wishes.

The case of disagreement over conciliationism is similar. While conciliationism perhaps gives me a reason to prefer the complex action of 'decreasing

my credence in conciliationism for reasons that are not conciliatory' (since this response seems to be deferential both at the level of credence and the level of reasons), it is impossible for conciliationism to be my *basis* for this response. But perhaps conciliationism *could* be my basis for continuing to actively search for adequate *non-conciliatory* reasons to lower my credence for conciliationism, since this exploration maximizes the chance that I will find good non-conciliatory reasons for abandoning conciliationism and for adopting the view of my disputant.

Before considering some worries about my argument for resolute conciliationism, it's worth making clear how this argument addresses the arbitrariness charge in a way that Elga's defence of self-exemption does not. The picture suggested by Elga's discussion is as follows: there are two ways to respond to a disagreement over conciliationism, a conciliatory response and a non-conciliatory response; because the conciliatory response leads to incoherence, the conciliationist should endorse the non-conciliatory response and affirm that this is an exception case. As argued in Section II.4, Elga's appeal to the high-level concern of coherence does not adequately answer the conciliatory reasoning, reasoning that identifies disagreement as a significant sort of defeater and that still seems to support reducing one's credence in this particular case. Rather than showing where this reasoning goes wrong, Elga has (at best) merely identified a different (and perhaps weightier) consideration in favour of staying put. But my argument shows that the conciliatory argument for credence reduction *is* misguided, at least if conciliationism is motivated by a commitment to epistemic deference. Contrary to the picture suggested by Elga, in a disagreement over conciliationism, the conciliationist does *not* face a choice between a conciliatory response that involves credence reduction and a non-conciliatory response that involves staying put. Rather, each of these responses is conciliatory in one respect and non-conciliatory in another. Concern for epistemic deference motivates staying put (in order to avoid relying on a contested conciliatory rationale) just as much as it motivates a credence reduction (in order to avoid having a high credence for a contested view). In noting how epistemic deference at the credence level trades off with deference at the reasoning level, the argument supplies a ground-level explanation for why the aim of epistemic deference does not require credence reduction in this case. Elga's argument, in contrast, merely trumps conciliatory concerns with an appeal to the high-level concern of consistency.

I conclude this section by considering two objections to the positive case for resolute conciliationism offered above.[11] First, one might take issue with my claim that specific conciliatory policies are motivated by a commitment to epistemic deference. While the language of deference is frequently used to

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[11] Thank you to two anonymous referees for raising these objections.

describe conciliatory policies, the policies themselves are typically concerned only with changes in credence or belief. So why think that conciliationists would be concerned with deference at the reasoning level as well? In response, at least one prominent conciliationist, Adam Elga, has described his conciliatory views in a way that would suggest a commitment to deference at the reasoning level. Elga's 'equal weight view' says to 'defer to an advisor in proportion to your prior probability that the advisor would be right in case of disagreement' (2007: 495). He discusses two ways in which one might defer to an advisor, including deference to the advisor's *information* and to the advisor's *judgement*. According to Elga, I defer to an advisor's judgement when 'I defer to the *manner* in which she forms opinions on the basis of her information' (p. 479, emphasis mine). This suggests that deference has implications not just for my credences, but also for the reasons I employ to arrive at those credences. Granted, Elga's full statement of the equal weight view outlines a policy that deals only with credence adjustments. But the relative silence concerning deference at the reasoning level in the work of Elga and other conciliationists is not good evidence that they are not committed to deference at both levels. For this silence is easily explained by the fact that the two types of deference typically do not come apart, making it unnecessary to distinguish them. If I lower my credence for *p*, I will naturally give less weight to any line of reasoning that relies on *p* as a premise. Only in very special circumstances, where deference at the credence level requires non-deference at the reasoning level, is it necessary to attend separately to the two levels of deference.

There is a reason to think that when conciliationists *do* distinguish the two levels of deference, they will readily endorse deference at the reasoning level. After all, reliance on a contested rationale seems no less worrisome than the holding of a contested belief. But if I am wrong about this and it turns out that many conciliationists are concerned to show deference only at the level of credences or beliefs, then these conciliationists will not be able to avail themselves of my argument. The argument for resolute conciliationism crucially depends on conciliationism's being motivated by a more expansive commitment to epistemic deference.

A second objection is that my proposed response to the conflict between deference at the credence and reasoning levels is entirely too sanguine. I have said that because the aim of epistemic deference does not lead to a determinate prescription in disagreements over conciliationism, one is free to set the concern for deference aside and to base one's credence for conciliationism on other factors. But why not instead say that this conflict between levels forces a rational dilemma, leaving no reasonable way to proceed? This objection deserves more attention than I can give here, but here are two brief responses. First, in recommending that the conciliationist remain steadfast in disputes over conciliationism, I am not recommending an attitude of nonchalance. The disagreement over conciliationism raises worries for the conciliationist's

position whether or not she maintains her conciliatory view or abandons it for conciliatory reasons. While these worries offset one another in their prescriptive implications, it is not as though they cancel each other out in a way that should leave the conciliationist unworried and entirely comfortable. Discomfort is appropriate and helps to motivate a careful re-examination of the conciliatory position as well as ongoing attempts to persuade the other side. Secondly, I think the 'rational dilemma' interpretation of the situation is less plausible if we think of epistemic deference as a *pro tanto* (rather than absolute) rational requirement. In a situation where all of the available options violate some *pro tanto* rational requirement, it may be perfectly reasonable to select an option on the basis of rational considerations that are normally trumped by the *pro tanto* requirement in question.

IV. THE CONCERN OF PROBLEMATIC GENERALIZATION

I now turn in this and the final section to two significant worries one might have about the implications of resolute conciliationism. The first is that my argument in the last section generalizes in problematic ways. It might seem that my defence of resolute conciliationism, if translated to other contexts, would imply that certain self-defeat arguments that have been raised against other epistemic norms do not in fact constitute serious objections to those positions. And since in some cases it seems clear that these self-defeat arguments *do* constitute serious objections to the theories they target, one might conclude that my argument in the context of conciliationism should be rejected. Examples of self-defeat arguments that seem to pose legitimate challenges to the targeted theory might include Alvin Plantinga's (1981) arguments against 'classical foundationalism' and George Bealer's (1992) arguments against empiricism.

It will be helpful to more explicitly spell out the objection in the context of a specific example. Consider Bealer's self-defeat argument against empiricism. The version of empiricism that Bealer has in mind is Quine's, which, as characterized by Bealer, has three central dogmas: (1) the principle of empiricism ('a person's experiences and/or observations comprise the person's *prima facie* evidence'); (2) the principle of holism ('a theory is justified. . . for a person if and only if it is, or belongs to, the simplest comprehensive theory that explains all, or most, of the person's *prima facie* evidence'); and (3) the principle of naturalism ('the natural sciences [plus the logic and mathematics needed by them] constitute the simplest comprehensive theory that explains all, or most, of a person's experiences and/or observations') (p. 99). According to Bealer, this version of empiricism is 'epistemically self-defeating' since, by its own lights, empiricism is not justified (p. 119). While I will not rehearse Bealer's detailed argument, the key claim is that the concept of epistemic justification does not belong to the 'simplest regimented formulation of the natural sciences',

nor does any concept that is relevantly analogous to epistemic justification (pp. 120 ff.). The natural sciences (and their supporting apparatuses) simply cannot say *anything* about epistemic justification. But if this is right, then it follows from the principles of empiricism and naturalism that the theory of empiricism (which employs these problematic epistemological concepts) does not belong to that theory which best explains a person's prima facie evidence. And from this and the principle of holism, it follows that we are not justified in believing empiricism. So if empiricism is true, we are not justified in believing it.

If Bealer is right that empiricism lacks empirical support, this would seem to present a major challenge to those in the empiricist camp. For it seems that they will need to substantially revise their epistemology, perhaps to the point of altogether abandoning anything that could be reasonably labelled 'empiricist'. But now the objection to my defence of resolute conciliationism can be rendered more explicit. For it might appear that if this defence is correct, then Bealer's challenge to the empiricist can be easily dismissed. Here is how the objection against me might be articulated. Just as a disagreement over conciliationism results in a situation where deference at the credence level trades off with deference at the reasoning level, the discovery of empiricism's lack of empirical support results in a situation where respect of the empirical evidence at the credence level trades off with respect of the empirical evidence at the reasoning level. We therefore should expect that the same sort of argument advanced for resolute conciliationism could also be given for 'resolute empiricism'. The analogous reasoning would go as follows: the empiricist who lowers her credence for empiricism (upon seeing that empiricism is not empirically supported) respects the empirical evidence at the level of her credences (by apportioning her credences to empirical support), but in so doing she relies on an empiricist rationale that lacks empirical support and she thus fails to respect the empirical evidence at the level of her reasoning; therefore, the commitment to respecting the empirical evidence does not motivate any particular response to the discovery of empiricism's lack of empirical support, leaving the empiricist free to maintain a high credence for empiricism. If this argument for resolute empiricism is right, then Bealer is simply wrong to think that a lack of empirical support would pose a problem for empiricism. But clearly a lack of empirical support *would* pose a problem for empiricism. Thus, there must be a mistake in this argument for resolute empiricism, and, by extension, in the argument for resolute conciliationism on which it is modelled.

I readily concede that advocating resolute empiricism would be an unpersuasive response to the challenge that Bealer raises against empiricism. But there is at least one critical disanalogy between the cases of conciliationism and empiricism that explains why a resolute version of the first but not the second is reasonable. I argued in the last section that because the conciliatory commitment to epistemic deference does not motivate any particular response to

disagreements over conciliationism, the conciliationist is free in such disagreements to base his credence for conciliationism entirely on other sorts of rational and evidential considerations, ones that have nothing to do with the views of one's disputants. And since conciliationism is not a complete theory of rational justification but is only a theory that pertains to the rational significance of one sort of evidence (namely, the views of others), there is no problem in basing a high credence for conciliationism on rational considerations other than those described by a conciliatory theory. But the version of empiricism discussed by Bealer *is* a complete theory of rational justification, at least for belief in theories; it proposes a necessary and sufficient condition for the justification of any theoretical belief. Consequently, the empiricist cannot consistently affirm empiricism while acknowledging that her credence for empiricism is based on rational and evidential factors other than those specified by empiricism. And this means that the sort of argument used to defend resolute conciliationism cannot be used to defend resolute empiricism. Even if it is true that one's empiricist commitments cannot give one a rational basis for rejecting empiricism (since this would be to rely at the reasoning level on the very theory one is rejecting), there is still the question of whether one could have a good reason for believing empiricism once it is seen to lack empirical support. And the empiricist must concede that there is not: empiricism says that there are no justifying grounds except those specified by empiricism; so when empiricist grounds fail to justify a belief empiricism, it follows that *nothing* justifies a belief in empiricism. Consistency requires that the empiricist acknowledge that empiricism is not justified.

The disanalogy between the case of empiricism and the case of conciliationism is subtle but important. Conciliationism identifies the views of others as a significant rational factor, but it does not purport to offer a complete account of the sorts of rational considerations that may justify a belief. Thus, when the conciliationist sees that conciliationism has no bearing on the belief that conciliationism is true, no special problems arise from the fact that this belief must be justified on grounds not accounted for by conciliationism. But when empiricism fails to validate itself, there are no remaining grounds (according to empiricism) that could justify the theory.

V. MODERATING THE ACCOUNT

Resolute conciliationism, as I have characterized it thus far, would seem to licence an absurd degree of intransigence in the face of overwhelming opposition.[12] Suppose, for example, that Gary, a competent but unremarkable

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[12] Christensen (2013) develops an objection of this sort in response to Elga's defence of self-exemption.

philosopher, begins to think about the epistemology of disagreement. Gary ends up endorsing some sort of resolute conciliationism, one that he calls RC. Gary then presents RC to the philosophical community, and scores of brilliant philosophers carefully consider its merits. While some think that the view is on the right track and others think that it is significantly mistaken, all of the philosophers independently conclude that one particular claim asserted by RC is incorrect. Let's call this claim *P*. Suppose that Gary hears all of his colleagues' reasons for rejecting *P*, and though he acknowledges that the matter is complex, he does not ultimately find any of the reasons for rejecting *P* convincing. Ought Gary to nonetheless lower his credence for *P* in response to the fact that *all* of his philosophical colleagues reject it? The view I have been defending would seem to imply that, as long as RC is motivated by a commitment to epistemic deference, Gary would be rational in remaining perfectly confident in the face of such overwhelming disagreement: since a commitment to deference does not supply a reason to reduce confidence in conciliationism when it is disputed, and since *P* is part of Gary's conciliatory norm RC, Gary has no reason for reducing confidence in *P*. But the suggestion that Gary ought to be unmoved by the overwhelming consensus of his colleagues is difficult to accept, to say the least.

In this final section, I will argue that the reasons I have given for resolute conciliationism do not in fact support conciliatory positions that are completely immune from the sceptical threat of disagreement. The version of resolute conciliationism that properly emerges from the considerations developed above is, surprisingly, one that can accommodate the claim that Gary ought to conciliate in the above example.

The reason why conciliatory views should not be completely immune from being defeated by disagreement is that any real-life conciliationist will have multiple independent (or at least partially independent) conciliatory commitments, and even if no one of these commitments can undermine itself for the reasons offered in Section III, this does not rule out the rationality of one conciliatory commitment being a reason for taking disagreement to defeat another of one's conciliatory commitments. To develop this point, consider the following toy example. Continuing with the case of Gary, suppose that Gary's conciliatory position includes the following two claims:

COMMUNITY: In general, if I believe that *p* and then discover that a large majority of those who are best situated to assess *p* (and who are better situated than I) think that *p* is false, then I ought to give significant weight to their contrary view.

INDIVIDUAL: In general, if the only knowledge I have about the distribution of opinion concerning *p* is that I believe that *p* and that one apparent epistemic peer with respect to *p* believes that *p* is false, then I ought to give equal weight to this person's contrary view.

Of these two conciliatory commitments, INDIVIDUAL is obviously the more demanding and questionable commitment. So let us suppose that Gary is more confident in COMMUNITY than in INDIVIDUAL. Moreover, while Gary thinks that COMMUNITY has a significant chance of being true even if it turns out that INDIVIDUAL is false, he is certain that if COMMUNITY is false then INDIVIDUAL is also false. Given this setup, I suggest that the arguments I have given for resolute conciliationism do *not* imply that Gary's belief in INDIVIDUAL ought to be completely exempt from defeat by *community* disagreement. While those arguments do imply that a commitment to INDIVIDUAL cannot give Gary a rational basis for doubting INDIVIDUAL, those arguments do not bar Gary from doubting INDIVIDUAL on the basis of his commitment to COMMUNITY.

To see this, consider a case where it is known that a large majority of those best positioned to assess INDIVIDUAL think that INDIVIDUAL is false. How ought Gary to respond to this fact? The answer to this question will depend on whether INDIVIDUAL is contested for reasons that would also call into question COMMUNITY, or for reasons that leave COMMUNITY untouched, or for both sorts of reasons.

Consider first the scenario where INDIVIDUAL is contested for reasons that would *not* call COMMUNITY into question. In this case, Gary can rationally reduce his credence for INDIVIDUAL for the reason that this is required by COMMUNITY. Since COMMUNITY is not implicated in the dispute, showing deference at the credence level need not trade off with deference at the reasoning level.

Next, consider the scenario where INDIVIDUAL is contested for reasons that would equally call COMMUNITY into question. While the disagreement explicitly concerns INDIVIDUAL, Gary's reliance on COMMUNITY would be non-deferential if he knows that the same considerations that led his colleagues to reject INDIVIDUAL would also lead them to reject COMMUNITY. In this case, if Gary were to lower his credence for INDIVIDUAL in an effort to defer to his community, he would be relying on a rationale that he knows to be non-deferential. So the commitment to the kind of epistemic deference that COMMUNITY prescribes would not give Gary a reason to reduce his credence for INDIVIDUAL.

Finally, if INDIVIDUAL is contested both for reasons that also implicate COMMUNITY and for reasons that do not implicate COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY can give Gary a reason for being conciliatory with respect to the latter but not to the former group of reasons.

The key point is that if a conciliationist has multiple independent (or partially independent) conciliatory commitments, the arguments for resolute conciliationism do *not* licence packaging all of these commitments into one conciliatory norm and then holding that all of the elements of the norm are immune from defeat by disagreement. To the extent that two conciliatory commitments are noetically independent, it may be possible for one of these commitments to rationally ground scepticism towards the other commitment when this other

commitment is disputed. As long as the conciliatory commitment that is mo-
tivating the doubt is not also implicated by the dispute, then the reasoning
that grounds the credence reduction will not be non-deferential. So in Gary's
case, COMMUNITY and INDIVIDUAL essentially constitute two distinct conciliatory
norms, each applying to different sorts of disagreements. We could alterna-
tively speak of Gary's conciliatory 'norm' in the singular, referring to the entire
package of his conciliatory views. But since such an encompassing norm will
be the product of several conciliatory commitments that are at least par-
tially independent, this norm will not be invulnerable to worries raised by
disagreement.

The picture that emerges from this discussion is one where my total con-
ciliatory view consists of a nest of conciliatory commitments, some tame and
highly plausible and some demanding and less plausible. None of these com-
mitments can rationally undermine themselves, though this does not prevent
them from being undermined by my other conciliatory commitments. My
more questionable conciliatory commitments with more demanding require-
ments will be especially susceptible to being defeated by disagreement, since
such commitments will likely be contested partly for reasons that do not apply
to my tamer conciliatory commitments, making it possible for these tamer
commitments to undermine my belief in the more demanding requirements.
But such defeat would not be an instance of *self*-defeat, since the basis for the
defeat would be supplied by some other commitment. Of course, the tamest
and most general of my conciliatory commitments (which we might character-
ize as follows: some disagreements call for some degree of epistemic deference)
will be completely immune from defeat by disagreement. In a situation where
this norm is disputed, *every* rationale I could give for reducing my credence for
the norm in response to the disagreement would entail the truth of the norm
under dispute and would therefore be a non-deferential rationale. But even if
the entire world were to dispute this most tame of conciliatory commitments,
my sticking by the commitment would not be objectionably immodest. For
bringing myself to reduce confidence in this case would require that I rely on
conciliatory reasoning, reasoning that is universally disputed. So whether I
reduce my confidence or not, I will find myself endorsing (whether explicitly
in my credences or implicitly in the reasoning behind my credences) a way
of thinking that I know to be universally disputed. Epistemic modesty would
simply not be an option. And where modesty is impossible, immodesty is not
objectionable.

Where does my account leave today's conciliationist? Can she, in the face
of disagreement, remain resolute in her controversial conciliatory views? Or
should she be led by her tamer and less controversial 'conciliatory' commit-
ments to back down from any position with significant conciliatory bite? This
is no easy question, depending as it does on a number of empirical questions

concerning the various commitments of a given conciliationist and the kinds of reasons motivating the opponents of various conciliatory proposals. But without considering specific conciliatory proposals, we can arrive at some general conclusions about what kind of conciliatory positions are likely to be viable in a context like our own where conciliationism is contested. First, a detailed conciliatory norm that incorporates specific provisions that are controversial even among conciliationists is likely to be defeated by disagreement. For however confident one may initially be that some such norm is correct, one is likely to be even more firmly committed to a more vaguely stated (and thus less controversial) conciliatory norm that is not subject to all of the criticisms directed towards the detailed norm and that supports the conclusion that one ought to reduce confidence in response to the disagreement over the merits of the more detailed norm.

Matters are quite different, however, when we consider those vaguer conciliatory commitments that serve to mark the boundary between conciliationists and non-conciliationists. Let N_I be some vague but nonetheless fairly demanding conciliatory norm, one that would be rejected by almost all opponents of conciliationism and accepted by almost all of its supporters. (There are several different ways we could imagine characterizing N_I. Perhaps N_I could offer some paradigm examples where significant conciliation is required and then assert that in disagreements relevantly like one of the paradigms, significant conciliation is required. Or perhaps N_I could point to some of the leading conciliatory proposals and then assert that these are reasonably good approximations of the truth.[13]) One consequence of the vagueness of N_I is that those who dispute it are likely to have relatively little to disagree with beyond some very general commitments that are arguably quite fundamental to any position deserving of the label 'conciliationism'.

It is probable, then, that N_I would not be defeated by the disagreement over the view. For N_I would be defeated by disagreement only if there is some other norm N_O that (1) is affirmed by advocates of N_I; (2) delivers a conciliatory prescription when applied to the type of opposition faced by N_I; and (3) would not itself be undermined were one to accept the reasons that opponents of N_I use to attack N_I. Plausibly, there is no N_O that satisfies all of these criteria. For given the current state of the dispute over conciliationism, (2) would seem to demand that N_O be a rather demanding requirement (after all, it is not as though the overwhelming majority of experts have rejected conciliationism), while (3) seems to require that N_O be a very weak requirement (since if it is a demanding requirement, the criticisms lodged against the very general N_I will probably apply to N_O as well). I suspect that if one asked opponents of conciliationism whether reasonability would require that they give up some

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[13] For an example of a conciliatory commitment characterized along these lines, see Frances (2010: 459).

philosophical position of theirs if it were to face the same degree and type of opposition faced by conciliationism, they would answer *no*, adding that any norm that required them to conciliate in such a situation would fall afoul of the same critiques that they advance against conciliationism. If this is right, then there is good reason to think that there is no norm that satisfies (1)–(3), and that a conciliationist who accepts *N1* may reasonably stand by *N1* even in the face of disagreement.

So even if the reasonable conciliationist cannot be *entirely* resolute in the face of disagreement over conciliationism, the conciliationist need not be entirely conciliatory either. Belief in highly specific conciliatory norms will probably have to be given up if the specifics of such norms are contested for reasons that do not simultaneously call into question more general conciliatory commitments. But it seems probable that one can reasonably maintain belief in these more general conciliatory commitments even in the face of the current disagreement over the merits of conciliationism.[14]

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