

Can We Rationally Believe Conciliationism?

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The Plan

- What's Conciliationism?
- Why does it matter?
- What's the Self-Undermining Problem for Conciliationism?
- How have people tried to solve it?
- Why have they failed?
- Why will they keep failing for a long, long time?

What's Conciliationism?

Conciliationism's Core (full-belief): If an agent *A* learns that an apparent epistemic peer, *B*, disagrees with her about *p*, then *A* is rationally required to suspend judgment about *p*.

Conciliationism's Core (credence): If an agent *A* learns that an apparent epistemic peer, *B*, disagrees with her about *p*, then *A* is rationally required to adjust her credence in *p* significantly in the direction of *B*'s.

Why Does Conciliationism Matter?

If Conciliationism is correct, you ought to suspend judgment about . . .

- the moral (im)permissibility of buying factory farmed meat
- consequentialism vs. non-consequentialism in ethics
- theism vs. atheism
- one-boxing vs. two-boxing
- presentism vs. eternalism
- internalism vs. externalism about epistemic justification

Why Does Conciliationism Matter?

Some arguments employing Conciliationism as a premise:

- **Against controversial moral beliefs:**
Matheson (2016), McGrath (2007), Vavova (2014), Rowland (2017), Sinnott-Armstrong (2007), Sidgwick (1874)
- **Against (Ir)religious beliefs:**
Feldman (2007), pretty much any religious diversity argument
- **Against Philosophical Beliefs:**
Goldberg (2013), Matheson and Carey (2013), Kornblith (2013)

What's the Self-Undermining Problem?

Conciliationists

- Bogardus (2009)
- Christensen (2007, 2009, 2013)
- Frances (2013)
- Elga (2007, 2010)
- Feldman (2005, 2007, 2010)
- Goldberg (2013)
- Kornblith (2010, 2013)
- Machuca (2013)
- Matheson (2009, 2015)
- Pittard (2015)
- Tersman (2015)
- Vavova (2014)

Steadfasters

- Bergmann (2009)
- Decker (2014)
- Dougherty (2013)
- Kelly (2005, 2010)
- King (2012, 2013)
- Lackey (2008)
- Pritchard (2013)
- Titelbaum (2014)
- van Inwagen (2010)
- Weatherson (2010, 2013)
- Wedgwood (2010)
- Weintraub (2013)

What's the Self-Undermining Problem?

“Several people have noted that, at least given the current state of epistemological opinion, there is a sense in which Conciliationism is self-undermining. For example, I, as a conciliationist, know full well that several excellent philosophers oppose my view; in fact, it seems to me that opinion on Conciliationism is presently divided roughly evenly. By my own lights, then, I should not be highly confident in Conciliationism. So, in a sense, my Conciliationism is self-undermining.”

What's the Self-Undermining Problem?

“Indeed, it seems to me those of us who find ourselves strongly drawn toward Conciliationism in these contentious times should not be confident that Conciliationism is correct. (Of course, we may still work hard in producing and disseminating arguments for the view, hoping to hasten thereby the day when epistemic conditions will brighten, consensus will blossom, and all will rationally and whole-heartedly embrace Conciliationism.)”

David Christensen (2009: 763)

How Have People Tried to Solve It?

- Tomas Bogardus (2009): “A Vindication of the Equal Weight View”
- John Pittard (2015): “Resolute Conciliationism”
- Adam Elga (2010): “How to Disagree about How to Disagree”

Why Existing Defenses Fail

The Big Idea: These defenses depend for their success on controversial philosophical claims. By their own lights, then, conciliationists cannot rationally believe the claims they employ in their defenses. So they cannot rationally believe that their defenses succeed. Thus, they cannot rationally believe Conciliationism in the face of peer disagreement about it—nor can anyone else.

Why Existing Defenses Fail: Bogardus

[T]he antecedent of the Equal-Weight View might not be satisfied in cases involving knowledge from that unmediated access to the truth of propositions sometimes afforded by rational intuition. And it's plausible that the Equal-Weight View is itself a deliverance of rational intuition . . . With further reflection, I think, one can come to just see the truth of the View – not only does it seem obvious, but upon further reflection it just *is* obvious.

Tomas Bogardus (2009: 333)

Why Existing Defenses Fail: Pittard

Self-Exempting Conciliationism:

- (1) Conciliationism: If A learns that an apparent epistemic peer, B , disagrees with her about p , then A is rationally required to adjust her credence in p significantly in the direction of B 's (or suspend judgment about p),
- (2) unless p is Conciliationism. If p is Conciliationism, then A ought to remain steadfast in her confidence in p .

Why Existing Defenses Fail: Pittard

Conciliationism's Big Idea: We ought to show epistemic deference to our epistemic peers and superiors

Two ways to show deference:

- At the level of our *beliefs and credences*
- At the level of our *rationale* for revising beliefs and credences

Why Existing Defenses Fail: Pittard

Controversial Claims

Possible: It is *psychologically possible* for an agent to form (or retain) a belief on the basis of a claim that she does not believe or on the basis of reasoning that she rejects.

Permissible: It is *rationally permissible* for an agent to form (or retain) a belief on the basis of a claim that she does not believe or on the basis of reasoning that she rejects.

Why Existing Defenses Fail: Elga

Self-Exempting Conciliationism:

- (1) Conciliationism: If A learns that an apparent epistemic peer, B , disagrees with her about p , then A is rationally required to adjust her credence in p significantly in the direction of B 's (or suspend judgment about p),
- (2) unless p is Conciliationism. If p is Conciliationism, then A is required to remain steadfast (indeed, have $cr = 1$) in p .

A Dissenting Conciliationist

“I think that there is something unsatisfying about [SEC]... Suppose that I follow [Conciliationism] and remain absolutely confident in its correctness, despite the fact that it's rejected by many epistemologists I respect, and even rate as my superiors in philosophical skill. How should I view my own reasoning on this topic? Should I think that while I'm generally only moderately reliable when I think about philosophy, nevertheless when I think about arguments for general conciliation, and for not being conciliatory about conciliation, I'm especially immune from error? That seems extremely dubious. There is nothing about this particular topic that would make my way of thinking about it special, or especially immune from my usual sort of blunders.

Should I count myself just lucky, then? This seems more natural: given my general fallibility in thinking philosophically, it would indeed be lucky if I, rather than all those more-talented philosophers who reject [Conciliationism], am the one who is right this time... On what basis could I conclude that I'm the one who got lucky, rather than those who reject [Conciliationism]?... [T]he intuitive appeal of conciliatory views of disagreement (and of other principles of epistemic modesty) flows from rejecting that sort of reasoning as begging the question.

Thus it doesn't seem to me that it would be rational for me to be highly confident (let alone certain) that I'm either very lucky or using especially reliable methods in thinking about the topic of rational responses to disagreement. And so [SEC], despite fitting in a natural way with the [SUP], does not seem to me to provide a satisfactory solution to our problem."

Christensen (2013: 89-90)

Why Existing Defenses Fail: Elga

Controversial Claims:

Rational Dogmatism: We are rationally permitted to believe, or have $cr = 1$ in, Conciliationism.

Motivation: Self-exempting Conciliationism is consistent with the central motivations for embracing Conciliationism in the first place.

Why Future Defenses Will Fail (Probably)

- Conciliationism is a simple view. The SUP is a simple problem. If the solution were obvious, it would have been noticed by now.
- So, if there is a solution, it will probably involve some fancy philosophical footwork.
- But fancy philosophical footwork usually involves controversial philosophical claims.
- So any future solution to the SUP will probably involve controversial philosophical claims.
- Conciliationism's Best Hope: Sudden mass conversion. (Ain't likely to happen anytime soon.)

Thanks.

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