Unacknowledged Permissivism
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Abstract: *Epistemic permissivism* is the view that it is possible for two people to rationally hold incompatible attitudes toward some proposition on the basis of one body of evidence. In this paper, I defend a particular version of permissivism – *unacknowledged permissivism* (UP) – which says that permissivism is true, but that no one can ever rationally believe that she is in a permissive case. I show that counter to what virtually all authors who have discussed UP claim, UP is an attractive view: it is compatible with the intuitive motivations for permissivism and avoids a significant challenge to permissivism: the arbitrariness objection.

1 Introduction

According to *basic permissivism* about rationality, there can be cases in which two people come to different rational conclusions on the basis of the same evidence. More precisely, basic permissivism says that *basic permissive cases* are possible.

> **basic permissive case:** A case in which two people rationally hold incompatible doxastic attitudes towards some proposition P on the basis of a single body of evidence E.[1]

Those who endorse permissivism agree that basic permissive cases can occur but differ with regard to whether *acknowledged permissive cases* are possible. Acknowledged permissive cases are cases in which two people rationally hold incompatible attitudes towards some proposition based on shared evidence, while believing that one another's opinions are just as rational as their own.[2]

The most popular versions of permissivism hold that acknowledged permissive cases can occur, and that in fact, they occur often. Call permissive views which allow for the existence of acknowledged permissive cases versions of *acknowledged permissivism.*[3] Another possible type of permissivism holds that acknowledged permissive cases are not possible, and that every basic permissive case is an *unacknowledged permissive case*: a case in which two parties rationally hold incompatible attitudes towards some proposition on the basis of a single body of evidence, but neither party believes that the other party's view is rational.

Unacknowledged permissive cases might count as unacknowledged for different reasons. For example, a permissive case could be unacknowledged in virtue of the fact that the parties involved are not aware of the disagreement—that is, they do not recognize that they have differing opinions about P. An example: two mathematicians working in different countries hold different views about whether some hypothesis is provable but are unaware of their disagreement because they have not come in contact with one another. Another way in which a permissive case could count as unacknowledged is if the parties to the disagreement recognize that they have different opinions about P, but fail to regard one another's opinions about P as rational.[4] A third way that a permissive case could be unacknowledged is if each of the participants is aware of the other party's attitude towards P and believes that attitude to be rational, but is uncertain about their own attitude towards P. Call permissive views that hold that the only permissive cases are unacknowledged permissive cases versions of *unacknowledged permissivism* (UP for short).

According to *impermissivism* about rationality, basic permissive cases, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged, are not possible.[5]

Most authors who defend permissivism defend acknowledged permissivism.[6] Likewise, most authors who argue against permissivism focus their criticisms on acknowledged permissivism.[7] Unacknowledged permissivism is thought to be unmotivated, and therefore taken to be a coherent but unattractive option by most parties to the debate.

The goal of this paper is to show that, contrary to what has been assumed, UP is a plausible view. I begin by clarifying the thesis of unacknowledged permissivism by contrasting it with acknowledged permissivism (§2). I then discuss the kind of cases that are often taken to provide intuitive support for permissivism, and to support acknowledged permissivism in particular. I show that these cases do not provide more support for acknowledged permissivism than they do for unacknowledged permissivism. I also suggest that there is some reason to be skeptical of whether our intuitions about these hypothetical cases really support even basic permissivism (§3). In §4, I show that UP avoids a significant theoretical challenge that plagues versions of acknowledged permissivism–namely, the challenge of instability, inconsistency, or arbitrariness. Thus, unacknowledged permissivism does not run afoul of our intuitions about permissivism (as it is often assumed to do) and is immune to the strongest objection in the literature against basic permissivism. Finally, in §5, I respond to two objections that have been raised against unacknowledged permissivism.

2 Acknowledged and Unacknowledged Permissivism

In their helpful paper delineating different versions of permissivism and impermissivism, Kopec and Titelbaum discuss a version of permissivism according to which 'there exist cases where two agents have the same evidence and rationally come to conflicting assessments [of some proposition P], all the while being fully aware of the divergent rational assessments' (2016, p. 191). They dub this view 'acknowledged permissivism,' and the kind of case just described an 'acknowledged permissive case.'

This characterization of an acknowledged permissive fails to specify what exactly needs to be acknowledged by the parties to the disagreement for their case to count as an acknowledged permissive case. In particular, the description leaves open whether each party must acknowledge the *rationality* of the other's party's attitude towards P, or simply *the fact that* the other party has a different attitude towards P. The nomenclature (acknowledged *permissivism*) suggests that Kopec and Titelbaum have the former variation in mind: what is acknowledged by each party is that both the attitude held towards P by the other party and their own attitude toward P are rational. That is, an acknowledged permissive case is as follows:

> **acknowledged permissive case:** A case in which two people rationally hold incompatible doxastic attitudes towards P on the basis of a single body of evidence E, and in which each person believes that the other party's attitude is rational.

Acknowledged permissivism is the view that acknowledged permissive cases are possible. But it's possible to have a permissive view about rationality even if you find the existence of acknowledged permissive cases implausible. Such a view would affirm the existence of *basic* permissive cases, while denying the possibility of *acknowledged* permissive cases. According to this version of permissivism, every basic permissive case is also necessarily a case in which rational participants fail to see an attitude towards P other than their own as rational, perhaps even in spite of their most charitable attempts. Call the view that holds that basic permissive cases exist, but acknowledged permissive cases do not, *unacknowledged permissivism* (UP). UP is the view that the only permissive cases that exist are *unacknowledged permissive cases*:

> **unacknowledged permissive case**: A case in which two parties rationally hold incompatible attitudes towards P on the basis of a single body of evidence E, but neither party believes that the attitude of the other party is rational.[8]

According to unacknowledged permissivism, individuals who have reached rational, incompatible conclusions on the basis of shared evidence cannot at the same time rationally regard one another's views as rational. UP says you can be in a basic permissive case only if you don't believe that you're in one.[9] If, in such a situation, you do come to believe that the case you're in is permissive, your overall doxastic state is no longer rational. White describes such a position as the view that 'permissivism is true but epistemically destructive if known' (2005, p. 450).[10]

UP entails both that (i) there are possible cases in which evidence E rationalizes belief that P and belief that not-P; and (ii) that it is not rational for a subject who is in such a case to believe P on the basis of E while simultaneously judging that a belief that not-P on the basis of E is rational. Thus, UP posits that permissive cases exist, but necessarily involve what Sorensen (1988) refers to as a 'belief blindspot' for any subject who is in a permissive case. According to Sorensen, a belief blindspot is a proposition that may be true, but cannot be rationally believed by a subject.[11]

While UP is a coherent position in the theoretical space of options, it is usually thought to be an overall unattractive view. One alleged problem with the view is that it breaks ties with the core motivation for defending permissivism in the first place–namely, the intuition that there are plenty of ordinary and easily identifiable cases in which rational disagreement can occur. Unacknowledged permissivism cannot accommodate this intuition because it entails that rationality forbids participants in a permissive case from seeing their disagreement as a rational one.[12] Schoenfield, for example, writes:

> [UP] is a very implausible view and accepting it requires giving up on some of the considerations that motivate permissivism in the first place. (2014, footnote 31)

And White writes:

> While [UP] may be coherent and escape the objections thus far, I doubt that anyone holds such a view, as it is hard to see what could motivate it. (2005, p. 451)

As I will argue in §3, however, the thought that unacknowledged permissivism fails to fulfill our intuitions about permissive cases is mistaken: UP fulfills these intuitions as well as acknowledged permissivism does.

Another complaint against unacknowledged permissivism is that the view has the unusual implication that, whenever one comes to correctly believe that one is in a basic permissive case with regard to some proposition P, one's original (rational) attitude towards P ceases to be rational. This seems problematic because, as White puts it, it is 'natural to suppose that a belief can always rationally survive learning the epistemic value of one's evidence. That is, if it is rational to believe P given evidence E, then it is rational to believe P given E and E', where E' correctly states what attitudes towards P are rationally permissible given E' (2005, p. 450).

A final objection to unacknowledged permissivism is that it suggests that it is impossible to identify a permissive case, even from an observer's or third-person perspective. (The details of this argument will be elaborated in §5.) But if there are no identifiable permissive cases, this seems like a problem for the view: why should we believe permissivism is correct if we can never identify a permissive cases?

So, permissive epistemologies that do not allow for acknowledged permissive cases, it is argued, are intuitively implausible, and suffer from other problems. As I'll argue, though, there are good reasons for thinking that these objections to unacknowledged permissivism cannot be sustained. In the next section, I turn to the allegation that unacknowledged permissivism breaks ties with the intuitive motivations for permissivism.

3 The Intuitive Motivations for Permissivism

The intuition that rational disagreement is possible is among the major motivations cited for basic permissivism. Here is Rosen (2001), often referenced in discussions of the intuitive motivation for permissivism:

It should be obvious that reasonable people can disagree, even when confronted with a single body of evidence. When a jury or a court is divided in a difficult case, the mere fact of disagreement does not mean that someone is being unreasonable. Paleontologists disagree about what killed the dinosaurs. And while it is possible that most of the parties to this dispute are irrational, this need not be the case. To the contrary, it would appear to be a fact of epistemic life that a careful review of the evidence does not guarantee consensus, even among thoughtful and otherwise rational investigators (2001, pp. 71–72).

Here, Rosen asserts the rationality of diverging opinions in two domains: courts of law, and scientific inquiry. And it is quite common to see similar appeals to the permissibility of rational disagreement in other domains, too. Schoenfield, immediately after quoting part of the above passage from Rosen, remarks that 'it is not just in scientific contexts in which it seems that people can reasonably arrive at different conclusions on the basis of the same body of evidence.' In other domains, such as medicine and religion, she suggests that people might reasonably disagree on the basis of the same evidence; for example, about the efficacy of acupuncture, or the existence of God (2014, p.196).

Adding to the list of domains in which permissivism seems to many intuitively correct, we see Peter van Inwagen appealing to the intuition that rational disagreement in philosophical matters is possible a decade before the debate over permissivism gained steam:

Whatever the reason, it must be possible for one to be justified in accepting a philosophical thesis when there are philosophers who, by *all* objective external criteria, are at least equally well qualified to pronounce on that thesis and who reject it (1996, p. 31).[13]

It is natural to see cases in these domains (law, science, religion, philosophy) as involving a mutually recognized disagreement between the parties involved: the majority of jurors, scientists, philosophers, and people with religious views are aware that there are equally intelligent and informed people who disagree with them. To take one example, consider the case of Peter van Inwagen and David Lewis, who had an extensive philosophical correspondence and thus were well aware of their disagreement about the compatibility of free will and determinism. To many, it can seem that the correct explanation of a protracted and mutually acknowledged disagreement between thinkers of formidable intelligence, such as the disagreement between van Inwagen and Lewis, should respect that fact that both parties hold rational beliefs. Part of the appeal of this

explanation is that it allows us to avoid attributing bad-faith inquiry or sloppy thinking to either of the parties involved.

So, let's grant for now that the cases we have been examining provide some intuitive support for permissivism. But do they also support acknowledged permissivism over unacknowledged permissivism, as it is usually assumed? Although these cases often involve mutually recognized disagreement, it does not follow from that fact that these are *acknowledged* permissive cases. What is necessary for an acknowledged permissive case to obtain is the existence of a mutually recognized disagreement about P *plus* each party's recognition *that the other person's attitude towards P is rational*. So, in order for these cases to support acknowledged permissivism over unacknowledged permissivism, they must be construed as cases that involve rational disagreement between parties each of whom regard the other's view as rational.

Are the intuitive cases best construed as cases in which parties to a mutually recognized disagreement also regard one another's views as rational? In fact, the cases usually offered to generate our permissivist intuitions are neutral on this point. There is typically no stipulation that the parties involved see one another's views as rational, nor is this possibility ruled out. Instead, a story is given about how equally competent inquirers derive different conclusions from a single body of evidence. To see an example of this, consider a generic description of a jury case that is meant to stir up our permissivist feelings:

> In a criminal trial we have a large, complex body of evidence, some of which appears to link the defendant with the crime, some of which suggests that he has nothing to do with it. Figuring out what to believe is a matter of weighing various considerations as we try to fit all the pieces together. Difficult cases like this tend to produce sharp disagreement even among the most diligent inquirers. (White 2005, p. 446)

Here, a specific case is not described in great enough detail to give us an answer to the question of whether the disagreeing jurors regard one another's views as just as rational as their own. For everything White says here, it's open to the reader to interpret this as a case where the jurors regard one another's views as rational. It's also open to the reader to interpret it as a case in which they don't. Forming the opinion that the juror's views in this case are rational, then, speaks in favour of basic permissivism, but not necessarily in favour of acknowledged permissivism, or against unacknowledged permissivism. To see whether *acknowledged* permissivism in particular receives

strong support from our intuitions about particular cases, we would need to examine our intuitive reactions to cases like this one:

> **acknowledged permissive jury case**: A group of jurors are faced with a large, complex body of evidence in a criminal trial. Some of the evidence appears to link the defendant with the crime, and some of the evidence suggests that he has nothing to do with it. All of the jurors are diligent inquirers and each one of them considers the evidence conscientiously. After each juror has had a chance to privately form an opinion regarding the defendant's guilt, the jurors share their opinions with one another. Some of the jurors think the defendant is guilty, and some of them think he is innocent. But, while standing by their initial verdicts, everyone who thinks the defendant is guilty recognizes that the opinions of those who think he is innocent are rational, and vice versa.

If a significant number of people think that the jurors in *this* case are rational, we would have a clear case of intuitive support for acknowledged permissivism, and against unacknowledged permissivism. But here, in my experience, peoples' intuitions are more mixed. It seems (to me) just as plausible that each juror, having scrutinized the evidence and done her best to ascertain its probative force, will not be rational to regard the opinions of disagreeing jurors as rational — at least insofar as she retains her original opinion. In other words, one might just as easily think there is something *problematic* about a case in which disputants have come to different conclusions about P on the basis of E and nevertheless regard one another's views as rational.[14]

I've just claimed that cases like the **acknowledged permissive jury case** might seem intuitively problematic to some, but there are undoubtedly those who will lack this intuition. I ask those who fit that description to consider Peter van Inwagen's reaction to his disagreement with David Lewis as an example of how challenging it can be for a rational person to acknowledge that a view they disagree with, made on the basis of the same evidence they possess, is rational. If one thinks acknowledged permissivism is true, and that van Inwagen and Lewis's disagreement is an example of an acknowledged permissive case, one should hope that Van Inwagen would conclude at some point over the course of this protracted and mutually acknowledged philosophical disagreement that he and Lewis held rational incompatible doxastic attitudes on the basis of their shared body of evidence. But this was not van Inwagen's response. Instead, he concluded that he (van Inwagen) must possess some incommunicable insight into the subject matter that Lewis lacked. That is, van Inwagen concluded that he was in possession of some extra (inarticulable or otherwise incommunicable) evidence that put him in a superior evidential position to Lewis.

Notably, Van Inwagen did not conclude that his disagreement with Lewis was an instance of an acknowledged permissive case.[15]

Let me be clear about my use of this example: I'm not claiming that this anecdote shows that one can't rationally regard an opinion other than one's own as rational. Rather, I bring it up to show how it can seem right, when in the throes of an intense disagreement with someone one respects, to nevertheless resist the conclusion that that person's view is both based on the same evidence *and* rational. Van Inwagen's response to this dilemma was to give up on the idea that he and Lewis shared the same evidence.

So far I've argued that our intuitions about typical cases used to support permissivism don't provide *more* support for acknowledged permissivism than they do for unacknowledged permissivism, because it's possible to interpret them either as acknowledged permissive cases or as unacknowledged permissive cases. Further, I've suggested that cases like **acknowledged permissive jury case**, in which it is *stipulated* that disputants regard one another's views as perfectly rational, generate mixed intuitions. Some readers may remain unmoved on this last point. To these readers, it will seem that even jurors who recognize one another's opposing views as rational can themselves be rational. I'll conclude this section by suggesting two error theories about our intuitions in this case, and more generally in the types of cases typically offered to provide intuitive support for permissivism.[16] That is, I'll provide two theories according to which the best possible explanation of the cases under consideration could *seem* to be that they that they involve rational disagreement between the parties involved, when that is not in fact the case. In doing so, I hope to provide those who still feel the pull of acknowledged permissivism with reason to question their intuitions about cases like the **acknowledged permissive jury case**.

Error theory 1: We might confuse judgments about *the agents* with judgments about *the agents' attitudes*.

Consider the difference between the judgment that someone else is a rational person, and the judgment that a particular attitude of hers is rational. In order to arrive at a judgment of the first kind, we might consider factors such as whether the person typically reasons to conclusions that are supported by the evidence, or whether she usually uses good belief-forming processes, or whether she possesses certain character traits such as curiosity, intellectual humility, open-

mindedness, or other traits that characterize the epistemically virtuous. Notice, too, that it is possible for these judgments to diverge: we might think that someone is, in general, a rational person, but that, in this particular case, she's come to hold an irrational belief.

The cases that are meant to provide intuitive support for permissivism often rely on descriptions of the parties to the disagreement that encourage readers to regard them as the kind of people who typically form rational beliefs—for example, by describing them as 'diligent inquirers' or 'well qualified' to render a judgment on the topic in question. These descriptions emphasize the epistemic virtues that would be relevant to making global judgments about the agents as individuals. Encouraging readers to think of the subjects as the kind of people who typically form rational beliefs, and then asking a question about whether their beliefs are rational in this particular case, makes it easy to confuse being a reasonable person with having a reasonable attitude. But a judgment that the participants in some case are 'rational people' is not the same as a judgment that, in this particular case, they both hold rational attitudes towards some proposition. The latter judgment is what is needed in order for cases involving disagreement between jurors, paleontologists, philosophers, or people of different religious persuasions to provide intuitive support for permissivism.

One possible explanation of our intuitions about these cases is that they amount to judgments that the parties involved are rational in a global sense, rather than judgments that their respective attitudes in the particular case in question are rational. However, the latter judgment is what is needed to support either basic permissivism or acknowledged permissivism. If this error-theoretic explanation is correct, then our intuitions about test cases will not support permissivism at all, let alone *acknowledged* permissivism.

Error theory 2: We might confuse judgments about the rationality of others' beliefs with judgments about whether they are deserving of respect, or whether they are worthwhile conversation partners.

For some, the intuitive appeal of acknowledged permissivism is that it allows parties to a disagreement to espouse intellectual humility, or to somehow treat others with respect, in a way that competing theories of epistemic rationality cannot. Unacknowledged permissivism and impermissivism both entail that I can never rationally accept the view of my peer as rational, while

retaining my own view.[17] For impermissivism, this is because there is only ever one rational response to the evidence, so either my own view or my peer's will be rational. If I'm the rational one, I shouldn't falsely believe that my peer's view is rational too—instead, I should regard her view as irrational. On the other hand, if my peer is the rational one, and I come to recognize this, I should abandon my own view and adopt the rational view of my peer. Either way, I can't rationally recognize my peer's view as rational while retaining my own. Unacknowledged permissivism has the same consequence, because according to UP, the only permissive cases are cases in which each party's view is rational, but neither party believes that the attitude of the other party is rational.

One might think that someone who disagrees with the conclusions of other competent inquirers tasked with assessing a complex body of evidence lacks intellectual humility, or somehow fails to treat the other inquirers with due respect, if she concludes that their views are irrational. Regarding one's peers' beliefs as irrational may seem like something only a jerk would do, in Schwitzgebel's sense of the term. According to him, a jerk is someone who 'culpably fails to appreciate the perspectives of others around him, treating them as tools to be manipulated or idiots to be dealt with rather than as moral and epistemic peers' (2014). Some people may be drawn to acknowledged permissivism because it seems to be the only way to avoid the consequence that to be perfectly rational, one must be a jerk.

The assumption behind this line of thought is that believing one's peer's belief is irrational necessarily involves acting like a jerk—treating them with a lack of respect, as an object to be manipulated and not as an epistemic peer. While regarding someone's belief as irrational is definitely *compatible* with treating them in this way, this needn't be the case. To the contrary, a belief that someone else's belief is irrational (or a failure to see how it could be rational) can sometimes serve as motivation to continue engaging in inquiry with that person, redoubling one's efforts to see how he or she arrived at her view. In so doing, one might naturally reconsider whether one's own position is correct. Thus, it does not follow from the fact that one judges that someone else's view is irrational that one fails to treat them as an epistemic peer, or that one treats them as an object to be manipulated.[18]

Believing that someone else's belief is irrational is also compatible with seeing that person as being, in general, a responsible epistemic agent who erred on this occasion (see previous error-theoretic explanation). So, believing that the beliefs of others who disagree with you on the basis

of the same evidence are irrational (or failing to see how their beliefs could be rational) need not involve a lack of respect towards one's peers.

So, if one's rejection of unacknowledged permissivism is the result of a hesitancy to adopt a theory of rationality that entails that rational belief necessarily involves moral or epistemic vice, this rejection is unfounded. The truth of unacknowledged permissivism need not involve anything less than treating others with full respect.

The first error theory calls into question whether our intuitions about test cases really give any support to permissivism. The second error theory calls into question whether our intuitions support acknowledged permissivism in particular. But if either theory is correct, there will be an explanation of our intuitions about test cases that is in harmony with unacknowledged permissivism. So in order to show that the kind of cases typically offered to generate permissivist intuitions support acknowledged permissivism over unacknowledged permissivism, we should first rule out these error theories.

4 The Arbitrariness Objection

In the previous section I argued that the cases typically offered to provide intuitive support for permissivism, and often thought to support acknowledged over unacknowledged versions of the view, do not provide more support for acknowledged permissivism than they do for unacknowledged permissivism. In fact, there is some reason to suspect our intuitive reactions to the kinds of cases that are usually provided to generate intuitive support for acknowledged permissivism actually do no such thing. In this section, I turn to what I see as one of the major virtues of and motivations for UP: its ability to withstand the most serious objection to permissivism, the arbitrariness objection. My goal here is to give a succinct characterization of the objection, which appears in the literature in many forms, and to show that it applies only to acknowledged versions of permissivism. Our discussion of the arbitrariness objection will also suggest a plausible motivation for UP: namely, that it respects a requirement of rationality that I call the 'anti-arbitrariness requirement' (or AAR). Later in this section, I'll discuss the anti-arbitrariness requirement in greater detail.

The arbitrariness objection to permissivism is discussed at length by White (2005, 2013), but see also Christensen (2007) and Feldman (2006) for early mentions of the problem. Since then,

the objection has surfaced in many places in the literature under the label of arbitrariness (Schoenfield 2014; Simpson 2017), instability (Weisberg forthcoming), or inconsistency (Greco and Hedden 2016). The objection takes the form of a *reductio* against permissivism. It goes roughly as follows: in cases where the permissivist herself recognizes that a belief that not-P is just as rational as a belief that P given her evidence, her own commitment to P is problematically arbitrary. Because permissivism allows individuals to adopt arbitrary beliefs, it is said to be in some way incoherent, inconsistent, or unstable.

White, in his discussion of this style of objection, likens an agent's adherence to her belief in a permissive case to a person's adherence to his belief in a case in which he knows the belief is the result of his having taken a belief-inducing pill (2005, p. 448).[19] A belief formed by taking a belief-inducing pill is no more likely than chance to be true, and it's clear enough that there is something arbitrary about forming a belief this way. But why should the person in a permissive case see her belief that P as no more likely than chance to be true? Presumably, because of another judgment she holds; namely, that a belief that not-P would also be rational. According to this line of thought, what's wrong with permissivism is that it allows problematic pairs of judgments in permissive cases. Someone in a permissive case is permitted to believe that P (i.e. to judge that P is true) and simultaneously to judge that not-P is rational given evidence E. It is the combination of these attitudes that many authors identify as problematic.[20]

Though the details vary from author to author, there is a common concern in the objections to permissivism that charge it with instability, arbitrariness, or inconsistency. Most authors who find the arbitrariness objection persuasive, or simply seek to characterize it, agree that the objection charges permissivism with violating a prohibition on *certain combinations of attitudes that are themselves irrational*. We can summarize the rational requirement that is at the crux of the arbitrariness objection as follows:

> **Anti-arbitrariness requirement (AAR):** Do not adopt a doxastic attitude towards P, based on a body of evidence E, while believing that an incompatible doxastic attitude towards P is rational based on E.[21]

The arbitrariness objection charges permissivism with allowing attitudes that violate a *coherence* requirement of rationality. Coherence requirements of theoretical rationality are prohibitions on holding certain combinations of attitudes. For example, if there is a requirement that prohibits

agents from holding combinations of beliefs that violate the law of non-contradiction, it counts as a coherence requirement. Similarly, if the enkratic requirement, which prohibits a person from believing P while believing that she is rationally required to refrain from believing P, is a requirement of theoretical rationality, it is a coherence requirement (*cf.* Broome, 2013). Likewise, the anti-arbitrariness requirement, if it is a genuine requirement of rationality, will be a coherence requirement.

In short, any theory of rationality that says that the requirements of rationality permit combinations of attitudes that themselves violate a requirement of rationality is self-defeating. Thus, since permissivism licenses agents to violate AAR, permissivism is self-defeating. The arbitrariness argument against permissivism can be laid out more succinctly as follows.

Arbitrariness argument against permissivism
1. Sometimes, belief that P and belief that not-P are both rational, given evidence E. (basic permissivism)
2. One is never rationally permitted to hold some doxastic attitude towards P one the basis of E while believing that an incompatible doxastic attitude towards P is rational on E. (AAR)
3. Sometimes, one is rationally permitted to believe P on the basis of E, and rationally permitted to believe that a belief that not-P is rational on E.
  Therefore,
4. Permissivism licenses agents to violate a requirement of rationality. (2, 3)
5. The correct theory of rationality does not license agents to violate the requirements of rationality.
  Therefore,
C.   Permissivism is false. (1, 4, 5)

Premise 1 of the argument simply says that basic permissive cases can occur: it is a statement of basic permissivism for the sake of *reductio*. Premise 2, though we have not said much in its explicit defense, captures that thought, shared by many authors, that there is something unstable (and thus rationally impermissible) about affirming the rationality of not-P while believing that P. Some permissivists simply reject AAR: they hold that there is nothing wrong with such pairs of attitudes (see Meacham, 2014; Schoenfield, 2014). However, I think there is some reason to side with those who believe that AAR expresses a genuine requirement of rationality.

Why think that one violates a requirement of rationality when one believes that P while acknowledging that a belief that not-P is equally rational? For a start, AAR bears a strong resemblance to the principle of Immodesty, which is itself typically taken to be a requirement of

rationality. Immodesty prohibits an agent from adopting an inductive method that estimates that it is less accurate than any other inductive method (Lewis 1971). Some versions of Immodesty go further, stipulating that one should regard one's own inductive method as *more* accurate than any alternative (Horowitz 2013, p. 43) So Immodesty says that you should believe that your inductive method is as accurate as any alternative, or perhaps even that you should believe it is more accurate than any alternative. The motivation for accepting Immodesty as a requirement of rationality is that rational agents should use inductive methods that they take to be maximally truth-conducive: you are less than perfectly rational if you adopt an inductive method that you judge to be less accurate than some alternative.

There is a similar motivation available for the purported rational requirement expressed by AAR. AAR says that you should not believe P when you think that some other incompatible attitude is rational on the basis of your evidence. The reason for accepting this principle as a requirement of rationality is that rational agents should hold beliefs that they take to be maximally rational. You are less than perfectly rational if you adopt a belief that you judge to be no better than some alternative. Just as a rational agent shouldn't use an inductive method that she takes to be no better than a competing method, a rational agent shouldn't hold a belief that she takes to be no more rational than a competing belief. I take this to be a *prima facie* reason for accepting AAR as a genuine requirement of rationality.[22]

Premise 3 of the arbitrariness argument says that I can sometimes rationally believe that my disagreement with a peer is an instance of a permissive case—that is, I can rationally take some attitude towards P while believing that another attitude towards P is rational on the basis of the same evidence. For simplicity, call this conjunction of beliefs the belief that I'm *in a permissive case*. If permissive cases are possible (as we have assumed in Premise 1) it seems natural to think that it can be rational for me to believe I'm in one. Suppose I am in fact in a basic permissive case, and I rationally believe P on the basis of E. Since this is a permissive case, the belief that not-P is also rational, given E. And if belief that not-P is rational, I should be rationally permitted to *believe* that a belief that not-P is rational. So it seems that I should be able both to rationally believe that P, and to rationally hold that a belief that not-P is rational. If one thinks that permissive cases can occur, then, one should be amenable to accepting Premise 3.

It follows from Premises 2 and 3 that permissivism licenses subjects to violate the requirements of rationality (Premise 4). Premise 5, which states that the correct theory of

rationality will not permit agents to violate the requirements of rationality, though not accepted universally, seems exceedingly plausible to many philosophers.[23] We have derived a contradiction from our assumption of basic permissivism, so basic permissivism must be false.

The arbitrariness argument against permissivism poses a problem for permissivists who accept the idea that one can sometimes rationally believe that one is in a permissive case. Acknowledged permissivists, of course, must accept this: the view that acknowledged permissive cases are possible just *is* the view that one can sometimes believe one is in a permissive case.

On the other hand, proponents of unacknowledged permissivism deny that one can ever rationally believe that one is in a permissive case, and therefore would reject Premise 3 while accepting Premise 2. One way to resist the arbitrariness objection, then, is to endorse unacknowledged permissivism, and deny that it is ever rationally permissible to believe that you are in a permissive case. This can be an appealing response to the arbitrariness objection if, like White, Weisberg, Simpson, Greco, Hedden, and others, one finds it plausible that there is something problematic about believing P while recognizing that an incompatible attitude toward P is rationally permissible.

That UP is unsusceptible to the arbitrariness objection is not a new point: Ballantyne and Coffman (2012, p. 663 ff.), Horowitz (2013, footnote 20) Schoenfield (2013), White (2005), and Weisberg (forthcoming) all appreciate that arbitrariness-style worries are not effective against versions of permissivism that deny the possibility of acknowledged permissive cases. However, by and large the trend among these authors is to hastily dismiss UP as implausible, focusing their attention instead on the prospects for acknowledged permissivism. Here, my aim is to cast UP's ability to withstand the arbitrariness objection as a possible motivation for the view. UP should be attractive to those who are both inclined to accept basic permissivism, and to accept AAR as a requirement of rationality.

5 Objections to Unacknowledged Permissivism

So far, we've seen that unacknowledged permissivism can fulfill some of the intuitive motivations for permissivism and that, unlike acknowledged permissivism, it doesn't succumb to charges of instability or arbitrariness. But still, one might worry that it entails that, in permissive cases, one's attitude toward P cannot rationally survive one's learning the epistemic value of one's evidence;

or that it entails that it is not possible ever to identify permissive cases. In this section, I address these objections to UP.

5.1 Learning the epistemic value of one's evidence

White claims that it is 'natural to suppose that a belief can always rationally survive learning the epistemic value of one's evidence. That is, if it is rational to believe P given evidence E, then it is rational to believe P given E and E', where E' correctly states what attitudes towards P are rationally permissible given E' (2005, p. 450). White believes that learning the epistemic value of one's evidence should not impact the rationality of the doxastic attitudes one formed on the basis of that evidence. For simplicity, let's call this idea *White's claim.*

> *White's claim*: Rational beliefs can always survive learning the epistemic value of one's evidence.

If *White's claim* is correct, unacknowledged permissivism must be false. To see this, recall that according to UP, there are possible cases in which E makes rational belief that P and E makes rational belief that not-P. Suppose that I am in such a case, and I rationally believe P on the basis of E. Also according to UP, rationality prohibits me from believing P on the basis of E while believing that an incompatible attitude toward P is rational. So according to UP, if I learn the epistemic value of E (that is, if I come to know that E rationalizes incompatible doxastic attitudes toward P), it will no longer be rational for me to retain my original belief that P. In short: if UP is correct, then if I come to correctly believe that I am in a permissive case with regard to some proposition P, my original rational attitude towards P ceases to be rational.

White thinks that most people will accept the idea that the rationality of a belief should not be impacted by learning the epistemic value of one's evidence. While White's claim does seem plausible, in order for it to constitute a robust refutation of UP, it requires further defense. Something more needs to be said about why we would expect one's doxastic attitude towards P to be able to survive the revelation that one's evidence also rationalizes an alternative doxastic attitude towards P.

One possible motivation for *White's claim* is the idea that rational doxastic states should not depend on ignorance. If unacknowledged permissivism is correct, only ignorance of the

epistemic value of my evidence allows me to preserve the rationality of my belief that P, when I am in a permissive case. We might think that what's problematic about this state of affairs is that only ignorance of the true nature of my situation allows me to preserve my rationality. My attitude towards P can remain rational only so long as I remain in the dark with respect to the rationality of other points of view. This seems odd, and some might think it grounds for rejecting UP.

On closer examination, though, we see that this consequence of unacknowledged permissivism is actually an instance of a more general phenomenon. Permissive cases are not the only kind of case in which we can secure a special epistemic status for a belief only through ignorance of some other true proposition. In fact, such cases are commonplace. As an example of the broader phenomenon in question, consider the ordinary occurrence of rational false belief. Suppose I rationally believe that P, and that P is in fact false. My belief that P is rational by stipulation. And of course, there is nothing strange about the thought that I may come to possess some new evidence that leads me to recognize that P is false: we acquire new information and update our beliefs in light of it all the time. Suppose I do come to acquire new information that entails that P is false, and that I recognize the implications that my new information has for the truth of P. Because of my acquisition of new evidence that entails that P is false, belief that P is no longer rational for me.

As in an unacknowledged permissive case, the case of rational false belief is one in which my attitude towards one proposition (namely, P) is rational only so long as I am ignorant of some other proposition(s)—the one that entails that P is false. The idea that rational beliefs shouldn't depend on ignorance about the true nature of one's situation, then, isn't a plausible motivation for *White's claim*, since this line of reasoning will end up condemning intuitively unproblematic and commonplace cases of rational false belief, too.

To take another example of a kind of case in which a special epistemic status for a belief can be preserved only through ignorance of some other proposition, consider skeptical threats to ordinary knowledge. Grant that skepticism is false, and that under ordinary circumstances I have knowledge of facts about my immediate environment. In particular, I know that I have hands. But now, my skeptically-inclined friend raises the possibility that I might be a disembodied envatted brain being made to believe that I have hands. Suppose I rationally admit that it is possible that I am a disembodied brain, and I agree that, if that were the case, I would not have hands, and hence not *know* that I have hands. Some philosophers have argued that when I make this admission, I

lose knowledge of the fact that I have hands. According to this view, I can know that I have hands as long as I'm not thinking about the possibility that I might be a disembodied brain, but once I start entertaining that possibility, I lose knowledge of that proposition. If these philosophers are correct, this is another example of a case in which my attitude towards one proposition has a certain epistemic status (knowledge) only so long as I lack knowledge of another proposition (namely, that it is possible that I am an envatted brain).[24]

Because there are plenty of uncontroversial cases in which rational belief (or knowledge) can be preserved only through the right kind of ignorance, we should seek a different motivation for *White's claim.* A more promising idea is that rational doxastic states should not depend on ignorance of *a priori facts.*[25] As the case of rational false belief illustrates, the rationality of our beliefs often depends on our ignorance of empirical truths of which we lack knowledge because of our contingent circumstances. (Consider: I can rationally believe it's not raining in my part of town on the basis of my reliable weather app when I am in my windowless kitchen. But if I were to step out into my living room, I would see the rain and my belief would no longer be rational. There is nothing odd or problematic about this.) However, in contrast to empirical truths, *a priori* truths are always available or accessible. As a result, we might expect that learning an *a priori* truth should never impact the epistemic status of a rational belief. This thought, combined with the assumption that facts about what beliefs a body of evidence rationalizes are *a priori*, entails *White's claim.*

That the rationality of an attitude should not depend on ignorance of *a priori* facts initially seems much more promising than our previous proposal. Intuitively, if it's rational to believe that it's raining outside, then my learning that cubes have six sides, or that all bachelors are unmarried, or that 42 x 13 = 546, or some other *a priori* truth, does not change the rationality of my belief.

On the other hand, many authors believe there are cases in which the rationality of a belief can be undermined by learning an *a priori* truth. One example is that of Fermat's Last Theorem, first conjectured in 1637 by Pierre Fermat, and finally proved by Andrew Wiles in 1994. Most philosophers would agree that, as a theorem of number theory, Fermat's Last Theorem is an *a priori* truth. In the approximately-350-year span between the time Fermat raised the conjecture and the time it was proven to be true, mathematicians rationally suspended judgment on the matter. In this case, the rationality of the mathematicians' suspension of judgment about the theorem depended on their ignorance of an *a priori* truth—that is, their ignorance of the theorem itself.

Since there are cases in which the rationality of a belief depends on a subject's ignorance of an *a priori* truth, we should keep looking for a better justification for White's claim.

Perhaps what is most plausible is that *White's claim* is not a particular instance of a more general principle such as the ones we have been discussing, but that it arises from a certain view of the relationship between rational belief and evidential support. *White's claim* could seem natural or even self-evident on the assumption that *facts about what it is rational to believe are reducible to facts about evidential support*. Under this assumption, the argument for *White's claim* might go something like this. Suppose I am in a case in which I rationally believe P on the basis of E. Since I am rational to believe P on the basis of E, E must support P. When I learn that a belief that not-P is also rational on E, I learn that E also supports not-P. But simply learning that the evidence supports another doxastic attitude towards P does not change the fact that the evidence supports my own belief, and thus cannot alter the rationality of my belief that P. Generalizing, we can conclude that rational beliefs can always survive learning the evidential value of one's evidence.

This motivation for *White's claim*, while the most promising of those that have been discussed, depends on an assumption that many epistemologists – and more to the point, many proponents of permissivism – will find it difficult to accept: that facts about what it is rational for a subject to believe are reducible to facts about what that subject's evidence supports. This is a controversial assumption: many epistemologists think that variables other than a subject's evidence can be relevant to determining whether her belief is justified. So White's claim is most plausible when given a somewhat controversial assumption.

Still, suppose we grant the assumption that facts about whether a belief is rational for a subject are reducible to facts about what the subject's evidence supports. It's true that, given this assumption, my learning that E supports not-P can't change the fact that E supports P, and thus can't change the fact that believing P on the basis of E is rational. However, learning that E supports not-P *can* change *whether it is rational for me to go on believing P* – for my total evidence is no longer E. My evidence has expanded from E to E + E', where E' correctly states which attitudes are rational for someone who possesses evidence E. So while it's true that learning E' won't change the fact that belief that P is still rational on E, when I learn E', it is not guaranteed that my belief that P will still be rational on my *total evidence*, which now includes more than just E. The above argument for *White's claim* fails, then, because it neglects to account for the possible change in the rationality of my attitude toward P that can occur when my total evidence changes.

In summary, White's argument against unacknowledged permissivism depends on the idea that one's rational beliefs can always survive learning the epistemic value of the evidence upon which those beliefs are based (i.e., it depends on *White's claim*). I have argued that *White's claim* seems most plausible on the assumption that facts about what it is rational for a subject to believe are reducible to facts about what the evidence supports. Even granting this assumption, however, it is unclear why we should think that a subject who learns the epistemic value of her evidence for P would still be rational to believe P, since her evidence about P has now changed. I conclude that *White's claim* is not an adequate basis for rejecting unacknowledged permissivism.

5.2. The no identifiable permissive cases objection

Unacknowledged permissivism says that I cannot rationally identify a case as permissive when I am in one. More precisely, UP entails that, for any given situation in which I possess permissive evidence and hold a rational attitude that is supported by that evidence, I cannot rationally believe that my evidence is permissive (i.e. that it makes rational a doxastic attitude that is incompatible with my own). One way of thinking about this commitment of UP is that the view says that I can't rationally identify a case as permissive from the first-person perspective. But one might worry that the view also entails that I can't rationally believe that *any* case is permissive, even from the *third-person* perspective. Why? Suppose I claim that a particular case, C, in which two subjects disagree about P on the basis of a single body of evidence, is permissive. Presumably, I also have some doxastic attitude towards P: belief, disbelief, or suspension of judgment. But if I have some doxastic attitude towards P, then I shouldn't judge that a doxastic attitude incompatible with P is rational, because doing so will violate AAR. So I cannot rationally judge that C is a permissive case. Generalizing, unacknowledged permissivism seems to entail that no one can recognize a permissive case, even from an observer's third-person perspective. And if there are no identifiable permissive cases, it is hard to see why one would should believe that unacknowledged permissivism is correct. Call this the *no identifiable permissive cases* objection.

One possible response to this objection is to claim that identification of permissive cases is only possible when the person identifying the permissive case – the observer – lacks a doxastic attitude towards P. If the observer lacks a doxastic attitude towards P, she does not violate AAR when she identifies a case as permissive. To violate AAR, one needs to hold some attitude towards

P based on E while believing that an incompatible attitude is rational based on E. According to UP, there is no prohibition against believing more than one doxastic attitude towards P is rational based on a particular body of evidence when one does not share that evidence. So permissive cases can be identified from a third-person perspective only when the observer does not herself hold some attitude towards P.

I do not think this reply will work. This is because it seem unlikely that there are cases in which one understands and is aware of P, yet has no doxastic attitude towards P. Arguably, even states such as suspension of judgment (Friedman 2013) and agnosticism (Decker 2012) qualify as genuine doxastic attitudes. So, even in cases in which one is uncertain about whether P, one will count as taking some doxastic attitude towards P. And if one takes some doxastic attitude towards P, AAR prohibits one from rationally regarding any other attitude towards P as rational. We seem to be back where we started: with no identifiable permissive cases, even from the observer's perspective.[26]

A more promising response to this objection is to say that it is possible for an observer to identify permissive cases only when he has different evidence than the disputants. AAR prohibits me from judging that a doxastic attitude towards P other than my own is rational only when both my attitude towards P and the alternative attitude are based on the same body of evidence. Whenever the observer has the same evidence as the participants, then the observer's attitudes will be capable of running afoul of AAR. When the observer's epistemic situation is identical to that of the participants, he is himself a participant. Under these circumstances, the observer cannot rationally recognize that is a particular case is permissive.

But the situation is different if the observer's evidence differs from the disputants' evidence. If the observer has evidence that the participants lack, and that is relevant to the question of whether the case in question is a permissive one, the observer should be able to rationally believe the case is permissive without violating AAR. To see how this might go, let's consider the following case:

Rational Observer
Ann and Beth rationally disagree about P on the basis of evidence E. Ann believes P, and Beth disbelieves P. Charlie is an observer of Ann and Beth's disagreement: he possesses evidence E + O, where O is additional evidence that includes both evidence relevant to the truth of P and evidence about whether evidence E is permissive. On the basis of E + O,

Charlie comes to believe P. There is no other attitude towards P that Charlie regards as rational on the basis of E + O.

Charlie's belief that P does not violate AAR, which requires that he not adopt an attitude towards P based on E + O that he regards as just as rational as his own. But can Charlie rationally believe that Ann's belief that P on the basis of E is rational and that Beth's belief that not-P on the basis of E is rational? Since O includes evidence that Ann and Beth are in a permissive case, it seems that he should be able to rationally believe that E is permissive with respect to P.[27] Charlie's additional evidence that Ann and Beth's case meets the requirements for a permissive case can serve as a basis for a rational judgment that they are in a permissive case. Ann and Beth, on the other hand, lack evidence that their own case meets the requirements for a permissive case, so unlike Charlie, they don't have enough information to rationally believe that their evidence is permissive. So, only when observers possess different evidence from the disputants is it possible for an observer to recognize that a case is permissive *for the participants* without violating the requirement of rationality expressed by AAR.

Even so, one might think that a problem remains for UP. If observers can come to learn that a particular case has the features of a permissive case, and on that basis come to rationally regard it as a permissive case, why can't *participants* in a permissive case do the same thing?

One possible response is to point out that in practice, it is very difficult to acquire strong evidence that one's own case is permissive. Most versions of permissivism on offer posit that rational disagreement arises as a result of different people having different rational approaches to the evidence (for instance, different prior conditional probabilities, different cognitive abilities, or different epistemic values). In practice, it is very hard to determine the precise epistemic values, cognitive abilities, or whatever, that lead individuals to hold different beliefs. Consequently, it is difficult to acquire strong evidence that a particular case is permissive.

However, this response falls short because it cedes the theoretical possibility of cases in which one acquires strong evidence that one's own case is permissive. If the proponent of UP allows that it is possible for a subject to acquire evidence that her own case is permissive, it doesn't matter if this kind of case is unlikely to occur in practice: since UP denies that acknowledged permissive cases are *possible*, all that is needed to prove it false is the *possibility* of a subject's rationally believing that he is in a permissive case.

So the proponent of UP should say that it *is* in principle possible for subjects in a permissive case to acquire strong evidence that their shared evidence is permissive, even if this is extremely rare in practice. Returning to our case involving Ann and Beth, suppose both Ann and Beth acquire evidence that strongly supports the conclusion that Ann and Beth's original evidence, E, is permissive. Now, we face the question of what beliefs Ann and Beth would be rational to form on their total evidence.

Unacknowledged permissivism can allow, and *should* allow, that Ann can come to rationally believe, on the basis of her new, expanded evidence, that E rationalizes both the belief that P and the belief that not-P. (The same goes for Beth.) That is, the proponent of UP can and should maintain that Ann can rationally believe that E is permissive with respect to P. However, when Ann comes to hold the belief the E is permissive with respect to P, she faces rational pressure to revise her original attitude toward P. Ann's rational belief that there is a rational approach to E that yields the belief that not-P constitutes a reason for her to revise her original belief that P.

So, the proponent of UP can allow both that subjects can acquire strong evidence that their original evidence is permissive with respect to some proposition P, and that they can come to rationally believe that their original evidence is permissive. However, the defender of UP should also maintain that, as soon as this happens, the subjects cease to be in a situation in which their shared evidence supports incompatible doxastic attitudes. Rather, they now both face rational pressure to revise their respective attitudes towards P. Acquiring strong evidence that one is in a permissive case changes the case such the participants how have evidence which is not permissive with respect to P. So defenders of UP can allow that subjects can acquire strong evidence that their own case is permissive without this posing a threat to the coherence of their view.

This conclusion about the rational course of action for the person who comes to believe an attitude other than his own towards P is rational bears some resemblance to conciliatory views in the epistemology of disagreement. Conciliationists say that when you disagree about P with a peer on the basis of the same evidence, you must modify your attitude towards P in the direction of your peer's attitude (e.g. Christensen, 2007; Cohen, 2013; Elga, 2007). One standard defense of conciliationism holds that the disagreement constitutes evidence that some other response to the evidence is more rational than your own. And the rational response to evidence that some other view is just as rational as one's own is to modify one's original view, according to the conciliationist.

The similarity between conciliationism and the version of unacknowledged permissivism that I have discussed here is that both agree that when I come to believe that a view other than my own but based on my own evidence is rational, the required response is to modify my original view. The difference between concilationsim and UP is that, according to UP, the mere fact that I disagree with my peer does not itself rationally compel me to conclude that some other view is just as rational as my own, and thus does not rationally compel me to modify my original attitude towards P. According to UP, I might recognize that a peer disagrees with me, and yet rationally refrain from forming the belief that my peer's view is just as rational as my own. According to conciliationism, recognizing that your peer has a different attitude towards P triggers rational pressure to revise your attitude towards P. According to the version of unacknowledged permissivism that I am defending, believing that your peer has a different *rational* attitude towards P triggers rational pressure for you to revise your attitude towards P. But when confronted with peer disagreement, it can also be rational to fail to recognize your peer's attitude as rational. So UP, unlike conciliationism, holds that there is more than one rational way of responding to the disagreement of a peer.

The comparison with conciliationism leads me to a final question that might arise about my view: the question of whether an actual case of rational disagreement with a peer needs to occur in order for the rationality of my attitude towards P to be undermined. Is an actual disagreeing peer necessary, or is simply believing that a view other than my own is rational sufficient to render my attitude towards P irrational?

For versions of unacknowledged permissivism that rest on the appeal of AAR, the answer will be that that the presence of another person is not necessary. All that is needed in order for the rationality of my attitude towards P to be undermined is for me to believe that some attitude incompatible with my own (but based on the same evidence) is rational. But one might worry that, if believing an incompatible attitude is rational is all that is necessary to fall afoul of AAR, then the rationality of many of my beliefs will be undermined.

This conclusion *would* follow if we always recognized the permissive nature of a case when we were in one. But as a matter of fact, we often fail to recognize the rationality of other rational positions. As Kelly points out, interacting with peers who disagree with us can be helpful because it can cause us to treat alternative possible attitudes towards P with the attention that they deserve. The presence of actual disagreeing peers can 'forcefully remind us of just how formidable the case

is for the thesis that they defend' (2005, p. 192). The presence of a disagreeing peer, then, may make me more likely to recognize the rationality of an alternative attitude towards P. But ultimately, whether there exists rational pressure on me to revise my attitude towards P depends on whether or not I believe an attitude other than my own is rational.[28] One way to be rational in a permissive case is to recognize that one is in a permissive case, and change one's attitude towards P. But another way to be rational in a permissive case is just to fail to recognize the case as permissive. Since the features of a case that make it permissive, and whether those features obtain in any given case, are often opaque, we fail to recognize that we are in permissive cases quite frequently.[29]

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Notes

[1] I'll use the term *doxastic attitude* to refer to three attitudes a subject might adopt towards a proposition P: belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment. I take the possible situations in which two subjects hold *incompatible* doxastic attitudes toward P to be the following: one subject believes P and the other disbelieves P; one subject suspends judgment about P and the other subject believes P; one subject suspends judgment about P and the other subject disbelieves P. I treat disbelief that P and belief that ~P as identical doxastic attitudes.

[2] I use the terms 'position' and 'view' as shorthand for 'doxastic attitude.' For simplicity, I specify doxastic attitudes in terms of belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment, but what I say will also be applicable to creedal versions of permissivism and impermissivism.

[3] The nomenclature of 'acknowledged' and 'unacknowledged' versions of permissivism is due to Kopec and Titelbaum (2016), though other authors acknowledge the same distinction. See Ballantyne and Coffman (2011), Cohen (2013), Feldman (2006, 2007), Schoenfield (2014), Weisberg (forthcoming), and White (2005).

[4] One could fail to regard someone else's attitude towards P as equally rational by suspending judgment on whether that attitude is rational, or by believing it to be irrational, or by failing to consider the question of whether that attitude is rational.

[5] An impermissivist is someone who endorses Feldman's 'Uniqueness Thesis' (2007, p. 205). Feldman's paper and White's 'Epistemic Permissiveness' (2005) are usually cited as the seminal papers on Uniqueness. Here, I follow Horowitz (2013) in calling proponents of the Uniqueness thesis impermissivists.

[6] See, for example, Kelly (2013), Kopec (2015), Meacham (2014), Podgorski (2016), Schoenfield (2014), Simpson (2017) and Weisberg (forthcoming). On the other hand, Cohen (2013) argues for a version of unacknowledged permissivism.

[7] See, for example, Dogramaci & Horowitz (2016), Horowitz (2013), Schultheis (2018), and White (2005, 2013).

[8] If you think that rationality admits of degrees, you can define an unacknowledged permissive case as one in which two people rationally hold different doxastic attitudes toward P on the basis of a single body of evidence E, but neither party believes that the attitude of the other party is *equally rational* to her own.

[9] More precisely, unacknowledged permissivism says that you can be in a permissive case only if you don't believe that an attitude incompatible with your own is rational on the basis of your evidence.

[10] Actually, my preferred version of unacknowledged permissivism differs slightly from the position described by White. I will argue that permissivism is true and epistemically destructive if known, but also that it is epistemically destructive if *believed*.

[11] According to Sorensen, there are different types of blindspots corresponding to different propositional attitudes. Sorensen defines a blindspot relative to attitude A for a subject *a* at time *t* as a proposition that is consistent but towards which subject *a cannot* have attitude A at time *t* (1988, p. 52, my emphasis). However, in the case of case of belief blindspots, the sense in which the subject 'cannot' believe the blindspot proposition is that the subject must be

immune from criticisms of inconsistency (*cf*. p. 53). So although Sorensen does not himself define belief blindspots in terms of what can be 'rationally believed' by a subject, to describe them as I have is consistent with his understanding of belief blindspots.

[12] Defenders of *impermissive* epistemologies, clearly enough, get nowhere towards vindicating rational disagreement: they must maintain the "awkward position" that maximally rational disputants, if they share the same evidence, will always be in agreement, since the total evidence alone determines what it is rational to believe (White 2005, p. 446).

[13] While van Inwagen speaks in terms of justified belief rather than rational belief, it is not uncommon to see these two terms used more or less interchangeably. (Cf. Feldman 2006, p. 220, and White 2005, p. 445-6.) Here, I use the terms 'rational' and 'justified' interchangeably.

[14] More on the idea that cases like these are problematic in the following section.

[15] The following passage illustrates how difficult van Inwagen found it to know how to respond to his disagreement with Lewis: 'How can I believe (as I do) that free will is compatible with determinism…when David Lewis – a philosopher of truly formidable intelligence and insight and ability – rejects [this thing] I believe and is already aware of and understands perfectly every argument that I could produce in [its] defense? Well, I *do* believe [this thing]. And I believe that I am justified in believing it. And I am confident that I am right. But how can I take these positions? I don't know.' (1996, p. 30)

[16] Thanks to an anonymous referee for the suggestion that I frame this portion of my discussion as a discussion of error theories.

[17] Actually, this is an oversimplification: according to UP, I can rationally believe that my peer's attitude toward P is rational if I don't know my own view about P. So it is strictly speaking false that UP says that I can *never* believe that the view of a peer is rational, while retaining my own view.

[18] Suppose that you and I hold incompatible doxastic attitudes on the basis of the same evidence, that I believe that your view is irrational, and that as a result of this belief, I redouble my efforts to see how you arrived at your view. If my motivation for redoubling my efforts is to learn from your perspective on the issue, all is well and good – I am treating you respectfully, not jerkily. On the other hand, if my motivation for redoubling my efforts is to correct you or help you amend (what I perceive as) your irrational ways, one might think that I'm still failing to treat you as an epistemic peer – and hence still being a jerk. My own intuition is that it is possible to respectfully engage in dialogue with someone, and even to learn from them, even while being motivated by a desire to correct them.

[19] The arbitrariness objection is most striking when it is applied to a case in which a permissivist holds that E rationalizes both belief in P and belief in not-P (a position White calls 'extreme permissivism'). However, its force is not diminished in cases where the permissivism is understood in credal terms. If I believe, for example, that credences of .6 and .8 in P are both rational on E, it's still hard to see what reasons I could have for choosing a credence of .6 rather than a credence of .8. In what follows, I discuss the more extreme example where E licenses belief in P and belief in not-P, but as far as I can see, nothing much turns on this.

[20] Weisberg's discussion of the arbitrariness objection (in his terminology, the instability problem) comports with this reading of the objection (forthcoming). Weisberg writes that permissive epistemologies 'allow us to embrace one set of beliefs while simultaneously acknowledging that an alternative view is just as good.' He goes on to say that 'acknowledging that a second perspective is equally legitimate threatens our commitment to the first.' Having made the judgment that a belief that P is 'just as good' as a belief that not-P, we can't rationally favour one over the other. Simpson (2017), in his paper-length analysis of the arbitrariness objection, also pinpoints the problematic nature of judging two doxastic attitudes to be equally rational and choosing just one: 'If you say DA_1 and DA_2 are both rationally permissible doxastic attitudes to hold towards P given E, it's hard to see what reasons you could have – other than arbitrary reasons, like what's more fun to believe – for singling out either of these as *your* belief.'

Finally, Greco and Hedden (2016) argue that judging that P is rational on E and concurrently judging that not-P is rational on E is inconsistent. They argue for this conclusion on the basis of a principle they endorse, *Deference*. *Deference* says that if an agent S_1 judges that S_2's belief that P is rational, and that S_1 does not have any relevant evidence that S_2 lacks, then S_1 defers to S_2's belief that P (p. 373). (They take deferring to someone else's belief to involve adopting that belief as one's own rather than 'merely respecting it or allowing it to govern a group's decision.') If we grant that *Deference* is true, then judging that more than one doxastic attitude towards P is rational given E will result in inconsistent attitudes.

[21] Note the resemblance of AAR to Cohen's *Doxastic Uniqueness* principle. *Doxastic Uniqueness* states that 'a subject cannot rationally believe there are two (or more) rational credences for [some hypothesis] H on [some body of evidence] E, while rationally holding either' (Cohen 2013, p. 102). Cohen uses Doxastic Uniqueness to defend a version of the Equal Weight view in the literature on disagreement. I discuss the similarities and differences between conciliationist views of peer disagreement my own in greater detail in §5.

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