Resolute Conciliationism

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Abstract: "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 conciliatory commitment to epistemic deference therefore does not provide a rational reason to reduce confidence in conciliationism when it is disputed. After presenting the positive case for "resolute conciliationism," I address two objections.

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; Kelly 2010; Enoch 2010). It would seem, then, that according to the conciliationists' own theory, they cannot reasonably maintain a confident belief in this theory 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

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[1] This characterization of "conciliationism" is most directly inspired by Christensen (2011). For arguments in favor of conciliatory positions, see, for example, (Feldman 2006; Christensen 2007; Elga 2007; van Wietmarschen 2013). The term "conciliationism" is taken from Elga (2010).

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 skeptical implications?[2] Adam 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 is not being unacceptably arbitrary. As I will seek to show, the conciliationist who remains firm in a dispute over conciliationism is being no less deferential than one who decreases her confidence in conciliationism. The conciliatory commitment to epistemic deference therefore does not provide a rational basis for reducing confidence in conciliationism when that view is disputed. 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. In response to this objection, I show that my argument against self-defeat in the context of conciliationism does not generalize in a problematic way. Specifically, the strategy I employ will not successfully translate to contexts where the norm charged with self-defeat is one whose justification must be accounted for in terms of the norm itself (as will be the case with any norm that characterizes a complete theory of justification). The second objection is that the resolute conciliationism I defend commends a degree of steadfastness with respect to conciliationism that is absurdly immodest. In response, I argue that the resolute conciliationist need not be committed to an immodest intransigence when her favored conciliatory norm is disputed. This is because a reasonable conciliationist will be committed to not just one but to a whole host of conciliatory norms; and even if none these norms can undermine themselves, in a situation where one of the stronger and more demanding conciliatory norms is overwhelmingly disputed, the conciliationist's belief that this norm is correct will likely be undermined by a different, weaker conciliatory norm to which the conciliationist is even more firmly committed. My defense of resolute conciliationism thus allows for some degree of modesty with respect to individual conciliatory norms while also establishing the possibility of maintaining a coherent and robust conciliatory commitment in the face of significant disagreement.

1. 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 argument for the acceptability of self-exempting conciliationism.[3] While Elga's defense of self-exemption is ultimately unsuccessful, an evaluation

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

[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.

of his argument provides an opportunity to clarify just what a successful response to the self-undermining worry must accomplish and sets the stage for my own argument to follow.

1.1 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, f.n.). 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 *I1* is my inductive method and that it requires conciliation in all disagreements with apparent "epistemic peers."[5] 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 *I1* 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, *I2*, that is less conciliatory in its approach to disagreement than *I1*.[6] Clearly, *I1* and *I2* 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 *I1* and *I2* offer mutually incompatible recommendations *R1* and *R2*, respectively. So if *I1* says to follow *I2*, then *I1* implicitly recommends *R2* in response to C. But *I1* also recommends *R1* in response to C. Thus, *I1* is an incoherent inductive method. Elga's argument suggests that this fatal "self-undermining problem" afflicts any inductive method that includes a conciliatory requirement that can call for conciliation in disagreements over the correctness of the requirement itself.

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[4] Elga's argument for this conclusion (found on pp. 179-182) is adapted from Hartry Field (2000, 131).

[5] The term 'epistemic peer' was first introduced by Gutting (1982). For purposes of this paper 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*. And two people are *apparent* epistemic peers with respect to *p* just in case, setting aside facts about their actual views on *p*, they appear to be epistemic peers with respect to *p*.

[6] Strictly speaking, the fact that *I1* recommends that I increase my credence in a steadfast view does not entail that *I1* recommends that I *follow* a steadfast policy (Weatherson 2013, 58; Christensen 2013, 84). For it is certainly possible for *I1* to recommend that I increase my credence for a steadfast view while continuing to perfectly conform to *I1*. 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.

1.2 Elga's defense 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" (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 (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" (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. Elga goes on to suggest that the reason for self-exemption in this case is analogous to the reason that *Consumer Reports* would be justified in consistently and automatically rating itself the best consumer product ratings magazine: they *must* give themselves a superior ranking in order to be consistent with their buying recommendations for toasters and cars and the like (which sometimes conflict with recommendations from competing magazines) (185).[7] Similarly, a conciliatory method *must* unconditionally endorse conciliationism if it is to consistently recommend conciliation in disagreements with apparent peers on other topics.

    I will develop two criticisms of Elga's defense of self-exempting conciliationism: first, his case for self-exemption relies on an unjustified exclusive focus on fundamental methods; second, he fails to properly characterize (and address) the objection that self-exemption is unacceptably arbitrary or ad hoc.

1.3 Criticism one: An unjustified exclusive focus on fundamental methods

Elga asserts that one's view on disagreement is "part" of one's "inductive method," which Elga has defined in such a way as to stipulate that inductive methods are *fundamental* methods. By saying that one's view on disagreement is "part" of one's inductive method, Elga means that one's inductive method says everything that one's view on disagreement says (180 f.n. 6). But I will argue that Elga is unjustified in thinking that one's view on disagreement must be fundamental in this way. And once we consider the possibility that one's view on disagreement could be provisional rather than fundamental, Elga's case for self-exemption falls apart.

    In order to illustrate why Elga's appeal to the requirement that fundamental methods be dogmatic is ultimately beside the point, it will be helpful to reflect further on Elga's *Consumer Reports* example. Elga is right that if the editors of *Consumer Reports* are to consistently stand by their consumer product advice, they must not believe that the advice of *Consumer Reports* is inferior to the contrary advice of some specified competitor magazine. But from this we cannot conclude that the editors of *Consumer Reports* should *automatically* rank their publication as the most reliable consumer product magazine. As long as it is possible for the editors to become less confident in

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[7] Elga takes his inspiration for the *Consumer Reports* example from Lewis (1971, 55).

their past product recommendations, consistency does not require that they adopt a dogmatic approach to ranking consumer product magazines. To see this, suppose that *Consumer Reports* has up to this point stood by method M as the best method for ranking consumer products of *any* category in terms of their success in delivering specified goods and values. But now some meddlesome staff worker informs the editorial board that he has used M to rank consumer product guides according to the reliability of their consumer product rankings, and that after proper application of M he has arrived at the conclusion that the competitor magazine *Consume or Die*, which uses another ranking method, has rankings that are reliably better than those of *Consumer Reports*. Of course Elga is right that *Consumer Reports* cannot consistently stand by its product rankings while also ranking *Consume or Die* as the most reliable consumer products guide. But this most certainly does *not* mean that the reasonable thing for *Consumer Reports* to do in response to this discouraging news is to shift their methodology from M to M*, where M* says to use M in all product evaluations *except* when evaluating consumer product guides (in which case M* simply says to rank first those guides which use M*). While this example is under-described, the most natural reaction to the example is to judge that the editorial board should retract its previous advice and either change their ranking methodology or close up shop. Surely it would be utterly unconvincing if the editorial board justified their adoption of M* on the basis of "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." For while adopting the dogmatic M* restores rational consistency, there are likely other rationally consistent options available (like retracting former rankings and substantively changing the ranking method) that are less dogmatic and *precisely for that reason* seem much more reasonable.

By extending the *Consumer Reports* example and imagining the adoption of M* in response to the self-undermining of M, the dogmatism Elga commends begins to look patently absurd. But this does not mean that we should look for some flaw in Elga's argument that inductive methods must be dogmatic in order to be coherent; I think this argument is correct. Rather, the problem is with Elga's exclusive focus on inductive methods, which for Elga are *fundamental* methods. Some reflection on the elaborated *Consumer Reports* example helps us to see that it can be perfectly reasonable to endorse some method of belief formation without thereby holding that method as a fundamental commitment. Before the meddlesome staff worker attempted to use M to rank consumer guides according to their reliability in ranking products, surely the editors could have been reasonable in holding the following beliefs: (i) M is the best method for ranking consumer products according to specified criteria; (ii) should M be used to rank consumer product guides according to their reliability in ranking products, it would deliver the verdict that guides using M are superior to other guides; (iii) nonetheless, it is epistemically *possible* that applying M in this way could deliver the verdict that guides *not* employing M are superior to those that *do* employ M; and (iv) in the event that using M to rank guides delivered this unexpected verdict, the reasonable thing to do would be to abandon the belief that M is the best method for ranking consumer products. Clearly an editor who affirmed these four beliefs about M could be described as a proponent of M. But such an editor would *not* have M as part of her fundamental method, nor could M be derived from her fundamental method. Since her commitment to M is conditional on her not receiving evidence indicating that M has issued a self-undermining verdict, M is a *provisional* rather than fundamental commitment. And once we allow that proponents of M may hold M as a provisional rather than fundamental commitment, there is no reason to suppose that

proponents of M have an incoherent inductive method on account of M's not being dogmatic (unlike M*). For in contexts where M self-undermines, those who held M provisionally are no longer committed to M, and thus they are not committed to inconsistent courses of action in such contexts. So the requirement that inductive methods be coherent does not provide a sufficient reason for giving up M and adopting M* in its place, since the coherence requirement can also be met by holding M in a non-fundamental way.

This discussion suggests that Elga is too quick to suppose that a conciliationist's (fundamental) inductive method will say everything that her favored conciliatory norm says. And if it is possible for the conciliationist to endorse a conciliatory norm in a non-fundamental way, then the requirement that inductive methods be coherent does not by itself support the conclusion that conciliationists ought to endorse a dogmatic, self-exempting conciliationism. For before learning that there actually *is* disagreement over conciliationism, there appear to be at least two ways to be a conciliationist without having an incoherent inductive method: adopt a self-exempting conciliatory norm, or have a non-fundamental commitment to a non-self-exempting conciliatory norm. In the latter case, one's inductive method would not require that one fully conform to the conciliatory norm in contexts where, due to disagreement over the conciliatory norm, one has lost confidence in the conciliatory norm. In such contexts, the inductive method could require only that one partially follow the conciliatory norm, weighting its prescriptions in proportion to one's credence for the proposition that the conciliatory norm is correct. Since Elga's incoherence argument relies on the assumption that a conciliationist has a fundamental commitment to a conciliatory norm and is therefore committed to fully conforming to that norm in all contexts, the argument does not apply to someone who has a non-fundamental commitment to conciliationism in the way just described.

Reflecting on the above elaboration of the *Consumer Reports* example suggests that adopting a dogmatic, self-exempting method may in some circumstances be less reasonable than provisionally committing to a method that could self-undermine and then abandoning or weakening this commitment in contexts where it does self-undermine. The elaboration of the *Consumer Reports* example also poses a challenge to me, since I will have to show why my defense of resolute conciliationism does not imply the reasonableness of a dogmatic commitment to M. I will return to this challenge in §3.

1.4 Criticism two: A failure to properly characterize (and address) the arbitrariness objection

My second and more important objection to Elga's defense of self-exemption is that it 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 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 skeptical pressure, and if self-exempting conciliationism is correct, there must be an explanation for why this skeptical 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 skeptical pressure. The "high level" concern of coherence does not rebut or undermine the "ground level" reasons for disagreement-based skepticism, reasons that seem to apply to disagreements over conciliationism as much as to any other type of disagreement.

Of course if we knew that some form of conciliationism was correct and that (as claimed by Elga) self-exempting conciliationism is 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 skeptical 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 skeptical 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.

2. 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? Why would the skeptical pressure exerted by disagreement mysteriously disappear in this case? I will now attempt to successfully meet the arbitrariness objection by answering this question.

Suppose I am convinced of the following conciliationist thesis: where possible, I ought to show epistemic deference to suitably qualified thinkers, giving equal weight to the views of those who appear to be my epistemic peer and more weight to the views of those who appear to be my epistemic superior. My contention is that my commitment to this thesis 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 1, whereas my disputant's well-considered credence for conciliationism is close to 0. To simplify the discussion somewhat, imagine that I do not know anyone else's view on conciliationism before the disagreement, and that my disputant's philosophical credentials are far superior to my own, so much so that my conciliatory policy would normally recommend that I completely defer to this disputant in

philosophical disagreements. My suggestion is that in this dispute over conciliationism, unlike disputes over unrelated matters, complete deference is simply impossible, and decreasing my credence for conciliationism is no more deferential than remaining steadfast in my conciliatory views. To see why, suppose first that I reduce my credence for conciliationism to near 0 in an attempt to exhibit the epistemic deference that conciliationism requires. Is this in fact a deferential response? Well, my *credence* is completely deferential, since it gives full weight to my disputant's low credence for conciliationism; but my *reasoning* that is the basis for this lowered credence is completely *non-deferential*, 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 views of my disputant. So this response is deferential at one level (the credence level) but maximally non-deferential at another level (the reasoning level). Now suppose instead that I remain confident in my conciliatory views and do not adjust my credence downward at all. Is this a *non*-deferential response? Well, it *is* non-deferential at the level of my credence for conciliationism. But in refraining from giving the disagreement the evidential force that my disputed conciliatory view would seem to require, I am at another level being fully deferential. For by remaining steadfast, I avoid basing my credence for conciliationism on the sort of conciliatory rationale that my disputant holds to be illegitimate. A steadfast response to a disagreement over conciliationism is thus non-deferential at the level of my credences but maximally deferential at the level of my reasoning on which those credences are based. Finally, if I adopt some position intermediate between these two, lowering my credence for conciliationism but stopping short of my disputant's credence, then I will have been partly deferential and partly non-deferential both at the level of my final credences and at the level of my reasoning behind those credences.

The above reasoning suggests that in a disagreement over conciliationism, none of the responses available to me is more conciliatory than any other. To the extent that I show epistemic deference at the level of my final credences, I will be non-deferential at the level of my reasoning behind those credences, and to the extent that I show deference at the level of my reasoning (by decreasing my reliance on any conciliatory rationale) I will be non-deferential in my credences. 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 favoring 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.[8]

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[8] The case of disagreement over conciliationism with an epistemic *peer* is slightly less straightforward, though the same conclusion ultimately applies. In disputes between epistemic peers, a conciliatory policy would normally call for partial deference at the credence level, prescribing a credence midway between the disputants' initial credences. So if I proceeded as normal in a peer disagreement over conciliationism, then I would partially defer at the credence level by adopting a midway credence, and in doing this I would fully rely on a conciliatory rationale and would therefore be completely non-deferential at the reasoning level. At the other extreme, if I defer fully at the reasoning level by not putting any weight on a conciliatory rationale, I will of course be fully non-deferential at the credence level. So unlike the case of disagreement with an epistemic superior considered above, there is not a zero-sum relationship between deference at the reasoning level and deference at the credence level: at the extremes of the range of possible responses, I face a choice between (i) complete non-deference in reasoning and partial deference in my credence or (ii) complete deference in reasoning and complete non-deference in my credence. Since (ii) is completely deferential at one level while (i) fails to be completely deferential at any level, one could argue that a commitment to epistemic deference gives me a reason for preferring response (ii) and thus for remaining steadfast in my high credence for conciliationism! Of course, conciliationism is not *just* a commitment to epistemic deference; rather, it is a commitment to epistemic

One might retort at this point that there *is* a response that is fully deferential both at the credence level and at the reasoning level: namely, moving my credence for conciliationism to approximately 0 for reasons that have nothing to do with conciliatory requirements, or for no reason at all. For example, I could adopt a credence of 0 for conciliationism *not* because this is the response that accords with the conciliatory policy I am inclined to endorse, but because philosophical reflection leads me to think that conciliationism is a wrongheaded view. In this case, I would have a deferential credence, and my reasoning could be said to be deferential inasmuch as it does not employ any contested conciliatory rationale. Let me grant for sake of argument 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 was my basis for the complex action of "adopting a credence of 0 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. Imagine that you have the opportunity to make a short-term $100 investment in your neighbor's lemonade stand. You know that if you make the investment, you will by the end of today get your $100 investment back plus a $20 return, and that if you do not make the investment, you will not make any money today. Unfortunately, your uncle, who is a mind-reading criminal mastermind, informs you that if you decide to invest in the lemonade stand *for the reason of making money*, then he will steal $1,000 from you. And he will do this if money-making considerations play *any* role (however indirect) in explaining your decision to invest in the stand. If you do not invest in the lemonade stand, or invest for reasons that are completely independent of money-making considerations, then he will leave you alone. In this case, money-making considerations give you a clear reason for preferring a specific action, namely, investing in the lemonade stand for reasons that have nothing to do with making money. This action yields the best outcome from a financial perspective. But even though money-making considerations give you a reason for preferring this action, it is impossible for money-making considerations to be your basis for performing this action. For if it was true that you performed the action of "investing in the lemonade stand for reasons that have nothing to do with making money" *for money-making considerations*, then it would have to be true that money-making considerations both did and did not play a role in explaining why you invested in the lemonade stand, which is obviously incoherent. It seems that in this case, the only action that could rationally be based on money-making considerations is the decision to set money-making considerations aside when deciding whether or not to invest in the lemonade stand. This action avoids any possibility of losing $1,000 by theft, and it at least leaves open the possibility that you will ultimately choose the most profitable path, which is investing in the lemonade stand for non-financial reasons.

deference proportioned in a certain way to the epistemic qualifications of my interlocutor. So it is not clear that there is a conciliatory rational for preferring (ii) to (i). But this much *should* be clear: given that conciliationism does not give me any reason for decreasing my credence in a dispute over conciliationism with an epistemic *superior*, it surely does not give me a reason for decreasing my credence in a dispute over conciliationism with an epistemic *peer*.

The case of disagreement over conciliationism is similar. While conciliationism perhaps gives me 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 moving on to consider other objections, it's worth making clear how my defense of resolute conciliationism addresses the arbitrariness charge in a way that Elga's defense 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 §1.4, 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. Elga has not shown where the conciliatory reasoning in favor of credence reduction goes wrong, but has (at best) merely identified a different (and perhaps weightier) consideration in favor of staying put. But my argument in this section shows that the conciliatory argument for credence reduction *is* misguided, even if we endorse the sort of epistemic deference that conciliationists commend. 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 conciliatory argument in favor of credence reduction is answered in its own terms. Rather than merely trumping conciliatory concerns with an appeal to the high-level concern of consistency, we have a "ground level" explanation for why the aim of epistemic deference does not in this case give us reason for a credence reduction.

If I am right that the fundamental conciliatory commitment to epistemic deference does not provide any reason for reducing confidence in conciliationism when that view is disputed, then resolute conciliationism is not unacceptably arbitrary. With self-defeat concerns defused, we are free to assign conciliationism a credence that reflects our own assessment of its rational merits. And whatever the merits of conciliationism, the resolute conciliationist cannot be dismissed as dense or hypocritical. It is, rather, the weak-kneed variety that holds the less reasonable position.

3. THE CONCERN OF PROBLEMATIC GENERALIZATION

I now turn in this and the final section to two significant worries one might have about resolute conciliationism. The first is that my argument in the last section generalizes in problematic ways. It might seem that my defense 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. To this list we can add the example of method M in my elaboration of Elga's *Consumer Reports* example. Surely the fact that M ranks another ranking methodology more highly than itself points to a serious problem for advocates of M. If my argument for resolute conciliationism implies otherwise, then this would seem to be good reason for rejecting my position.

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: (i) the principle of empiricism ("a person's experiences and/or observations comprise the person's *prima facie* evidence"); (ii) 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 (iii) 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") (99). According to Bealer, this version of empiricism is "epistemically self-defeating" since, by its own lights, empiricism is not justified (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 (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.

It is quite clear that if Bealer's argument is sound, it presents 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 labeled 'empiricist.' But now the objection to my defense of resolute conciliationism can be rendered more explicit. For it might appear that if this defense 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 modeled.

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 example of M in §1.3 is similar to that of empiricism, at least given certain ways of filling in the details of the case. Recall that M is *Consumer Reports*' imagined method for ranking products that, when applied to *Consumer Reports* and a competitor magazine using a different method, delivered the verdict that the competitor magazine does a better job at ranking products. Now, it could be perfectly reasonable for the editors of *Consumer Reports* to believe that M is correct while believing on the basis of M that *Consume or Die* is the more trustworthy magazine *if* they think that *Consume or Die* is better *not* because it has the superior ranking methodology, but for some other reason. The editors might suspect, for example, that their staff often does a poor job of applying M, and that careful and rigorous application of the suboptimal method used by *Consume or Die* is superior to sloppy application of M. But let's suppose that the editors know that the superior magazine also has the correct ranking methodology, one that is superior to all alternatives. Given

this stipulation, the case of M will be analogous to the example of empiricism just discussed: upon discovering that M ranks *Consume or Die* more highly, the editors will not be able to consistently believe both that M is the correct method and that this belief is justified. For the belief that M is the correct method is justified only if the belief that *Consumer Reports* is superior is justified. And since M does not support this latter belief, the belief that *Consumer Reports* is superior is justified only if it is justified by some rational factor not accounted for by M. But if the belief that *Consumer Reports* is superior is justified by a rational factor not accounted for by M, then M fails to take all of the relevant factors into account and is not the correct ranking method. It therefore follows that the belief that M is the correct method is justified only if M is not the correct ranking method. So the editors cannot consistently affirm M while holding this affirmation to be justified.

The disanalogy between the cases of empiricism and M 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 or when M fails to validate the magazine that employs M, there are (according to the theories) no remaining grounds that could justify the theory.

4. MODERATING THE ACCOUNT

Resolute conciliationism, as I have characterized it thus far, would seem to license an absurd degree of intransigence in the face of overwhelming opposition.[9] Suppose, for example, that Gary, a competent but unremarkable 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 the view is on the right track and others think 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 Gary would be rational in remaining perfectly confident in the face of such overwhelming disagreement: since conciliatory commitments give no reason for reducing 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 surely the suggestion that Gary ought to be unmoved by the overwhelming consensus of his colleagues is absurd.

Any view that would prescribe a steadfast response in the case just described ought to be rejected as implausible. But 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 skeptical threat of disagreement. The version of resolute conciliationism that properly

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

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 while the arguments above show that an individual conciliatory commitment cannot rationally undermine itself, they do 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 immune 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 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* license packaging all of these commitments into one conciliatory norm and then holding that all of the elements of the norm are immune to 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 skepticism towards the other commitment when this other commitment is disputed. As long as the conciliatory commitment that is motivating 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 alternatively 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 partially independent, this norm will not be invulnerable to worries raised by disagreement.

The picture that emerges from this discussion is one where my total conciliatory view consists of a nest of conciliatory commitments, some tame and highly plausible and some demanding and less plausible. None of these commitments 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 requirements 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 characterize 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" commitments 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 toward 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 *N1* 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 *N1*. Perhaps *N1* 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 *N1* could point to some of the principal conciliatory proposals in the literature and then assert that these are reasonably good approximations of the truth.[10]) One consequence of the vagueness of *N1* 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 *N1* would not be defeated by the disagreement over the view. For *N1* would be defeated by disagreement only if there is some other norm *N0* that (i) is affirmed by advocates of *N1*; (ii) delivers a conciliatory prescription when applied to the type of opposition faced by *N1*; and (iii) would not itself be undermined were one to accept the reasons that opponents of *N1* use to attack *N1*. Plausibly, there is no *N0* that satisfies all of these criteria. For given the current state of the dispute over conciliationism, (ii) would seem to demand that *N0* be a rather demanding requirement (after all, it is not as though the overwhelming majority of experts have rejected conciliationism), while (iii) seems to require that *N0* be a very weak requirement (since if it is a demanding requirement, the criticisms lodged against the very general *N1* will probably apply to *N0* as well). I suspect that if one asked opponents of conciliationism whether reasonability would require that they give up some 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 I'm right in thinking that they would answer this way, then there is good reason to think that there is no norm that satisfies (i) – (iii), 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

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

conciliatory commitments even in the face of the current disagreement over the merits of conciliationism.[11]

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