



No hope for conciliationism

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Abstract

Conciliationism is the family of views that rationality requires agents to reduce confidence or suspend belief in p when acknowledged epistemic peers (i.e. agents who are (approximately) equally well-informed and intellectually capable) disagree about p . While Conciliationism is *prima facie* plausible, some have argued that Conciliationism is not an adequate theory of peer disagreement because it is self-undermining. Responses to this challenge can be put into two mutually exclusive and exhaustive groups: the *Solution Responses* which deny Conciliationism is self-undermining and attempt to provide arguments which demonstrate this; and the *Skeptical Responses* which accept that Conciliationism is self-undermining but attempt to mitigate this result by arguing this is either impermanent and/or not very worrisome. I argue that, by Conciliationism's own lights, both kinds of responses (almost certainly) fail to save Conciliationism from being self-undermining. Thus, Conciliationism is (almost certainly) permanently self-undermining. This result is significant because it demonstrates that Conciliationism is likely hopeless: there is likely nothing that can save Conciliationism from this challenge. I further argue that Conciliationism, like any view, should be abandoned if it is (almost certainly) hopeless.

Keywords Conciliationism · Self-undermining · Epistemology of disagreement · Disagreement in philosophy

Conciliationism is the family of views that rationality requires agents to reduce confidence or suspend belief in a proposition p when acknowledged epistemic peers (i.e. agents who are (approximately) equally well-informed and intellectually capa-

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ble) disagree about p .¹ Many have objected to Conciliationism by arguing that such views are epistemically self-undermining: i.e. because there is disagreement amongst acknowledged epistemic peers (viz. philosophers) about the truth of Conciliationism, Conciliationism applies to and, by its own Conciliatory reasoning, epistemically defeats itself.²

While there are many different responses to this self-undermining challenge, these responses can be put into two mutually exclusive and exhaustive groups: *Solution Responses* and *Skeptical Responses* (explained below). In this paper I argue that, by Conciliationism's own lights, both kinds of responses (almost certainly) fail to save Conciliationism from the self-undermining challenge and, therefore, Conciliationism is (almost certainly) permanently self-undermining.³ This result is significant because it demonstrates that Conciliationism is (almost certainly) hopeless: there is (almost certainly) nothing that can save Conciliationism from this challenge. I further argue that Conciliationism, like any view, should be abandoned if it is (almost certainly) hopeless.

1 Clarifying the challenge

Proponents of Conciliationism usually support their view in two ways. First, they claim rationality requires agents to give significant, or equal, weight to the opinions of their acknowledged epistemic peers because epistemic peers are (about as) equally likely to be in a position to know p . And second, suspension of belief is rationally required in such cases because peer disagreement about p is strong reason to believe that at least one peer is mistaken, but, at the moment of recognized disagreement, neither peer has good reason to discount the other's belief in favor of their own. In other words, because their evidential situation regarding p is (roughly) symmetric, peer disagreement counts as *defeating* evidence against one's belief in p (cf. Christensen, 2010, Lasonen-Aarnio (2014), Schoenfield (2018), and Titelbaum (2015)).⁴

Given this description, Conciliationism would be epistemically *self-defeating* or *undermining* in the case where acknowledged epistemic peers disagree about Con-

¹ Conciliationism is defended by Bogardus (2009), Christensen (2007, 2009, 2013, 2021); Elga (2010); Feldman (2005, 2006, 2007, 2009); Littlejohn (2013); Matheson (2009, 2015a, b) Vavova (2014a, b) among others. See Frances and Matheson (2018) for an overview of the peer disagreement literature.

² The self-undermining problem is discussed by Bogardus (2009); Christensen (2009, 2013, 2021); Decker (2014); Elga (2010); Pittard (2015); Littlejohn (2013, 2014); Matheson (2015a, b); Weatherston (2013), among others discussed below.

³ Others, like Decker (2014), also argue that Conciliationism is self-defeating (his terminology) but his arguments, unlike mine, don't show that this is (almost certainly) unavoidable and he, unlike me, does not consider recent responses to this challenge (e.g. Fleisher (2021) discussed in § 3. And while Grundmann (2019) contends that arguments for a general kind of philosophical skepticism which use Conciliationism are unavoidably self-undermining, my arguments that Conciliationism is (almost certainly) self-undermining do not rely on Conciliationism generalizing to a general philosophical skepticism.

⁴ See Whiting (2021) for an overview on issues surrounding precisely how disagreement, as higher-order evidence, defeats one's beliefs. Also, Conciliationists usually adhere to the principle of Independence (Christensen, 2011: 1–2) to avoid improperly discounting one as an epistemic peer after disagreement. I will set this issue aside since my arguments below are not affected by whether this principle is true.

ciliationism. More precisely, a proposition p is epistemically self-undermining iff p applies to itself and defeats one's justification for believing p – i.e. p epistemically defeats itself. This challenge can be formalized as:

The Self-Undermining Challenge

1. If acknowledged peers recognize they disagree on p , then peers should suspend belief on p . (Conciliationism)
2. Acknowledged peers recognize they disagree on Conciliationism. (Empirical premise)
3. Thus, peers should suspend belief on Conciliationism.

This argument is significant because, if sound, it shows that Conciliationism applies to itself and dictates that one should not believe it. To some, this is a “devastating problem” (Decker, 2014: 1132) that “puts the Conciliationist in a dialectically untenable situation” (Decker, 2014: 1127) because it seems to additionally show that Conciliationism dictates that one should give up or abandon Conciliationism (cf. Fleisher, 2021).

To effectively analyze proposed responses to this challenge in the following sections, it is important to clarify the mechanics of this deceptively simple argument. Premise 1 is an abridged statement of the belief version of Conciliationism. To make it apply only to a restricted set of cases, Conciliationism's antecedent is usually filled with many more conditions. For my purposes, I can set aside these additional conditions (e.g. (approx.) peers are competent, honest, unimpaired, etc.) since any such conditions will presumably be satisfied in (nearly) all philosophical peer disagreements (more on this below). Additionally, this statement of Conciliationism assumes that cases of acknowledged peer disagreement rationally require agents to suspend belief on *any* p ; while Conciliationism is sometimes limited to quantify only over *most* p (e.g. Feldman, 2007: 213, Christensen, 2007: 189, and Elga, 2007: fn 26). But, with the possible exception of Conciliationism itself (see § 2), I can also safely set aside this complication since this paper only concerns the soundness and cogency of the self-undermining challenge. Relatedly, this issue can be set aside since presumably (nearly) all cases of philosophical peer disagreement are not about propositions that can plausibly be thought to be outside the scope of Conciliationism (e.g. logical truths).⁵

Additionally, focusing on the suspend belief version of Conciliationism embodied in premise 1 allows this paper to get to the heart of the self-undermining challenge while, at the same time, avoiding technicalities with more complicated versions of Conciliationism involving degrees of confidence, beliefs, or credences.⁶ Following Christensen (2013, 2021), Frances (2010), among others, it is not necessary to discuss more complicated versions of Conciliationism in formulating this challenge

⁵ See Gardiner (2014), Jehle and Fitelson (2009), Lasonen-Aarnio (2013), and Wilson (2010) for further difficulties in precisely formulating Conciliatory views.

⁶ This view is often called the Equal Weight View and is defended by Bogardus (2009), Christensen (2007), Elga (2007), Feldman (2005, 2006, 2007), Matheson (2009), among others.

because all plausible versions of Conciliationism threaten to be self-undermining. Also, following Christensen (2007), Elga (2007), Feldman (2005, 2006), among others, this (or something very similar) is the most well motivated version of Conciliationism.⁷ As such, if this version cannot adequately respond to the self-undermining challenge, then *a fortiori* all other plausible versions of Conciliationism are also self-undermining.⁸

Premise 2 is the empirical claim that there are acknowledged philosophical peers who disagree about the truth of Conciliationism. There are some (like Cary and Matheson (2013), King (2012), and Rotondo (2015) who would deny premise 2 on the grounds that it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether someone is an epistemic peer. Because in practice there will be few, if any, acknowledged philosophical peers, peer disagreement skepticism is rarely justified, and consequently it is of very limited epistemological significance. If this is the case, then one could deny premise 2 on the grounds that there are no acknowledge peers on Conciliationism. While this line of argument is directly relevant to the self-undermining challenge, I will set this aside and grant, along with Conciliationists and (nearly) everyone in the peer disagreement and self-undermining literature, that philosophers can, and often do, accurately acknowledge each other as epistemic peers (cf. Christensen, 2013, 2021), Feldman (2007), Kornblith (2010, 2013), Machery (2017: 131). Henceforth, I assume that all the disagreements in the peer disagreement and self-undermining challenge literature mentioned in the sections below are between acknowledge epistemic peers.⁹ Anyone who denies that philosophers can be acknowledged peers and disagree about Conciliationism should read the rest of the arguments in this paper conditionally: *if* this is true, then my arguments below follow. But, if denying premise 2 on these grounds ends up being, in light of my arguments, the only feasible way that

⁷ Proponents of credal versions of Conciliationism might deny either that “all versions of Conciliationism threaten to be self-undermining” or “suspend belief versions of Conciliationism are the most well-motivated.” But any Conciliationist who denies either claim has to contend with those (esp. Conciliationists) who accept them (e.g. Christensen (2007), Elga (2007) and Feldman (2005, 2006) hold the latter, while Christensen (2013, 2021) and Frances (2010) hold the former). To foreshadow my arguments below, such peer disagreements show that denying either claim will (almost certainly) not allow Conciliationists to adequately respond to the self-undermining challenge, i.e. this kind of response will (almost certainly) be defeated by the very view it is attempting to defend.

⁸ While a full defense of this claim is outside the scope of this paper, I will say that the empirical claim that “acknowledge peers recognize they disagree on *credal* Conciliationism” is – like the empirical premise of the self-undermining challenge – well supported. For example, not only is there ample peer disagreement on both whether credal versions of Conciliationism are true (i.e. from Steadfasters, see fn. 23), there is ample peer disagreement amongst Conciliationists on the best way to formulate Conciliationism (see fn. 5 and 7). Furthermore, to foreshadow my arguments below, because there will (almost certainly) be peer disagreement about any proposed way for credal versions of Conciliationism to avoid the self-undermining challenge, any proposed solution is likely to be defeated by the very view that it is attempting to defend (cf. fn. 41).

⁹ Another underlying assumption of this paper is that published articles that have incompatible views are genuinely in disagreement, i.e. that all, or most, authors genuinely believe (or endorse, accept, etc.) the views they defend in their articles (see Plakias (2019) and Fleisher (2020)).

Conciliationists can respond to the self-undermining challenge, then this, I claim, is a significant result.¹⁰

Lastly, I should note that in the literature on the self-undermining challenge there are two other similar, but less straight-forward, self-incriminating challenges to Conciliationism.¹¹ The first claims that because Conciliatory views are epistemically self-undermining, they are incoherent because they will offer inconsistent advice: to both conciliate and not conciliate in some cases of peer disagreement (see Christensen (2013, 2021), Elga (2010), and Weatherson (2013)). Rather than just being epistemically self-undermining, this challenge attempts to show that Conciliationism is *self-censoring*, i.e. it advises that one should not follow Conciliationism (cf. Decker, 2014: 1102), which is impossible advice to adopt and follow (cf. Fleisher, 2021). The second claims that successive peer disagreements about Conciliationism either prohibits one from maintaining a stable credence, or confidence, level in Conciliationism, or such disagreements will eventually require a proponent of Conciliationism to adopt a credence of zero in Conciliationism. Rather than just being epistemically self-undermining, this challenge attempts to show that Conciliationism is epistemically *self-negating*, i.e. it commits a Conciliationist to believe that Conciliationism is not true (cf. Decker, 2014:1101). While these additional self-incrimination challenges are important problems which deserve discussion, this paper focuses on the more straightforward self-undermining challenge presented above.¹²

1.1 The significance of this challenge

However, now that the self-undermining challenge has been explained, one might ask how *exactly* is this a problem for Conciliationism? This challenge does not show that Conciliationism is false or that any of the arguments for it are unsound. In contrast, it is clearer how Conciliationism being self-censoring or self-negating, as the other self-incriminating challenges allege, is problematic for Conciliationism and its proponents. The former alleges that Conciliationism gives incoherent guidance in cases of peer disagreement, while the latter rationally requires proponents to disbelieve it. But it is less clear why just being rationally required to “suspend judgement” on Conciliationism, because it is *epistemically* self-undermining, is problematic for Conciliationism.¹³

Although my full response to this question will have to wait until § 4 (i.e. wait until after I have argued in § 2–3 that Conciliationism is (almost certainly) permanently self-undermining), I will now clarify a few points that will be helpful in

¹⁰ But to again foreshadow my arguments below, denying the prevalence of acknowledged epistemic peer-hood will (almost certainly) not provide an adequate way for the Conciliationists to respond to the self-undermining challenge since there are (almost certainly) acknowledged epistemic peers (or superiors) who disagree and hold that epistemic peer disagreement (when properly understood) is prevalent (e.g. Christensen (2013, 2021), Feldman (2007), Kornblith (2010, 2013)). Additionally, it is plausible that there can be, or is, acknowledged peer disagreements on denying premise 2 on these grounds. Thus, by Conciliationism’s own lights, this response to the self-undermining challenge will (almost certainly) fail.

¹¹ See Decker (2014) and Fleisher (2021) for an explication of these different self-undermining arguments.

¹² See Decker (2014) for a survey of responses to these additional self-undermining challenges.

¹³ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to address and clarify these points.

motivating and foreshadowing the issues discussed in subsequent sections below. The self-undermining challenge is not a problem *for* Conciliationism, per se, but more accurately described as a problem for all current (and would-be) *proponents* of Conciliationism. Recall, the conclusion of this challenge dictates that epistemic peers should, on pain of irrationality, suspend belief on Conciliationism. And, per the definition of epistemically self-undermining above, this shows that proponents of Conciliationism are mistaken in believing that Conciliationism is adequately justified. Thus, if this challenge stands, then proponents of Conciliationism are *irrational* if they remain proponents of Conciliationism or believe this view is adequately justified.

While this result is significant for many reasons, I will limit my discussion to three which are especially relevant for this paper. The first two reasons center around the general idea that if you can't rationally believe a view (e.g. because it is irrational), it is hard to see what, if any, epistemic advantage the view has, or could provide, for epistemic agents. First, on most accounts of assertion, if it is irrational to believe some claim C, then one cannot assert that C is true or assert that C is closer to the truth (or more accurate) than its rivals.¹⁴ Thus, if it is irrational to believe or assert Conciliationism, it is easy to see why this "puts the Conciliationist in a dialectically untenable situation" (Decker, 2014: 1127).

To illustrate, it seems that those who, despite its irrationality, remain proponents of Conciliationism are guilty of something *akin* to Moore's paradox, e.g. they assert or believe that 'it is raining, but I don't believe it.' Specifically, they assert or believe Conciliationism is true, but they can't rationally do either. While it is controversial exactly why such Moorean propositions and beliefs are problematic, there is wide agreement they are "absurd" (Moore, 1942: 543).¹⁵ To be clear, this is only 'akin' to Moore's paradox because, as Fleisher (2021); Matheson (2015a) note, quintessential Moorean propositions are necessarily irrational, i.e. there are no situations in which one can rationally believe or assert them. In contrast, the self-undermining challenge makes Conciliationism contingently irrational, i.e. contingent on there being peer disagreement on Conciliationism. Nevertheless, if there remains peer disagreement on Conciliationism, the self-undermining challenge stands and makes believing, and asserting, Conciliationism irrational.¹⁶ Indeed, if the self-undermining challenge is,

¹⁴ For instance, Williamson (2000) holds that asserting p requires knowing p, where knowing p requires believing p. This so-called "knowledge norm of assertion" is the most popular view in this literature and is defended by DeRose (2002); Hawthorne (2004); Stanley (2005); Schaffer (2008); Turri (2010b), among others. Others defend a "belief norm of assertion" which holds that an asserter can only assert what they believe (see Hindriks (2007) and Bach (2008)). Lastly, others defend a version of the "justification norm of assertion" which only requires that an asserter have (propositional) justification for p to assert p. Specifically, Douvan (2006) and Lackey (2007) hold that assertion only requires that to assert p it would be rational for you to believe p.

¹⁵ Contra this consensus, Turri (2010a) argues that Moorean propositions are not inherently absurd since there are some cases where they can be appropriately asserted. For example, it is not absurd for proponents of eliminative materialism to assert 'eliminativism about propositional attitudes is true, but I don't believe it.' However, this kind of response is not available to the Conciliationist since, unlike the eliminative materialist, their view commits them to beliefs and/or credences, both of which are propositional attitudes.

¹⁶ However, in opposition to this, Fleisher's (2018, 2021) account of endorsement aims to allow the Conciliationist to rationally assert, but not believe, their view despite it being self-undermining. § 3 discusses

by Conciliationism's own lights, (almost certainly) unresolvable (see § 2–3), this puts rational pressure on Conciliationists to give up or abandon their view (see § 4).

Second, it is important to see that, like other skeptical challenges, if Conciliationism is self-undermining, then counterintuitively – not only do we lack adequate reason to believe it – Conciliationism is not adequately justified by what seem to be compelling considerations in its favor. For example, many believe that if one disagrees with their epistemic peer on what amount they each owe when splitting the dinner bill with 20% tip, that each peer should suspend belief on the correct split-bill amount (see Christensen (2007, 2011)). Indeed, even some opponents of Conciliationism admit that this case, and others like it, provides compelling support for Conciliationism (see Kelly (2010); Lackey (2010a, b)). But, despite seemingly compelling support, if the self-undermining challenge stands, it is nevertheless irrational, by its own lights, to believe that Conciliationism is adequately justified by any apparent support. By my lights, the counterintuitiveness of this demonstrates the significance of the self-undermining challenge.¹⁷ Indeed, if Conciliationism is likely, by Conciliationism's own lights, to remain perpetually unjustified (see § 2–3), this again puts rational pressure on Conciliationists to give up or abandon their view (see § 4).

Lastly, not only is the self-undermining challenge, in itself, a significant problem for proponents of Conciliationism, but it is also significant because of what it currently does and can potentially contribute to the other, and seemingly more serious, self-incrimination challenges. Given the explanations of these additional challenges above, the self-censoring and self-negating challenges depend on Conciliationism being epistemically self-undermining: Conciliationism cannot threaten to be self-censoring or self-negating unless there first is peer disagreement on Conciliationism itself. As such, if there were a cogent response to the self-undermining challenge this would also serve to respond to these additional challenges. For these reasons, the charge that Conciliationism is epistemically self-undermining is prior to and more fundamental than these other challenges.

Additionally, if my arguments in the sections below are sound and Conciliationism is (almost certainly) permanently self-undermining (see § 2–3), then the self-undermining challenge will likely make it extremely difficult for proponents of Conciliationism to respond to these additional challenges. To illustrate, while Christensen (2021) defends Conciliationism from the self-censoring challenge, Weintraub (2023) argues that Christensen's arguments fail. This peer disagreement shows that Christensen's response fails, by Conciliationism's own lights, to adequately respond to this challenge. This example illustrates the third way the self-undermining challenge is

and opposes Fleisher's endorsement response to the self-undermining challenge. (Also, see fn. 39).

¹⁷ Building off this point, I should note that this paragraph assumes a particular-first order of justification (aka particularism) where particular considerations (like the split-bill case) provide support for and justify methods (like Conciliationism). Alternatively, if we assume a method-first order of justification (aka methodism), then it is methods (like Conciliationism) that provide support for and justify particular cases (like conciliating in the split-bill case). If methodism is true, then the self-undermining challenge also has the following counterintuitive result: this challenge shows that since it is irrational, by Conciliationism's own lights, to believe Conciliationism, it is also irrational (despite appearances) to conciliate in cases of peer disagreement. In other words, by Conciliationism's own lights, it is irrational to believe that conciliating in cases of peer disagreement is rational. The counter-intuitiveness of this alternative result also, I claim, demonstrates the significance of the self-undermining challenge.

significant: If there are peer disagreements about ways to respond to these additional self-incrimination challenges, then by the same Conciliatory reasoning embodied in the self-undermining challenge, Conciliationists will (almost certainly) be unable to adequately defend (i.e. provide epistemically undefeated reasons for) Conciliationism against the charges that it is self-censoring and/or self-negating.

To be clear, my aim here is not to establish that Conciliationists cannot adequately respond to these other self-incrimination challenges. Recall, my focus in this paper is only on the self-undermining challenge. Instead, my aim here is to just indicate how the self-undermining challenge can potentially contribute to making it more difficult for the Conciliationist to adequately respond to these additional challenges. Furthermore, to this end, my arguments below that the self-undermining challenge is (almost certainly) unresolvable for Conciliationists (see § 2–3), provides potential support for believing that, by their own lights, Conciliationists (almost certainly) cannot adequately respond to these other challenges. This, I claim, also demonstrates the significance of the self-undermining challenge. (See § 4 for more on the significance of the self-undermining challenge)

2 Against solution responses

Proponents of Conciliationism (henceforth, CV) have provided many different responses to the above self-undermining challenge. These responses can be put into two groups: the *Solution Responses* which deny CV is self-undermining and attempt to provide arguments which demonstrate this; and the *Skeptical Responses* which accept CV is self-undermining but attempt to mitigate this result by arguing this is either impermanent and/or not very worrisome. Since one cannot coherently accept and deny CV is self-undermining at the same time, these groups are mutually exclusive and exhaust the ways one might respond to the self-undermining challenge. I will briefly address each kind of response in turn below and show that both kinds (almost certainly) fail, by CV's own lights, to save CV from the self-undermining challenge.

Beginning with the Solution Responses, I argue that all potential Solution Responses are likely to be defeated by the very same Conciliatory reasoning they are attempting to defend. This follows because Solution Response *arguments* almost certainly contain reasoning or auxiliary premises that are, or will be, disagreed upon by epistemic peers. Consequently, CV dictates that epistemic peers should suspend belief on this reasoning or premises. Thus, by CV's own lights, Solution Responses will likely fail to provide an adequate (i.e. epistemically undefeated) defense of CV from the self-undermining challenge. This argument can be formalized as:

Solution Responses (almost certainly) Fail

- I. If argument A adequately defends CV from the self-undermining challenge, then epistemic peers do not disagree with the reasoning or auxiliary premises of A.
- II. Epistemic Peers (almost certainly) disagree with the reasoning or auxiliary

premises of A.

III. Thus, A (almost certainly) fails to adequately defend CV from the self-undermining challenge.

Premise I claims that proponents of CV should consistently apply CV to any reasoning or auxiliary premises in their Solution Response arguments, such that: if epistemic peers disagree on these aspects of their Solution Response then they are committed to suspending belief on these aspects of their argument (more on this below). Premise II is an empirical claim that is indirectly supported by the well-known general facts that philosophers rarely reach consensus on, or resolve their disagreements on, substantive philosophical propositions (cf. Kornblith, 2010, 2013). Indeed, after surveying a large portion of contemporary philosophers, Bourget and Chalmers (2014, 2023) found that contemporary philosophers' opinions on many current and traditional philosophical problems are fairly evenly distributed between incompatible philosophical views.¹⁸

But premise II is also directly supported by the *literature* on Solution Responses to the self-undermining challenge. For instance, a common Solution Response from defenders of CV is to argue that, when Conciliationism is properly understood, it is self-exempting and so is not epistemically self-undermining. The most discussed version of this kind of response comes from Elga (2010) who argues that in order for Conciliatory views (his terminology) to be consistent (i.e. they do not call for their own rejection) and not be epistemically self-undermining, they must be dogmatic about their own correctness.¹⁹ While this may seem like an ad hoc solution, Elga contends that this constraint is not ad hoc because “this is a completely general constraint that applies to any fundamental policy, rule, or method” (Elga, 2010: 185), where a “fundamental method is one whose application is not governed or evaluated by any other method” (Elga, 2010: fn. 11). In other words, Elga makes the following argument: if a policy, rule, or method is fundamental, then it must be self-exempting; Conciliatory views are fundamental; therefore, Conciliatory views are self-exempting.

The further details of Elga's argument are unimportant for my purposes because as it stands Elga's argument fails, by Conciliatory reasoning, to save CV from being epistemically self-undermining. This is because the *literature* on Elga's argument is full of epistemic peers, including many Conciliationists, who contest the soundness of his argument above, per premise II. For example, Christensen (2013) argues that Elga's self-exempting constraint begs the question and undermines the motivations

¹⁸ These facts about *actual* peer disagreement in philosophy avoid issues about whether *potential* peer disagreements also have skeptical consequences (see Barnett and Han (2016), Cary (2011), Cary and Matheson (2013), Christensen (2007), Kelly (2005), and Kornblith (2010)); and these facts about the distribution of disagreement between philosophers also allow me to set aside issues regarding the difficulties surrounding the number of disagree-ers (see Cary and Matheson (2013), and Lackey (2013)).

¹⁹ Strictly speaking, Elga's argument is directed at responding to the alternative version of the self-undermining challenge regarding CV providing inconsistent advice mentioned in § 1.1 above. However, it is still appropriate to discuss his self-exempting response since, if successful, it would solve the present self-undermining challenge. Also, as mentioned at the end of § 1.1, my arguments will also show how Conciliationists (almost certainly) cannot adequately respond to these other challenges.

for CV; Decker (2014) argues that Elga's argument fails to show that CV leads to an inconsistency, and without this inconsistency the self-exempting constraint is unmotivated; and Littlejohn (2013) also argues that Elga's argument fails to show that CV leads to inconsistency and contends that there is no need for it to be self-exempting since the self-undermining challenge is not very worrisome. Indeed, there are many more examples in this literature of epistemic peers denying some aspect of Elga's argument, per premise II.²⁰ So, along with the Conciliatory reasoning in premise I, Elga's self-exempting Solution Response fails to adequately defend CV from the self-undermining challenge.

Elga could deny premise I by arguing that the reasoning and auxiliary premises of his self-exempting argument are, like CV, also exempted from the scope of CV (i.e. the premises that 'if a policy, rule, or method is fundamental, then it must be self-exempting' and 'Conciliatory views are fundamental' are also exempted). But this response is obviously *ad hoc*. Given that the conclusion of Elga's argument is 'Conciliatory views are *self-exempting*,' Elga's argument is not intended to exempt any other propositions from the scope of Conciliatory views, let alone the very premises of his own argument. But, *even if* we grant that the above premises of Elga's argument are exempted, this only pushes the problem back since any argument for *this new* exemption will also very likely have reasoning or auxiliary premises that are disagreed upon by epistemic peers, per premise II. Consequently, the argument for this new exemption would be subject to a new iteration of my Solution Responses (almost certainly) Fail argument. As such, the burden of proof is squarely on those who defend a self-exempting Solution Response to explain why the reasoning and auxiliary premises of their own self-exempting argument are themselves not subject to the Conciliatory reasoning embodied in premise I.²¹ Given the amount of peer disagreement about this self-exempting Solution Response, this is a burden of proof that I do not believe can be met.

Furthermore, my Solution Responses (almost certainly) Fail argument is also likely to epistemically undermine any other proposed Solution Response to the self-undermining challenge. To support this claim, I will now provide a brief survey of the literature on other Solution Responses and show that the soundness of these arguments has been disagreed upon by epistemic peers, per premise II. For example, Bogardus (2009: 333) argues that a version of CV known as the Equal Weight View (henceforth, EWV) is not epistemically self-undermining because we can just see, via direct acquaintance, that the EWV is obviously true. Like Elga, Bogardus essentially makes the following argument: if a view is known via direct acquaintance, then

²⁰ Additionally, Pittard (2015) argues that Elga's argument fails to consider alternative non-self-exempting ways to respond to the self-undermining challenge and that his arguments fail to adequately address *the ad hoc* (or arbitrariness) worry of making Conciliatory views self-exempting; and Matheson (2015a) argues that to avoid Elga's inconsistency and the epistemic self-undermining challenge, instead of making Conciliationism self-exempting, Conciliationism should be revised into a weaker form that also adopts an Evidentialist meta-rule that both allows it to be consistent and prevent it from being epistemically self-defeating (his terminology).

²¹ Also, a regress looms if Elga were to argue that the premises which justify this additional exemption are *also* exempt from Conciliatory views, like the EWV. This additional exemption is also obviously *ad hoc* and even if *these additional* premises were exempted, the argument for *this additional* exemption would be subject to another iteration of my Solution Responses (almost certainly) Fail argument.

this view cannot be self-undermining; the EWV is known via direct acquaintance; therefore, the EWV cannot be self-undermining. This solution fails, by the EWV's own lights, because many proponents and opponents to the EWV deny that the EWV is obviously true or can be known through direct acquaintance (e.g. Christensen (2013), Kelly (2005, 2010, 2013), Weatherson (2013)). And like Elga, it would be obviously ad hoc for Bogardus to argue that the premises of his argument above are also known via direct acquaintance and thus exempt from the scope of the EWV; and *even if* these premises were exempted, the argument for *this new* exemption would be subject to another iteration of my Solution Responses (almost certainly) Fail argument above.²² And, again, the burden of proof is on Bogardus and those who defend a direct acquaintance Solution Response to adequately explain why the reasoning and auxiliary premises of their own argument are not subject to the Conciliatory reasoning embodied in premise I. Likewise, given the amount of peer disagreement about this direct acquaintance Solution Response, this is a burden of proof that I do not believe can be met.

These same points apply similarly to other Solution Responses. Frances (2010) argues that we should accept CV because it is closer to the truth than its rival, Steadfastness:

Steadfastness: the family of views that says it is rationally permissible in at least some (if not all) cases of peer disagreement to retain one's level of confidence or belief.²³

This Solution Response fails because, as Christensen (2013) argues, this closeness to the truth claim is denied by those epistemic peers who adhere to Steadfastness. Christensen (2009) argues that this self-undermining challenge does not pose a special challenge to CV because it implausibly overgeneralizes to indict many other plausible Conciliatory principles (Matheson, 2015a argues similarly). This solution fails because Christensen (2013) himself later denies this response by arguing it does not adequately answer this challenge since epistemic self-undermining seems to unavoidably issue from the commitments of CV.

And, again, there are many more examples in this literature of epistemic peers denying some aspect of a given Solution Response to the self-undermining challenge.²⁴ Therefore, I conclude that all potential Solution Responses to the self-undermining challenge are very likely to be epistemically defeated by the very view they

²² Maybe it is more charitable to understand Bogardus as not providing a Solution Response but merely stipulating the EWV is true. If this is the case, then this is of no help to those who wish to provide an adequate defense of the EWV from the self-undermining challenge.

²³ Defined this way, proponents of Steadfastness include Enoch (2010); Fumerton (2010); Kelly (2005, 2010, 2013); Lackey (2010a, b); Lasonen-Aarnio (2013, 2014), Pasnau (2015), Schafer (2015); Titelbaum (2015); Weatherson (2013); Wedgewood (2010), among others.

²⁴ Additionally, Pittard (2015), building off Elga, argues that self-exempting CV is not arbitrary because as long as CV is motivated by "epistemic deference" (449) to one's peers, then disagreement over CV gives the Conciliatorist no reason to reduce confidence or suspend belief in CV itself. This solution fails according to Blessenhol (2015) because epistemic deference does not prevent self-exempting CV from being ad hoc since epistemic deference cannot be justified by Conciliatory motivations; additionally, such epistemic deference leads CV to inconsistency in certain circumstances. Pittard's solution also fails according to

are attempting to defend. To be clear, my Solution Responses (almost certainly) Fail argument is not meant to decisively refute all possible Solution Responses. Instead, my argument places a heavy burden of proof on those who wish to defend CV from the self-undermining challenge. But, given the empirical facts about the pervasiveness and persistence of disagreement amongst philosophers about substantive philosophical propositions and the fact that the peer disagreement literature itself is full of epistemic peers who disagree both about CV and various aspects of proposed Solution Responses, this is a burden of proof that I do not believe can be met (see § 4 for a further defense).

3 Against skeptical responses

Other proponents of CV have responded to the self-undermining challenge by providing, what I call, Skeptical Responses to it, i.e. they accept CV is self-undermining but attempt to mitigate this result by arguing this is either impermanent and/or not very worrisome (cf. Decker, 2014: 1132). More specifically, in this context a Skeptical Response ‘mitigates’ the self-undermining challenge when it provides *epistemic reason(s) to believe* this challenge is insignificant, esp. for proponents of CV.²⁵

I argue that, like all potential Solution Responses, all potential Skeptical Responses are likely to be defeated by the very same Conciliatory reasoning they are attempting to defend. This follows because there will almost certainly be disagreement amongst epistemic peers about whether a Skeptical Response adequately mitigates the self-undermining challenge for CV. Consequently, CV dictates that epistemic peers should suspend belief on such Skeptical Responses. Thus, by CV’s own lights, Skeptical Responses will likely fail to provide an adequate (i.e. epistemically undefeated) defense of CV from the self-undermining challenge. This argument can be formalized as:

Skeptical Responses (almost certainly) Fail

- IV. If M adequately mitigates the self-undermining challenge for CV, then epistemic peers neither disagree that M adequately mitigates the self-undermining challenge for CV, nor do they disagree about the truth of M.
- V. Epistemic peers (almost certainly) disagree that M adequately mitigates the self-undermining challenge for CV or disagree about the truth of M.
- VI. Thus, M (almost certainly) does not mitigate the self-undermining challenge for CV.

Weintraub (2023) because it is not deferential in a way that accords with the spirit of CV, but is more in accord with rival steadfast views.

²⁵ In terms of credences, a Skeptical Response ‘mitigates’ the self-undermining challenge when it provides one with epistemic reasons to maintain (or raise to) a high credence that this challenge is insignificant, esp. for proponents of CV.

Like premise I, premise IV claims that proponents of CV should consistently apply CV to any Skeptical Response, such that: if epistemic peers disagree on the adequacy of a Skeptical Response, then they are committed to suspending belief on this Skeptical Response. And like premise II, premise V is an empirical claim that is indirectly supported by the well-known general facts that philosophers rarely reach consensus on, or resolve their disagreements on, substantive philosophical propositions (cf. Kornblith, 2010, 2013) and the fact that contemporary philosophers' opinions on many current and traditional philosophical problems are fairly evenly distributed between incompatible philosophical views (Bourget & Chalmers, 2014, 2023).

But premise V is also directly supported by the *literature* on Skeptical Responses to the self-undermining challenge. To my knowledge, there are only two (related) kinds of Skeptical Responses that have been proposed by proponents of CV. Because the second kind builds on and defends the first from objections, I will discuss the first (and most common) Skeptical Response from defenders of CV before considering the second.

The first and most common Skeptical Response is to argue that while CV is indeed self-undermining, this does not show that CV is *false*. At best, what the self-undermining challenge shows is that CV cannot *currently* be justifiably believed or known to be true. The problem here is not with CV itself, but that too many epistemic peers disagree that CV is true; and hopefully someday soon this will no longer be the case (cf. Christensen, 2009: 763), Kornblith (2013: 274), Littlejohn (2013: 178), and Matheson (2015a:149). Thus, according to this Skeptical Response, the self-undermining challenge is not very worrisome since it is, at best, a temporary problem for CV.

In response, I grant that the self-undermining challenge does not, by itself, show that CV is false. I also grant that if there was no longer peer disagreement about CV (because opponents of CV came to genuinely believe it) this would solve the self-undermining challenge.²⁶ But, for three related reasons, this Skeptical Response should only offer cold comfort to proponents of CV. First, given the aforementioned facts that philosophical consensus on significant philosophical propositions are rarely (if ever) reached and, second, the amount of peer disagreement regarding various Solution Responses summarized above, it is likely that CV, by its own lights, will perennially remain epistemically self-undermining, per Solution Responses (almost certainly) Fail in § 2 above. In other words, even if proponents of CV were granted ample time to resolve the self-undermining challenge, it is unlikely they would be successful since it is very unlikely that a proposed Solution Response will be widely accepted amongst philosophers. Third, recall that proponents of Steadfastness believe that CV is false. So, *a fortiori*, they do not believe that there will ever be agreement that CV is the true theory of peer disagreement. As such, by Conciliatory reasoning, this peer disagreement between Conciliationists and Steadfasters also defeats the

²⁶ The parenthetical indicates that it matters *how* opponents of CV come to believe that CV is true. Intuitively, if a consensus on CV is reached by killing nearly all opponents of CV or forcing them to acquiesce at gun point, this would not solve the self-undermining challenge. See Kelly (2005) for a discussion of reaching consensus in these ways.

claim that the self-undermining challenge is only a temporary problem for CV. By my lights, these considerations are sufficient to undermine this Skeptical Response.

Moreover, together it seems that these three kinds of peer disagreement also provide excellent support for the claim that, by CV's own lights, proponents of CV will *never* justifiably believe CV. That is, given the persistence of these kinds of disagreements, we can justifiably or accurately predict that these disagreements about CV will likely not be resolved. As such, it seems very likely, by CV's own lights, believing CV will be permanently unjustified and irrational. Lastly, and most significantly, it is tempting to say that we should give up or abandon any view that leads to this worrisome result. Particularly, that one should give up or abandon CV, or any view, if it (almost certainly) can never be justifiably believed (cf. Decker, 2014 and Lasonen-Aarnio (2013)).

However, some proponents of CV deny something like this last claim to provide a second (but related) kind of Skeptical Response to the self-undermining challenge. They argue it is premature to abandon a controversial view on the grounds that it is unlikely to be widely accepted as true. For instance, Fleisher (2021: 9921) argues that the following intuitive principle is false:

Unjustified theory: If a subject S is not justified in believing (or would not be justified in believing) a theory, then S is rationally required to give up (not be committed to) that theory.

As Fleisher (2021: 9921) notes, this principle seems intuitively plausible only if one holds that belief is the only doxastic attitude one can take towards a theory they are committed to. But, according to Fleisher, this is false because it can be rational to take some other doxastic attitude, distinct from belief, toward a theory while remaining committed to it. Fleisher calls this attitude "endorsement" and claims that one can endorse theories one is provisionally inclined to accept but cannot (currently) rationally believe. More specifically, "endorsement is a propositional doxastic attitude [that] embodies the resilient commitment and advocacy that researchers should have toward their theories during inquiry" (Fleisher, 2021: 9923).

As such, Fleisher (2021) argues endorsement helps proponents of CV respond to the epistemic self-undermining challenge because it allows them to not completely abandon CV just because there is peer disagreement about it. Instead, endorsement buys the Conciliationist time to "rationally pursue the theory despite disagreement about it" so that "a new consensus might emerge" via new arguments and evidence for CV (Fleisher, 2021: 9920). Thus, contra Unjustified Theory, it does not follow that we should give up or abandon CV just because it is (currently) self-undermining. What is important for my purposes is that endorsement seems to offer the Conciliationist a second kind of Skeptical Response to the self-undermining challenge. Specifically, endorsement aims to allow Conciliationists to accept that CV, by its own lights, is epistemically self-undermining, but that this is not a worrisome result since although Conciliationists cannot (currently) rationally believe CV, they can still endorse it.

One might object that endorsement is an ad hoc solution to the self-undermining challenge. But as Fleisher (2021) argues, endorsement is independently well-moti-

vated by reflecting on the rationality of inquiry, esp. scientific inquiry. For instance, it seems that there are a variety of reasons that scientists cannot rationally believe the theories they are provisionally inclined to accept: e.g. If one is working in a cutting-edge field where there is little to no consensus, or if one reflects on the fact that the majority of proposed scientific theories have turned out to be false (i.e. the pessimistic meta-induction), to many it seems irrational to believe, or put much confidence in, the theory one is researching is true. That said, it seems *inappropriate* to hold that scientists are *irrational* for continuing to research theories they cannot currently believe. Endorsement captures the intuitive thought that one should not abandon a scientific theory just because it is controversial or likely false. The overall health of scientific inquiry would be harmed if scientists were required to give up and no longer pursue theories that they cannot rationally believe, contra Unjustified Theories.

Indeed, there is evidence that there are considerable benefits to collective inquiry if there are many researchers pursuing a variety of different theories and who, despite not rationally believing such theories, remain committed advocates of them.²⁷ Specifically, researchers who pursue theories despite lack of consensus on them, and defend them from objections or contrary evidence, make it more likely that inquiry (at least in the long run) will be successful.²⁸ For Fleisher, these benefits of remaining a committed advocate to theories one is inclined to accept provides strong epistemic, rather than just prudential, reasons to endorse a theory. Thus, for very general and non-ad hoc reasons one is not rationally required to give up or abandon a theory that they, strictly speaking, cannot rationally believe, contra Unjustified Theory. Instead, one can rationally endorse theories during inquiry.

The further details of Fleisher's view are unimportant for my purposes because as a Skeptical Response it fails, by Conciliatory reasoning, to mitigate the self-undermining challenge. Recall again that Steadfasters believe that CV is false. As such they will likely believe that we should not endorse CV. To see why, consider how Fleisher (2018: 2654-5) contrasts endorsement vs. belief:

[I]t is irrational to believe some proposition p if one takes $\sim p$ to be more probable than p . Put simply, you should not believe something you think is more likely false than true. This principle is not true for endorsement. *One should not knowingly endorse something false, but one can endorse something unlikely to be true.* Endorsement is an appropriate attitude for theories which *should be pursued and advocated for*, but which are (at least as yet) unconfirmed. (My emphasis)

Applying this passage to CV, Fleisher contends that proponents of CV can endorse CV *even if* it is not likely to be true as long as doing so will allow for the benefits of collective inquiry mentioned above. But, contra Fleisher, recall that Steadfasters do not just think CV is “unlikely to be true,” they believe that it is false, full stop;

²⁷ Kitcher (1990) argues that inquiry goes better when cognitive labor is better distributed across individuals and groups. Also, see Strevens (2003).

²⁸ Fleisher (2021) cites Mercier and Sperber (2011) and De Crus and De Smedt (2013) as empirical support.

and so, by Fleisher's claims above, Steadfasters also do not believe that CV "should be pursued and advocated for."²⁹ Accordingly, there is peer disagreement about the rationality of endorsing CV, per premise V; and per premise IV, it follows that Fleisher's Skeptical Response is undermined by the very view it is attempting to defend. In short, because disagreement with Steadfasters likely constitutes peer disagreement about the rationality of endorsing CV, this peer disagreement, by CV's own lights, undermines the rationality of endorsing CV.³⁰

However, it might be objected that the argument above still, at best, only provides *indirect* support for the claim that there is peer disagreement about the rationality of endorsing CV, per premise V.³¹ Rather than citing authors who explicitly deny this claim, the above argument just draws out the likely consequence that Steadfasters pose for Fleisher's Skeptical Response: there is peer disagreement about the rationality of endorsing CV. But, without explicit peer disagreement this objection might not have much force since many hold that merely possible peer disagreements do not pose a skeptical challenge (see fn. 18).

In response, I believe this also should only provide cold comfort to Conciliationists. Again, given the aforementioned facts that philosophical consensuses on substantive philosophical theses are rarely (if ever) reached and the amount of peer disagreement regarding various Solution Responses summarized in § 2 above, it is likely that CV, by its own lights, will perennially remain epistemically self-undermining, per Solution Responses (almost certainly) Fail. In other words, even if proponents of CV were permitted, by CV's own lights, to endorse CV, it is unlikely this would help resolve the self-undermining challenge since, again, it is very unlikely that a proposed Solution Response will be widely accepted amongst philosophers. Furthermore, even if we grant that explicit, rather than indirect or inferred, peer disagreement is required to challenge the rationality of endorsing CV, *give it time* and explicit peer disagreement will (almost certainly) happen. Again, by my lights, these considerations are sufficient to undermine this Skeptical Response.

Fortunately, my case against Fleisher's Skeptical Response does not solely rest on these considerations. This is because there are philosophical peers, in the *literature* on what doxastic attitude it is rational to take towards one's favorite theory, who *directly* contest the rationality of endorsing CV, per premise V; or, also per premise V, contest the truth of endorsement as a norm of inquiry. For example, Buchak (2021) and Jackson (forthcoming) argue that, in the face of peer disagreement, it can be rational to remain committed to *believing* one's favorite theory while reducing one's

²⁹ Of course, it might be prudentially rational to pursue and advocate for CV (e.g. the need to publish articles in order to get tenure). But obviously, this is distinct from it being epistemically rational to pursue and advocate for CV (i.e. rationality concerning whether, or how likely, CV is to be true). It is the epistemic rationality of CV that concerns the disagreement between proponents and opponents of CV. See Rinard (2017) for a challenge to the existence of pure epistemic rationality distinct from prudential rationality, and Fleisher (2018) for a defense.

³⁰ Fn. 43 explains why proponents of CV cannot defend the rationality of endorsing CV by discounting the peer-hood of Steadfasters.

³¹ Additionally, the existence of eliminative materialists also provides another potential source of indirect support for this claim. Because eliminative materialists hold that our common-sense psychological picture of the mind having various mental states is likely false, it follows that they also likely hold that it is not rational to endorse CV since there is no such mental state as endorsement. Cf. fn. 15 above.

credence in this theory. For both Buchak and Jackson, it is beliefs, rather than some other mental state, that allows one to remain a committed advocate of the views they favor: Beliefs allow one to represent what they take to be true of the world. In contrast, credences, as subjective measures of the probability of propositions, only track one's estimation of the total evidential support their views currently have. In other words, credences are probabilities that represent the degree of belief, or confidence, one has that a proposition is true given one's evidence. Buchak and Jackson argue that beliefs and credences do not always covary because beliefs can be resilient to new evidence in ways that credences are not. As such, it can be rational to retain one's belief, while holding a very low or middling credence.³² For Buchak and Jackson, the same is true for our favorite philosophical views. It can be rational to retain our beliefs after encountering new contravening evidence, even if this evidence makes it unlikely that one's view is true.

A further explanation of Buchak (2021) and Jackson's (forthcoming) view is unimportant for my purposes. What is important is that their view demonstrates that there is peer disagreement about the rationality of endorsing CV. Indeed, Jackson explicitly uses the distinction between beliefs and credences as a *Solution Response* to the self-undermining challenge: peer disagreement about CV means that "conciliationists should lower their credence in conciliationism, but there are no qualms about believing it" (Jackson (forthcoming)). In other words, this distinction allows Jackson to contend that in cases of peer disagreement on CV it can be rational to steadfastly believe CV while being conciliatory in one's credences toward CV. In particular, she holds that it can be rational to believe CV even while having a *middling to low* credence in CV. In contrast, Fleisher contends that in cases of peer disagreement it is rational to be conciliatory regarding one's belief in CV, while steadfast in one's endorsement of CV. Moreover, both Buchak and Jackson contend that their view allows for the epistemic benefits that disagreements provide for collective inquiry which, as mentioned above, Fleisher uses to support the rationality of endorsement. And Jackson (forthcoming) explicitly argues that their view better accounts for these benefits than Fleisher's endorsement.³³ For these reasons, the stated peer disagreement between Fleisher vs. Buchak and Jackson is not over CV since Buchak and esp.

³² To illustrate, imagine that a bus hit a pedestrian and you have reliable testimony that the bus involved is part of the Blue Bus fleet. Later you learn that the Blue Bus fleet only constitutes 5% of all buses in this part of the city. Jackson (forthcoming) uses this example from Smith (2016) to argue that, given the reliable testimony you possess, it does not seem that this new statistical evidence should undermine your belief that a Blue Bus hit the pedestrian. But this evidence does affect the probability that a Blue Bus was involved. Indeed, depending on how reliable the testimony is, it can be very unlikely that a Blue Bus was responsible. As such, it can be rational to retain one's belief that a Blue Bus was responsible on the basis of this testimony, while holding a very low or middling credence that a Blue Bus was involved after encountering this statistic.

³³ Jackson (forthcoming) also raises several worries for Fleisher's endorsement which she argues her view avoids. She contends that endorsement makes the frequently discussed "spinelessness" objection to CV worse since it can allow one to endorse mutually exclusive theories in different contexts. Lastly, she argues that Fleisher's view incorrectly dictates that it is irrational for philosophers to believe their views, while Jackson's view correctly dictates that philosophers can believe, but not be overly confident, in their controversial views.

Jackson *agree* with Fleisher that views like CV are worth pursuing. Instead, they disagree on what the rational attitude to take toward it during inquiry is.³⁴

In sum, this contrast between Fleisher's belief-Conciliationism and steadfast-endorsements toward CV vs. Jackson's belief-Steadfastness and credence-Conciliationism toward CV, reveals existent peer disagreement on the appropriate epistemic attitude to have toward CV, per premise V. Consequently, the rationality of endorsing CV is *directly* disagreed upon and subject to the Conciliatory reasoning embodied in premise IV. From all of this, it follows that Fleisher's endorsement Skeptical Response is undermined by the very view it is attempting to defend, per the conclusion of Skeptical Responses (almost certainly) Fail. Lastly, I claim that the Skeptical Responses (almost certainly) Fail argument will likely undermine any other kind of Skeptical Response that is proposed.³⁵

To be clear, my Skeptical Responses (almost certainly) Fail argument is not meant to decisively refute all possible Skeptical Responses. Instead, my argument places a heavy burden of proof on those who wish to defend CV from the self-undermining challenge. But, given the empirical facts about the pervasiveness and persistence of disagreement amongst philosophers about substantive philosophical propositions and the fact that the peer disagreement literature itself is full of epistemic peers who disagree both about CV and various aspects of proposed Skeptical Responses, this is a burden of proof that I do not believe can be met (see § 4 for a further defense).

3.1 Objections

There are two pertinent objections one might make against my arguments in the previous section. The first is that my argument fails because it misunderstands how endorsement responds to the self-undermining challenge. Endorsement is a distinct doxastic attitude and is not governed by the same considerations as belief. Unlike belief, endorsement is (largely) impervious to the defeating effects of peer disagreement. Indeed, according to Fleisher, the benefits that such disagreements can have to collective inquiry is what allows endorsement to be the attitude of resilient commitment to the views one is inclined to accept. And importantly, CV is a view that only concerns the defeating power that peer disagreement can have on our *beliefs*, *not*

³⁴ However, this issue is complicated because I hold that their stated disagreement is misleading. In § 3.1 I argue that Buchak and Jackson's view only allows one to believe CV in the face of the self-undermining challenge because it is a version of Steadfastness in disguise. Also, see fn. 42.

³⁵ For example, recently Christensen (2021: 2211-2) can be interpreted as providing a Skeptical Response since he accepts that CV succumbs to the self-undermining challenge above, but he argues this is not very worrisome because this does not pose a special problem for CV. He pessimistically contends, most philosophers are "not highly reliable in reaching correct philosophical conclusions." Contra Christensen, this general pessimism about the state of philosophy is disagreed upon by epistemic peers (Gutting, 2009; Stoljar, (2017). More specifically, this Skeptical Response is denied by Grundmann (2019) who argues that, if Conciliationism generalizes to a prevalent philosophical skepticism, then the self-undermining challenge does pose a special and unavoidable problem for Conciliationism; namely, in utilizing Conciliationism to argue for philosophical skepticism, this argument must use track-record arguments to establish epistemic peer-hood, but that such track-record arguments presuppose the falsity of prevalent philosophical skepticism. If Grundman's argument is sound, this constitutes another way that Conciliationism, and skeptical arguments which utilize it, is self-undermining, viz., they are self-negating because they commit the Conciliationist to believe that Conciliationism is false.

endorsements. So even though there is peer disagreement (from Buchak and Jackson) about endorsement being the appropriate attitude to take toward CV, this is irrelevant since peer disagreement does not affect endorsement. In short, CV just doesn't apply to endorsement.

In response, this objection misidentifies the target of my argument above. To be clear, the general target of my Skeptical Responses (almost certainly) Fail argument is not any particular mitigating factor (M) (e.g. endorsement) to the self-undermining challenge. Rather, its target is the *conjunction* of CV with any such mitigating factor. It argues that no M can be paired with CV in order to mitigate the self-undermining challenge, i.e. CV blocks any M from providing epistemic reasons to believe that this challenge is insignificant. Applying this clarification to Fleisher's Skeptical Response, my argument does not claim that endorsement is false, nor does it advocate for Buchak or Jackson's view. This argument targets the *conjunction* of CV with endorsement. As such, my argument does not attempt to show that an agent cannot endorse CV, nor does it deny that pragmatically much can be gained for collective inquiry by endorsing CV.³⁶

Rather, my Skeptical Responses (almost certainly) Fail argument, as applied to Fleisher's Skeptical Response, attempts to show that considerations which support endorsement cannot, by CV's own lights, *mitigate* the self-undermining challenge, i.e. provide reasons to *believe that endorsing CV is rational* in the face of the self-undermining challenge. To clarify how my argument works, it is important to understand that Fleisher's *arguments* for his Skeptical Response provide *reasons to believe* that endorsement, rather than belief, is the appropriate attitude to take toward CV during inquiry. Specifically, Fleisher's arguments, that endorsing CV allows us to gain the benefits to collective inquiry that genuine disagreements can provide, appears to be arguing for (i.e. providing reasons to believe) the following proposition: given peer disagreement on CV, the rational attitude it is appropriate to have toward CV is endorsement, not belief. This is supported by Fleisher's previous claims that endorsing a proposition can be rational when doing so can make it more likely inquiry will be successful by, in part, distributing the cognitive labor amongst researchers. Recall, Fleisher (2021: 9925, 9933) explicitly says that these considerations provide *epistemic*, rather than just prudential, *reasons to believe* that endorsing CV is rational.³⁷

³⁶ This is not to imply that there are no lingering problems and issues to be worked out; see fn. 33. For instance, contra Fleisher, to get these benefits of collective inquiry one might endorse CV for *pragmatic*, rather than epistemic, reasons. Also, although my Skeptical Responses (almost certainly) Fail argument does not (yet) imply that it is irrational to endorse CV, my overall argument in this paper entails that, by CV's own lights, endorsing CV is irrational. See § 4 for why the self-undermining challenge puts rational pressure on one to give up or abandon CV.

³⁷ In Fleisher's (2021: 9925) terminology, belief is only sensitive to "intrinsic epistemic reasons" which "are reasons to believe that a proposition is true." In contrast, endorsements are additionally sensitive to "extrinsic epistemic reasons" which are "reasons concerning the promotion of the goals of collective inquiry." Indeed, it is difficult to understand what role Fleisher's arguments (esp. those about gaining the benefits of collective inquiry) serve if not to provide intrinsic epistemic reasons to believe that we should endorse, but not believe, CV. Thus, peer disagreement (from Buchak and Jackson) does target these reasons for belief that Fleisher provides to endorse CV.

Indeed, it is difficult to understand what these arguments serve if not to provide reasons to believe that endorsing CV is rational.³⁸

And it is these reasons to believe that is both the target of my argument and is directly challenged by the peer disagreement from Buchak and Jackson. In short, given that there is peer disagreement (from Buchak and Jackson) on the rational attitude to take toward CV, CV applies to and defeats Fleisher's *arguments* that during inquiry it is rational to endorse CV. Thus, it is not rational, by CV's own lights, to *believe* it is rational to endorse CV. Consequently, Fleisher's endorsement fails, by CV's own lights, to provide an adequate (i.e. epistemically undefeated) Skeptical Response to the self-undermining challenge, per Skeptical Responses (almost certainly) Fail. More forcefully, by CV's own lights, it is *irrational* to believe that endorsing CV can avoid the self-undermining challenge, or show it is not very worrisome.³⁹

The second objection argues that we should deny Fleisher's view but accept Buchak and Jackson's view because it more directly provides a response to the self-undermining challenge. Specifically, a proponent of CV might argue that accepting their distinction between beliefs vs. credences provides a compelling *Solution* Response to the self-undermining challenge: their view allows that, even when there is peer disagreement on CV, it can still be rational to *believe* CV if one is also conciliatory in their credence toward CV. In essence, if CV is one's preferred theory of peer disagreement, then Buchak and Jackson's view allows one to remain steadfast in CV (provided a few conditions are met).⁴⁰

³⁸ For these reasons, Fleisher cannot be interpreted as arguing that to mitigate the self-undermining challenge one should *endorse* the endorsement of CV. Additionally, it is not clear that such second-order endorsement of CV is coherent since this amounts to claiming something like: "I am provisionally inclined to accept the reasons that allow me to be provisionally inclined to accept CV." But even if we grant the second-order endorsement of CV is coherent, this just pushes the problem back a level: there is likely peer disagreement about the endorsement of endorsing CV. Or, if one is allowed to continually flout the requirement to provide epistemic reasons to believe endorsing some view (like CV) is rational, then it seems that second-order or even higher-order endorsements are unmotivated, i.e. there are no epistemic reasons provided to take the attitude of endorsement. And again, it is not clear that such continued endorsements (or endorsements "all the way down") are coherent. Furthermore, such an account of endorsement may be too permissive since it may allow it to be rational to endorse obviously irrational propositions, e.g. the flat-earth hypothesis. That is, it seems that if first and later-order endorsements serve to inoculate a view from the defeating effects of peer disagreement, then this may allow for it to be rational for the flat earther to endorse the endorsement of the flat earth hypothesis. I lack the space to further pursue these potential problems for endorsement, which is related to, but ultimately outside the scope of, this paper. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to address this objection.

³⁹ Additionally, Fleisher's (2018) endorsement account of assertion conflicts with most accounts of assertion which hold that belief is necessary for assertion (see fn. 14). See Dethier (2022) for a direct disagreement with Fleisher's (2018) endorsement account of assertion. These peer disagreements, along with its conjunction with CV, entails that Fleisher's account cannot provide (undefeated) epistemic reasons to believe that endorsing/asserting CV is rational, per my Skeptical Responses (almost certainly) Fail arguments above.

⁴⁰ To be clear, Buchak and Jackson are not committed to the rationality of holding on to a controversial view like CV *come what may*. Rather, they hold that at a certain point when one's credence is sufficiently low, it becomes unreasonable to believe one's favorite view. While they do not specify precisely where this credal threshold is, even if this threshold is very low (e.g. one should not believe p when one's credence falls below 0.3) there are situations where one's credence falls below this threshold and one should no longer believe CV. For instance, if many epistemic peers sided with Fleisher's endorsement against

This response will not work for two related reasons. The first is that it seems that, to respond to the self-undermining challenge, Buchak and Jackson's use of the belief vs. credence distinction effectively denies premise 1 of this challenge: If peers recognize they disagree on p , then peers should suspend belief on p . But as explained in § 1, premise 1 is just a simplified statement of CV. So, it seems that Buchak and Jackson's Solution Response largely denies the defeating power that peer disagreement can have on our beliefs, contra CV. While denying premise 1 does effectively avoid the challenge, it does so in a way that a proponent of CV cannot accept.⁴¹

Understood this way, it seems that Buchak and Jackson's view is a version of Steadfastness in disguise. Indeed, it seems that in some ways their view is even more steadfast than other proposed Steadfast views. For example, Kelly's (2010, 2013) Total Evidence View (TEV) holds it can be rationally permissible to remain steadfast in one's beliefs in cases where one's total evidence supports their beliefs. TEV is widely regarded in the peer disagreement literature as a steadfast view since it largely

Buchak and Jackson's view, these peer disagreements could lead one's total evidence to fall below the credal threshold for belief. And if this happens, then while Buchak and Jackson's view entails that one should conciliate on CV, this will mean that their view still does not avoid or effectively respond to the self-undermining challenge to CV.

⁴¹ Proponents of credal versions of CV might balk at this. First, they could argue that credal versions of CV avoid the self-undermining challenge (as stated above) because they do not accept premise 1, i.e. because there are a range of cases where peer disagreement only leads to a negligible reduction in one's credences, peer disagreement does not necessarily entail suspending belief. For example, if a proponent of CV were to have a 0.9 credence in CV and acknowledge that an epistemic peer had a 0.5 credence in CV, then the proponent of CV should, according to the *split the difference* version of credal CV, change their credence to 0.7. And if one accepts, as most epistemologists do, the Lockean Thesis that rational belief in p is only permissible for credences above a certain threshold, e.g. 0.5 in p , then this proponent of CV can retain their original belief in CV. Second, they could argue that such cases show that credal versions of CV are more formidable and less susceptible to being self-undermining than full-belief versions of CV, contra my claim above. While a full response to these concerns is outside the scope of this paper, I will briefly respond to these concerns in reverse order. First, because there is ample peer disagreement on both whether credal versions of CV are true (i.e. from Steadfasters, see fn. 21) and peer disagreement amongst Conciliationists on the best way to formulate CV (see fn. 5 and 7), cases like the one above are unlikely outliers and cannot be used to draw the general conclusion that credal versions of CV are more formidable or less susceptible to being self-undermining than full-belief versions. Second, in light of such disagreements, the self-undermining challenge can be reformulated to apply to credal versions of CV since these disagreements support the empirical claim that "acknowledge peers recognize they disagree on *credal CV*" (cf. fn. 8). Of course, a proponent of credal CV might attempt to avoid the reformulated self-undermining challenge in various ways. For example, they could deny the split the difference version of CV in favor of a view that is much less conciliatory and/or alter the, Lockean, credal threshold for permissible rational belief so that they, more or less, guarantee that peer disagreement will never require one to change their beliefs. However, doing such things is clearly not within the spirit of CV: that one should give *significant*, or equal, weight to the opinions of disagreeing peers such that peer disagreements count as *defeating* (higher-order) evidence. (Indeed, such responses risk abandoning CV for a Steadfast view, e.g. like Buchak and Jackson do). And to, again, reiterate my Solution Responses (almost certainly) Fail argument: there will (almost certainly) be peer disagreement about any proposed solution to the reformulated credal self-undermining challenge (e.g. some deny the Lockean Thesis, while its proponents disagree on the best way to formulate it. See Jackson (2020) for an overview). Thus, any proposed solution is likely to be defeated by the very view that it is attempting to defend (cf. fn. 8). However, to be clear, these brief remarks are not meant to decisively establish that all possible credal versions of CV succumb to the self-undermining challenge. Instead, my arguments place a heavy burden of proof on those who wish to defend credal versions of CV from (either version of) the self-undermining challenge. This is a burden of proof that I do not believe can be met. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising and pushing me to address these concerns.

discounts (but does not completely deny) the defeating power that peer disagreement can have on our beliefs. Indeed, many prominent proponents of CV have challenged TEV and similar views on the grounds that there are cases where it gets the wrong (non)conciliatory result in cases of peer disagreement (e.g. Christensen (2011); Vavova (2014b)). Buchak and Jackson's view is more steadfast since it holds that one can retain one's belief in their favorite view (e.g. CV) *even if* one's total evidence does not support this view. Rather, one's total evidence largely just affects one's credences; and for them, belief is compatible with having a middling or low credence in a controversial view.⁴² Specifically, recall that Jackson allows one to *believe CV* even if one's total evidence only supports a middling to low credence in CV. In sum, while adopting Buchak and Jackson's view does effectively respond to the self-undermining challenge, it does so by accepting a version of Steadfastness; and thus, this is not an effective way that a proponent of CV can respond to this challenge.⁴³

⁴² However, I should note it is difficult to accurately interpret Buchak and Jackson on this point. Their view separates beliefs and credence such that credence and belief versions of CV are not equivalent. In doing so, they are breaking with the usual practice of defining CV as either suspending belief or significantly reducing one's credence in *p* when peers disagree on *p*. In other words, Buchak and Jackson deny the usual assumption that beliefs and credence covary and this affects how one should understand CV. As such they could argue they are still defending a view that is in the spirit, but not the letter, of CV. But to avoid a semantic dispute, my argument above can just stipulate that, as CV and Steadfastness are commonly understood, their view is a version of Steadfastness for the reasons mentioned above, or it fails for the reasons discussed in § 4 below.

⁴³ However, if Buchak and Jackson are *Steadfasters* in disguise (i.e. those who both disagree on CV and the epistemic reasons to endorse CV), then Conciliationists might defend the rationality of endorsing CV by arguing that: while the initial peer disagreement with Steadfasters on CV *itself* requires them, by CV's lights, to suspend belief on CV, that subsequent disagreements with Steadfasters on the endorse-ability of CV carries no epistemic weight. That is, they might argue that, after the initial disagreement, Steadfasters are no longer *endorsed or acknowledged* as epistemic peers because, from the Conciliationist's point of view, Steadfasters have handled the first disagreement on CV itself in an irrational way (cf. fn. 30). Thus, proponents of CV are free to endorse CV since this further disagreement with Steadfasters on endorsing CV carries no epistemic weight. In response, I argue that this discounting gambit is implausible for three reasons. Firstly, for similar reasons in fn. 38, discounting Steadfasters as peers in this case threatens to make endorsement too permissive by allowing it to be rational to endorse obviously irrational propositions, e.g. the flat-earth hypothesis. Specifically, flat-earthers can argue that while their initial disagreement with non-flat earthers requires them to suspend belief on the flat-earth hypothesis, that subsequent disagreements with non-flat earthers on the endorse-ability of the flat earth hypothesis carries no epistemic weight because non-flat earthers are no longer endorsed or acknowledged as an epistemic peer (e.g. from the flat-earthers' point of view, non-flat earthers have handled the first disagreement in an irrational way). Second, this consequence follows in part because discounting Steadfasters as peers in this case also threatens to violate the principle of Independence (i.e. to discount peer-hood for reasons that are not dispute independent) that many Conciliationists hold (cf. fn. 4). This is because it is not obvious that disagreement over CV is independent of disagreements over the endorse-ability of CV. Indeed, it seems distinguishing between earlier and later disagreements in this case is unmotivated and ad hoc because the reasons Steadfasters deny CV, presumably, carry over to their denial of endorsing CV. This is why a proponent of CV knows, or can reasonably infer, that Steadfasters disagree about the rationality of endorsing CV *at the time* of the, alleged, first peer disagreement over CV. (Just like flat-earthers know or can reasonably infer that non-flat earthers will also deny the endorse-ability of the flat-earth hypothesis). Third, but even if these disagreements are independent of one another, discounting Steadfasters as peers in this case then seems to implausibly commit the proponent of CV to denying the commutativity of evidence (i.e. it denies that the order in which evidence is acquire should not rationally influence what is reasonable to believe based on that evidence, cf. Gardiner, 2014 and Wilson (2010)). Because if Steadfasters and Conciliationists were to instead first disagree on the endorse-ability of CV, and then later disagree on CV itself, this would lead to the converse result that: Conciliationists, by CV's lights, cannot rationally endorse CV, but they can

4 Conclusion: there is no hope for conciliationism

Complications aside, my overall argument in this paper is simple. There are only two ways a proponent of CV can respond to the self-undermining challenge: to provide a Solution or Skeptical Response. Both ways of responding to this challenge (almost certainly) fail because there is or will likely be peer disagreement that directly or indirectly bears on these responses. As such, these responses are (almost certainly) defeated by the very view they are attempting to defend, CV. To make this overall argument persuasive, I have surveyed the current literatures on peer disagreement, the self-undermining challenge, and explained two rival views on the appropriate attitude to have toward one's favorite theory during inquiry - which directly bear on whether CV is self-undermining. All the peer disagreements in and between these literatures provide the empirical support for the claim that there is ample peer disagreement in philosophy for CV to apply to and defeat any way of responding to the self-undermining challenge.

How serious of a problem is this? Well firstly, if my arguments are sound, then they *exacerbate* all the problems that the original self-undermining challenge poses for proponents of CV explained in § 1.1. This is in large part because, if my arguments are sound, it follows that proponents of CV (almost certainly) can say *nothing* to defend their view from this self-undermining challenge, since any defense offered will likely have some feature that will be disagreed upon by epistemic peers.

Recall, the original self-undermining challenge makes those who, despite this challenge, remain Conciliationists guilty of something *akin* to Moore's paradox: i.e. absurdly believing or asserting that 'CV is true, but I don't believe it.' As mentioned in § 1.1, unlike quintessential Moorean propositions, believing or asserting the above proposition is only contingently irrational, i.e. contingent on their being peer disagreement on CV. But, if CV is (almost certainly) *permanently* self-undermining, then not only are Conciliationists without a feasible way to respond to the self-undermining challenge, Conciliationists are unlikely to ever avoid the above absurdity of believing or asserting CV. So, while believing or asserting the above proposition is still not necessarily irrational, for all our epistemic purposes, it is (almost certainly) permanently absurd to believe or assert CV.

Additionally, my arguments further exacerbate another problem explained in § 1.1 that the original self-undermining challenge poses for proponents of CV, viz., despite compelling considerations in CV's favor (e.g. the split-bill case), it is nevertheless irrational, by CV's own lights, to *believe* that Conciliationism is adequately justified by any apparent support. But if my arguments are sound, then it further follows that one can (almost certainly) *never* rationally believe, *nor endorse*, CV since the

believe CV since subsequent disagreements on CV itself carry no epistemic weight. Contra the commutativity of evidence, discounting the peer-hood of Steadfasters leads to the implausible result that, despite ending up with all the same disagreement (higher-order) evidence, the order in which this evidence is presented rationally warrants agents having different attitudes toward contested views like CV. Thus, for all these reasons discounting the peer-hood of Steadfasters is not a very promising way of mitigating the self-undermining challenge. These three reasons above show it is implausible for proponents of CV to maintain they are peers with Steadfasters when it concerns CV itself, but not peers when it concerns endorsing CV. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising, but not endorsing, this discounting peer-hood objection.

reasons for taking these attitudes toward CV are likely to be disagreed upon by epistemic peers. Counterintuitively, this means that the considerations that seem to be in CV's favor are likely to *never* provide adequate support for it. In other words, if my arguments are sound then, by CV's own lights, CV is (almost certainly) *permanently* defeated and left unjustified, via the self-undermining challenge. Moreover, these results provide a strong inductive base to infer that: it will likely never be rational to take *any* positive rational doxastic attitude toward CV (i.e. belief, endorsement, acceptance, etc.) since taking any proposed attitude toward CV is likely to be disagreed upon by epistemic peers.

Lastly, my arguments will likely make it extremely difficult for proponents of CV to respond to the additional self-incrimination challenges explained in § 1.1, viz. the self-censoring and self-negating challenges. Specifically, if there are peer disagreements about ways to respond to these additional self-incrimination challenges, then by the same Conciliatory reasoning embodied in my Solution, and Skeptical, Responses (almost certainly) Fail arguments, Conciliationists will (almost certainly) be unable to adequately defend (i.e. provide epistemically undefeated reasons for) Conciliationism against the charges that it is self-censoring and/or self-negating.

Given all of this, it seems that continuing to believe or endorse CV is not only *irrational* but, at best, akin to a fool's hope or wishful thinking. Indeed, given these results, it is hard to see what, if any, epistemic advantage CV has, or can provide, for epistemic agents. So, I agree with Decker (2014: 1132) that the self-undermining challenge is a "devastating problem" for proponents of CV. Furthermore, I contend that one should give up or abandon any view that leads to these results. To be clear, by "give up or abandon" CV, not only should one not believe, endorse, accept, be committed to, or even suspend belief on CV, but one should *disbelieve* CV, i.e. believe CV is likely false. In other words, given all the serious problems for CV explained above, it seems the only rational doxastic state one can take toward CV is to hold that it is a fundamentally defective theory and believe that it is likely false. My arguments provide a strong case that proponents of CV, or anyone, should give up or abandon CV.

However, this last claim leads us back to whether the previous discussed principle is true:

Unjustified Theory: If a subject S is not justified in believing (or would not be justified in believing) a theory, then S is rationally required to give up (not be committed to) that theory. (Fleisher, 2021: 9921)

As explained above, Fleisher's endorsement provides an independently well motivated and compelling rebuke of this principle. Specifically, it seems *inappropriate* to hold that inquirers (esp. scientists) are *irrational* for continuing to research theories they cannot currently believe. Endorsement captures the intuitive thought that one should not abandon a theory just because it is controversial or likely false. Thus, it seems that if I am going to make the strong claim that, by my arguments above, CV should be abandoned, I must accept Unjustified Theory, contra the compelling points from Fleisher.

In response, to make this strong claim I do not have to deny Fleisher's compelling points because my argument for abandoning CV does not rely on Unjustified

Theory. Instead, my argument for abandoning CV relies on the following more stringent principle:

Perpetually unjustified theory: If a subject S is not justified in believing (or would not be justified in believing) a theory and *S is justified in believing that they will (almost certainly) not be justified in believing a theory in perpetuity*, then S is rationally required to give up (disbelieve) that theory.

Unlike Unjustified Theory, Perpetually Unjustified Theory does not imply that theories which are just lacking sufficient justification to be believed should be given up. Rather, Perpetually Unjustified theory says when we have no reason to be optimistic, and have strong reasons to be pessimistic, that a view will turn out to be correct, one ought to abandon that theory.⁴⁴ In the case of CV, not only do we, by CV's lights, have no justification to believe CV (via the self-undermining challenge), we also have, by CV's lights, justification to believe that the theory will likely remain unjustified in perpetuity (via my Solution, and Skeptical, Responses (almost certainly) Fail arguments). Thus, it is Perpetually Unjustified theory along with my arguments in the previous sections that, I claim, does provide us with strong reason for proponents, or anyone, to abandon CV. In other words, my arguments in the previous sections provide justification to believe that CV will (almost certainly) not be justified *in perpetuity*, so – via Perpetually Unjustified Theory – it is a view that should not be believed, endorsed, accepted, etc., but disbelieved.

Indeed, Fleisher (2021: 9929) seems to agree with something very close to Perpetually Unjustified Theory when he writes:

The conciliationist should not view [not believing CV] as a problem, but rather an expected consequence that fits the spirit of the theory. CV is no worse off in this regard than any other theory from a cutting-edge research field. What would be a problem is *if one could never, in principle, rationally believe conciliationism...* The self-undermining challenge does not even allege that this is the case. [The self-undermining challenge] is only a problem for believing the theory here and now, in light of present disagreement. (My emphasis).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Stated this way, Perpetually Unjustified Theory is similar to, but stronger than, the principle that, under certain conditions, absence of evidence is evidence of absence. In non-slogan form, the belief that a theory is false (e.g. phlogiston theory), or belief that an entity does not exist (e.g. the luminiferous aether), can be inductively justified on the conditions that a sufficient number of qualified researchers have been unable to acquire evidence to justify believing in this theory or the existence of this entity despite such researchers having a sufficiently long period of time and were using methods and/or instruments which are likely to deliver such evidence. Both principles hold that lacking justification can rationally motivate disbelief. But Perpetually Unjustified Theory is stronger because it includes the positive justification condition that “*S is justified in believing they will (almost certainly) not be justified in believing a theory in perpetuity.*” The absence of evidence principle does not have this additional justification condition since, in slogan form, to infer the evidence of absence it is only concerned with the absence of evidence. In contrast, Perpetually Unjustified Theory is concerned with both absence of evidence and evidence of absence to justify disbelief.

⁴⁵ Fleisher is not alone in supporting something like Perpetually Unjustified Theory, see Buchak (2021: 206) and Jackson (forthcoming) for additional support.

Admittedly, my arguments do not show that it is *in principle* impossible to rationally believe CV. My arguments depend on actual or very likely peer disagreements which are contingent empirical claims. This is largely why my arguments contain the “almost certainly” qualifier throughout this paper. But, contra Fleisher, my arguments in the previous sections, in conjunction with Perpetually Justified Theory, show that the self-undermining challenge can be extended to establish that one can (almost certainly) *never* rationally believe CV.⁴⁶

Lastly, a proponent of CV might object that, even if my arguments in this paper are sound, the “almost certainly” qualifier in my arguments still leaves room for optimism that they can rationally believe CV at some point in the future. Specifically, the “almost certainly” qualifier allows for there to potentially be some knockdown argument for CV or that a consensus in CV’s favor will emerge in the future. However, this is not a promising option for proponents of CV. Given my arguments above, the only way that this can be accomplished is if proponents of CV could, at some point, rationally believe or endorse CV to hopefully discover some considerations in CV’s favor that are not disagreed upon by philosophical peers. Put this way, not only should this response only offer cold comfort to proponents of CV but it reveals that continuing to maintain CV in light of the seemingly unavoidable self-undermining challenge looks, again, irrationality akin to wishful thinking rather than a cogent research plan.⁴⁷

In conclusion, this result is significant because it demonstrates that, by CV’s own lights, CV is (almost certainly) hopeless: there is (almost certainly) nothing that can save CV from the self-undermining challenge. CV, conjoined with any reasons to

⁴⁶ However, one might still demur at the epistemic significance of my arguments. One might argue that even if my arguments are sound and it is both irrational to believe CV and one should disbelieve CV, the *rational action, desire, policy*, etc. in cases of peer disagreement is to suspend belief in accordance with CV. In response, let me preliminarily say my arguments can plausibly be extended to make the action of, policy of, or desire to, etc. conciliate in cases of peer disagreement also irrational. This is because, plausibly, if our rational actions, policies, desires, etc. should be based on our rational beliefs (such that they should avoid beliefs which are very likely to be irrational (in perpetuity)), then my arguments can further show that the act of, policy of, or desire to, conciliate in cases of peer disagreement is also irrational, should be disbelieved, and, to the extent we should act rationally, be avoided. A full defense of these claims is outside the scope of this paper. However, even if one denies that our rational acts, policies, desires, etc. are or should be based on rational beliefs (cf. the following footnote), given that such connections seem intuitively plausible, if this is the only way for the Conciliationists to address my arguments and minimize the self-undermining challenge, then this, I claim, is a significant result that further demonstrates the significance of my arguments.

⁴⁷ One might object, contra Perpetually Unjustified Theory, that a view being (almost certainly) hopeless is not sufficient to “give up or abandon” that view. For instance, if reversing global warming is only *almost certainly* hopeless then it doesn’t yet follow that we rationally should “give up” expending resources to reverse global warming. In response, I grant that if reversing global warming is only (almost certainly) hopeless, there may be *non-epistemic* reasons to, not “abandon” but, continue to attempt to reverse it against all odds, e.g. pragmatic and moral reasons to save humanity. But non-epistemic reasons are not what is at issue in the self-undermining challenge, nor are they at issue when it comes to showing that one should abandon, i.e. disbelieve, CV because it is (almost certainly) hopeless. It is outside the scope of this paper to address whether there can be moral encroachment in cases of peer disagreement on CV. To my knowledge, no one has argued that moral encroachment can provide a response to the self-undermining challenge. Of course, per my arguments above, such a response would (almost certainly) fail, by CV’s own lights, to mitigate the self-undermining challenge because there is likely to be peer disagreement on this Skeptical Response. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pushing me to address and clarify these points.

mitigate or save CV from the self-undermining challenge is very likely going to fail because CV undercuts any of the potential ways to defend CV from the self-undermining challenge. CV should be abandoned because it is (almost certainly) hopeless.

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