Liberal Evidentialism*

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Abstract: Liberal evidentialists disagree with conservative evidentialists about the nature of evidential support. According to the latter, a body of total evidence must always support a single attitude toward a given proposition better than it supports any alternative attitude toward that proposition. According to the former, a body of total evidence needn't always support a single attitude toward a given proposition better than it supports any alternative attitude toward that proposition. Both views come in doxastic and credal versions. Credal versions concern the question whether a body of total evidence must always support a unique credence in a given proposition. Doxastic versions concern the question whether a body of total evidence must always support a unique doxastic attitude toward a given proposition, where the doxastic attitudes in question are just belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment. In this paper, I focus on the doxastic versions of these views. I argue that the doxastic version of conservative evidentialism has unacceptable theoretical costs if it doesn't have straightforward counterexamples, address the most plausible arguments against doxastic liberal evidentialism, and highlight some consequences of doxastic liberal evidentialism for epistemic agency and the epistemology of disagreement.

Jones is on trial for murder. We don't know Jones, and we don't care about the victim, but we love the suspense of the courtroom, so we have attended the entire trial. The lawyers have made their closing arguments, and we know that we're not going to get any further evidence relevant to the question whether Jones did it. While the jury is deliberating, a friend asks what we think. You say Jones is guilty and I say I'm not sure. You explain why you've made up your mind, I explain why I'm suspending judgment, and we eventually agree that our different attitudes toward the proposition that Jones did it *both* fit the evidence at our disposal (the evidence that emerged over the course of the trial, plus whatever evidence we gained upon discussing our different attitudes toward the proposition that Jones did it). By our lights, while you are continuing to believe that Jones did it, and I am continuing to suspend judgment on this proposition, neither of us is responding incorrectly to our shared total evidence, so there's no reason why I should join you in believing that Jones did it, and no reason why you should join me in suspending judgment on this proposition. We agree to disagree. Is it possible that we're right to do this? Could our shared body of total evidence really support our agreement to disagree?[1]

Views that I will call 'liberal evidentialism' and 'conservative evidentialism' give opposing answers to this question. Let's say that doxastic attitude A toward p *fits* E just in case E supports A *at least as well* as it supports any alternative doxastic attitude toward p, let's say that doxastic attitude A toward p *uniquely fits* E just in case E supports A *better* than it supports any alternative doxastic attitude toward p, and let's say that doxastic attitude A toward p *does not fit* E just in case E supports some *alternative* doxastic attitude toward p better than it supports A. According to the view that I will call 'conservative evidentialism,' for every proposition p and body of total evidence E, some doxastic attitude toward p uniquely fits E. According to the negation of this view (which I will call 'liberal evidentialism'), for at least some proposition p and body of total

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[1] Here and throughout, by 'total evidence,' I mean total *relevant* evidence—that is, total evidence *relevant to the question whether p is true*. That you don't what I had for breakfast this morning, that you don't know where I had my 10th birthday party, that you don't know what my feet smell like, and countless similar facts jointly entail that we have very different *total* evidence, even if we have exactly the same total evidence relevant to some proposition p.

evidence E, no doxastic attitude toward p uniquely fits E. Conservative evidentialism entails that A fits E just in case it *uniquely* fits E, so conservative evidentialism entails that there can't be any case where multiple doxastic attitudes toward a proposition fit the same body of total evidence. Thus, if conservative evidentialism is true, the simple fact that you and I have different doxastic attitudes toward the proposition that Jones did it entails that at least one of us has an attitude toward the proposition that she did it that doesn't fit our total relevant evidence. Now of course, liberal evidentialism is *consistent* with this conclusion, but it is also consistent with the conclusion that we both hold attitudes toward the proposition that she did it that *do* fit our total evidence. So, if liberal evidentialism is true, it *does not* follow just from the fact that we have different attitudes toward the proposition that Jones did it that at least one of us has an attitude toward this proposition that doesn't fit our total evidence. So liberal evidentialism undermines any response to our disagreement that takes as a premise that, simply because we have different doxastic attitudes toward the proposition that Jones did it, at least one of us must have responded incorrectly to our evidence (cf. Kelly 2010).

By 'doxastic attitudes,' I mean just belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment. On many theories of belief, however, you and I might have different doxastic attitudes toward a proposition without having different credences in that proposition.[2] So compare the following versions of conservative evidentialism.

> **Doxastic Conservative Evidentialism**: For every proposition p and body of total evidence E, some doxastic attitude toward p uniquely fits E.

> **Credal Conservative Evidentialism**: For every proposition p and body of total evidence E, some credence in p uniquely fits E.

Doxastic conservative evidentialism and credal conservative evidentialism are not equivalent theses. To see why, consider views of belief like the one that Ross and Schroeder (2014) call 'pragmatic credal reductivism,' or 'PCR' for short.[3] According to PCR, believing p simply consists in having a sufficiently high credence in p, where your credence in p is sufficiently high just in case it is high enough to insure that you are willing to act as if p in some specified set of circumstances (p. 263). On this view, if your credence in p fits your total evidence and this credence is sufficiently high to count as a belief in p, then you believe p and your belief in p fits your total evidence. Similarly, on this view, if your credence in p fits your total evidence and this credence is sufficiently low to count as some alternative doxastic attitude toward p (a suspension of judgment with respect to p or a disbelief in p), then you have this alternative doxastic attitude toward p and this alternative doxastic attitude toward p fits your total evidence. So now assume that credal conservative evidentialism is true, assume that 0.75 is the credence in p that uniquely fits our total evidence, and assume that, in virtue of some non-evidential difference in our values, this credence is high enough to insure that you are willing to act as if p in the relevant set of circumstances but not high enough to insure that I am willing to act as if p in these circumstances (p. 278). Then, if PCR is true, your having credence 0.75 in p would amount to your believing p

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[2] See the theories of belief defended in Ganson 2008, Sosa 2010, Weatherson 2012, Ross and Schroeder 2014, and Locke 2014, to name just a few. (Here and throughout, I will make the standard assumption that disbelieving p, believing $\neg p$, and believing that p is false amount to the same thing.)

[3] According to Ross and Schroeder (p. 260), Ganson 2008, Fantl and McGrath 2009, and Weatherson 2012 all defend PCR.

while my having credence 0.75 in p would amount to my having some alternative doxastic attitude toward p, and, moreover, your belief in p would fit your total evidence while my alternative attitude toward p would fit my total evidence, even though (by hypothesis) we have exactly the same total evidence. But this conclusion conflicts with *doxastic* conservative evidentialism, since it denies that, if you and I have the same total evidence but different doxastic attitudes toward p, it follows just from this that at least one of us has an attitude toward p that doesn't fit our total evidence. So if PCR is true, credal conservative evidentialism and doxastic conservative evidentialism aren't just different theses, they're *inconsistent* theses, since the former entails that the latter is false.[4] Now, of course, it's an open question how beliefs relate to credences, and PCR is a controversial view. But PCR suffices to show that credal conservative evidentialism and doxastic conservative evidentialism should not be treated as equivalent theses.

In this paper, I will argue that doxastic conservative evidentialism is false. And since I think doxastic conservative evidentialism is false even if credal conservative evidentialism is true, I will assume throughout that credal conservative evidentialism *is* true. But I won't rely on any theory of belief like PCR in my argument against doxastic conservative evidentialism. Instead, I will show that doxastic conservative evidentialism has unacceptable theoretical costs, *if* it doesn't have straightforward counterexamples. An argument based on PCR would establish, at best, just that the in*ter*personal version of doxastic conservative evidentialism is false. My argument will target both the interpersonal version of doxastic conservative evidentialism and the in*tra*personal version of doxastic conservative evidentialism. From here forward, I will often drop the adjective 'doxastic,' since I will be focusing almost entirely on the doxastic version of conservative evidentialism and the corresponding doxastic version of *liberal* evidentialism. When I say just 'conservative evidentialism' or 'liberal evidentialism,' I will always mean the *doxastic* version of that view. In fact, to keep things really simple, I will usually just say 'conservatism' or 'liberalism' and use the labels 'conservatives' and 'liberals' for people who accept doxastic conservative evidentialism and doxastic liberal evidentialism, respectively.

Readers familiar with the permissivism debate will notice that conservatism resembles some versions of the uniqueness thesis. But as Kopec and Titelbaum point out, at least sixteen different views fall under the label 'the uniqueness thesis,' and contributors to the debate often take insufficient care to specify which view they are talking about (2016: 190-92). To avoid further confusion, I will avoid the word 'uniqueness' almost entirely, as well as the equally protean labels 'permissivism' and 'impermissivism.' Though for the record, I count liberalism as a permissive view, since it allows that, even though you and I have the same total evidence and we disagree about p, it's *not true* that at least one of us has an attitude toward p that doesn't fit our total evidence.

In §1, I will present a class of cases that look like counterexamples to conservatism. In §2, I will show that conservatism has unacceptable theoretical costs if these cases *aren't* counterexamples to conservatism. In §3, I will address some arguments for conservatism suggested by arguments in the literature for various versions of the uniqueness thesis. Finally,

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[4] Katherine Rubin (2015) defends a related point, and Dustin Locke's discussion of the people he calls Spike and Mike (2014: 50-51) raises similar issues.

in §4, I will draw out some consequences of liberalism for epistemic agency and the epistemology of disagreement.[5]

1. Counterexamples to Conservatism?

An attitude toward p uniquely fits E just in case E supports that attitude better than it supports any alternative attitude toward p. Thus, the question whether conservatism is true depends in part on the question whether E can provide equal support to all *three* doxastic attitudes, or at least provide equal support to any pair of them without providing more support to the third. If E must always provide more support for one doxastic attitude than the other two, then conservatism is true. But if E can provide equal support to all three doxastic attitudes, or provide equal support to two of them without providing more support to the third, then liberalism is true. And this is a problem for conservatism, at least *prima facie*, since there seems no reason why our total evidence couldn't support belief and suspension equally well without providing more support for disbelief.[6]

Suppose you and I have exactly the same epistemic values and standards, suppose we have exactly the same total evidence, and suppose we both want to know whether p is true. In the best-case scenario (strictly epistemically speaking), our total evidence decisively answers the question whether p is true, either by making it certain that p is true, or by making it certain that p is false. In the worst-case scenario (strictly epistemically speaking), our total evidence doesn't give us the slightest hint whether p is true. It supports p and $\neg p$ equally well, and thus leaves it entirely unclear whether p is true. Intuitively, suspension is the only attitude that fits our total evidence in the worst-case scenario, while either belief or disbelief is the only attitude that fits our total evidence in the best-case scenario (depending on which direction our evidence points). So, intuitively, conservatism gets the right results in both the best-case scenario and the worst-case scenario. But what happens if we start in the worst-case scenario and go by gradual improvements in our evidence to the best-case scenario? What happens if we start out in a situation where suspension is the only attitude that fits our total evidence and we slowly gain evidence for p until we eventually find ourselves in a situation where belief is the only attitude that fits our total evidence? At some time t^1, our total evidence supports suspending on p better than it supports any alternative doxastic attitude toward p. At some later time t^2, our total evidence supports believing p better than it supports any alternative doxastic attitude toward p. What happens in between? As we gain evidence from t^1 to t^2, our evidence provides less and less support to suspension of judgment, and more and more support to belief. Is it plausible that, no matter how we fill in the details of this case, there can't be any point where belief and suspension both fit our total evidence?

This *would be* plausible if it were plausible that belief is the only attitude that fits E whenever $\Pr(p|E)$ is higher than 0.5, disbelief is the only attitude that fits E whenever $\Pr(p|E)$ is lower

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[5] As I hope will be clear below, my argument for liberalism avoid natural objections to the permissive views in Douven 2009, Ballantyne and Coffman 2011, Kelly 2014, Schoenfield 2014, Weisberg forthcoming, and others. (Though I should note, at least some of these authors are defending versions of permissivism that aren't equivalent to liberalism.)

[6] My argument in the following paragraph bears some similarity to Philip Nickel's argument that belief and suspension are both rationally permissible in what he calls his "target cases" (2010: 315-16). As will be clear below, however, my argument skirts Kurt Sylvan's (2016) objections to Nickel's argument.

than 0.5, and suspending on p only fits E in the rare case that $\Pr(p|E)$ is exactly 0.5.[7] For on this view, the first moment we gain the slightest bit of evidence for p, our total evidence now supports belief better than both suspension and disbelief. But this view has intolerable consequences. Suppose that I'm about to toss a coin. The probability that the coin will land heads equals the probability that it will land tails, but the probability that it will land either heads or tails is not literally 1. As you and I both know, this probability assignment is an idealization. In real life, there will always be some chance that the coin will stick in the carpet and come to rest on its edge, or some chance that someone will catch the coin in the air so that it never lands at all, or some chance that some interruption will prevent me from tossing the coin in the first place, and so on. Where 'h' names the proposition that the coin will land heads and 't' names the proposition that it will land tails, $\Pr(h \vee t|E)$ is high but not literally 1. This means that $\Pr(h|E)$ and $\Pr(t|E)$ are both below 0.5. And since $\Pr(h|E)$ and $\Pr(t|E)$ are both below 0.5 only if $\Pr(\neg h|E)$ and $\Pr(\neg t|E)$ are both *above* 0.5, this view says that believing $\neg h$ uniquely fits E, that believing $\neg t$ uniquely fits E, and that believing $(h \vee t)$ also uniquely fits E. And of course, there is nothing special about this case. We get the same results for basically any actual coin that someone is about to toss. So on this view, if you're about to toss a coin and I say "the coin won't land heads, and the coin won't land tails either, but it will land either heads or tails," I can defend myself by pointing out (a) that my belief that the coin won't land heads uniquely fits my total evidence, (b) that my belief that the coin won't land tails uniquely fits my total evidence, and (c) that my belief that the coin will land either heads or tails also uniquely fits my total evidence. But this conclusion is beyond the pale. It's even worse than the conclusion that contradictory beliefs each uniquely fit our total evidence in standard preface and lottery situations, since, in these situations, our credences in all of the relevant propositions should presumably be *much* higher than my credences in $\neg h$ and $\neg t$ (cf. Christensen 2004). Surely, rather than conclude that believing $\neg h$ uniquely fits E, that believing $\neg t$ uniquely fits E, and that believing $(h \vee t)$ also uniquely fits E, it would be better to deny what many epistemologists would already want to deny anyway: that suspending on p fits E only in the rare case where $\Pr(p|E)$ is exactly 0.5.[8]

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[7] Here and throughout, I use '$\Pr(p|E)$' as shorthand for 'the probability of p conditional on the relevant body of total evidence E.' In saying that $\Pr(p|E) = x$, I mean just that the relevant body of total evidence supports p to degree x. I don't mean that any person has any particular credence.

[8] Objection: K = E and you *know* that the coin will land either heads or tails, so $\Pr(h \vee t|E)$ *does* equal 1. But this means that $\Pr(h|E)$ and $\Pr(t|E)$ are both exactly 0.5, and the view we are considering gets exactly the right result. Reply: Both premises of this objection are controversial, but even if they are true we can simply change the case. Just imagine a very *small* lottery with just three tickets, assume that you know this lottery will have exactly one winner, and assume that you know each ticket is equally likely to win. Then, if K = E, your evidential situation looks like this:

$$\Pr(t^1 \vee t^2 \vee t^3 | E) = 1$$

$$\Pr(t^1|E) = \Pr(t^2|E) = \Pr(t^3|E) = {}^1/_3$$

$$\Pr(\neg t^1|E) = \Pr(\neg t^2|E) = \Pr(\neg t^3|E) = {}^2/_3$$

But now, since 1 and ${}^2/_3$ are both greater than 0.5, this view entails that believing that ticket 1 won't win uniquely fits your total evidence, believing that ticket 2 won't win uniquely fits your total evidence, believing that ticket 3 won't win uniquely fits your total evidence, and believing that either ticket 1, ticket 2, or ticket 3 *will* win uniquely fits your total evidence. Again, we have an absurd result—or at least a result that's clearly less plausible than the claim that suspending on p might fit your total evidence even though $\Pr(p|E)$ is (say) 0.5000000001.

Since suspending on p might fit E even though $\Pr(p|E)$ is higher 0.5, then, how plausible is it that, in a case where we start out with no evidence for or against p and slowly gain evidence for p until there can be no serious doubt that p is true, there couldn't be any point where our evidence supports belief and suspension equally well? Consider a true/false test where we get a point for each correct answer, lose a point for each incorrect answer, and neither gain nor lose a point for each question that we skip. Our total evidence might rule out checking the box marked 'F' while providing equal support to skipping the question and checking the box marked 'T,' and it might do this even if we have exactly the same values (even if neither of us cares more than the other about doing well on the test, *etc.*). But something similar should happen in a case where our evidence starts out supporting suspension better than any alternative attitude and goes by gradual improvements to supporting belief better than any alternative attitude. Somewhere along the way, our total evidence should support belief and suspension equally well while supporting each better than disbelief. But conservatism has counterexamples if, anywhere along the way, our total evidence supports belief and suspension equally well while supporting each better than disbelief. So conservatism appears to have counterexamples.

And notice, the idea here isn't that, as our evidential situation improves, there will be some point where, relative to *my* epistemic values or standards, our total evidence uniquely supports one doxastic attitude toward p, whereas, relative to *your* epistemic values or standards, it uniquely supports a *different* doxastic attitude toward p. The idea here is that, relative to any fixed set of epistemic values and standards, there will be some point where our total evidence supports belief and suspension equally well while ruling out disbelief. So as our evidential situation improves, as long as it improves sufficiently slowly, by small enough steps, we will eventually find ourselves in a situation that's a counterexample to both the in*ter*personal version of conservatism and the in*tra*personal version of conservatism. Or so it seems.

2. Theoretical Costs of Conservatism

How should we respond to this argument? Several readers have responded to this argument by observing that it's *vague* where our evidence stops supporting suspension better than belief and then pausing for dramatic effect. But of course, all by itself, this observation isn't much of an objection. Other readers have suggested that *epistemicism* causes trouble for this argument. But this reply doesn't work either. Epistemicism is neutral between a conservative view that posits a sharp but unknowable cutoff that marks the transition from evidence that uniquely supports suspension to evidence that uniquely supports belief, and a liberal view that posits two sharp but unknowable cutoffs: one that marks the transition from evidence that uniquely supports suspension to evidence that supports *both* suspension *and* belief, and one that marks the transition from evidence that supports both suspension and belief to evidence that uniquely supports belief. Yet other readers have suggested that, as our evidential situation improves, there are situations where our evidence uniquely supports suspension, situations where our evidence uniquely supports belief, and situations where it is metaphysically indeterminate what our evidence supports, but *no* situations where belief and suspension both fit our evidence. But this response seems unmotivated. Why not think instead that there *are* situations where belief and suspension both fit our evidence, and, as our evidential situation improves, we get metaphysical indeterminacy *before* and *after* we find ourselves in these situations? That is, why not accept something like the view depicted in the following graphic?

Suspension uniquely fits our total evidence	Suspension and belief both fit our total evidence	Belief uniquely fits our total evidence
	Metaphysical indeterminacy	Metaphysical indeterminacy

This view entails that there are counterexamples to conservatism, yet this view seems on a par with the highly plausible claim that, as we move around the perimeter of the color wheel from (say) blue to yellow, we pass through a green region, and we get indeterminacy *before* and *after* the green region—between the blue and green regions, and then again between the green and yellow regions.

In any case, even if the situations where our evidence seems to provide equal support to both belief and suspension are really situations where it is metaphysically indeterminate what our evidence supports, this doesn't help conservatism. Conservatism entails that, if you and I have exactly the same total evidence but different attitudes toward p, then it's true that at least one of us holds an attitude toward p that doesn't fit our total evidence. But if the situations where belief and suspension apparently both fit our total evidence are actually situations where it's metaphysically indeterminate what our total evidence supports, then we have situations where you and I have exactly the same total evidence but different attitudes toward p and yet it's *not true* that at least one of us holds an attitude toward p that doesn't fit our total evidence, since there's simply no fact of the matter. Conservatism entails that these situations can't exist.

Vagueness complicates things, but whatever theory of vagueness turns out correct, if we start out in a situation where suspension is the only attitude that fits our total evidence and slowly gain evidence for p until we eventually find ourselves in a situation where belief is the only attitude that fits our total evidence, it seems plausible that, somewhere along the way, we will get a counterexample to conservatism. And indeed, as the forgoing discussion of vagueness illustrates, we *will* get counterexamples somewhere along the way unless the first of the following theses is true.

> **One Sharp Cutoff (OSC)**: A single sharp but unknowable cutoff marks the transition from evidence that uniquely supports suspension to evidence that uniquely supports belief.

> **Two Sharp Cutoffs (TSC)**: One sharp but unknowable cutoff marks the transition from evidence that uniquely supports suspension to evidence that provides equal support to suspension and belief, and a second sharp but unknowable cutoff marks the transition from evidence that provides equal support to suspension and belief to evidence that uniquely supports belief.

> **No Sharp Cutoffs (NSC)**: There aren't any sharp cutoffs here at all. Thus, no sharp but unknowable cutoff marks the transition from evidence that uniquely supports suspension to evidence that uniquely supports belief, no sharp but unknowable cutoff marks the transition from evidence that uniquely supports suspension to evidence that provides equal support to suspension and belief, and so on.

But now it's important to note two things. First, it's hard to see how OSC or TSC could be true while epistemicism is false. After all, if we get sharp but unknowable cutoffs as our evidence improves, then, surely, we will get sharp but unknowable cutoffs as we get taller, older, richer,

balder, and so on, for every paradigm example of vagueness. Since epistemicism looks unavoidable for anyone who accepts OSC or TSC, and since there are counterexamples to conservatism unless OSC is true, conservatives must accept epistemicism. Second, NSC seems inconsistent with epistemicism, and, even if it's not, it clearly doesn't *entail* epistemicism. Since liberalism is consistent with both NSC and TSC, liberalism is consistent with both epistemicism and its negation. Thus, conservatism entails epistemicism while liberalism does not. So now, what should we say about epistemicism itself? If epistemicism is true, the fact that conservatism entails epistemicism is neither a strike against conservatism nor a point in its favor, since liberals can also accept epistemicism. If epistemicism is false, however, then we should reject conservatism on the basis of its relation to epistemicism, simple as that, since liberals can reject epistemicism while conservatives can't. This means that none of the considerations that favor epistemicism count against of liberalism, while all of the considerations that count against epistemicism favor liberalism. So unless epistemicism is just *obviously* true, liberalism has a clear theoretical advantage over conservatism with respect to vagueness. But of course, epistemicism *isn't* obviously true. (As Williamson himself notes (1996: xi), it strikes most philosophers as obviously *false*.) Thus, even if cases where our evidential situation improves by gradual steps aren't straightforward counterexamples to conservatism, they do give us clear reasons to favor liberalism over conservatism.

3. Arguments *for* Conservatism?

There are powerful arguments for some versions of the uniqueness thesis, and, as we noted above, conservatism resembles some versions of the uniqueness thesis. With this is mind, it's worth asking whether any argument for uniqueness supports conservatism.

In my view, the best arguments for one or another version of uniqueness come from Matheson (2011), White (2014), Dogramaci and Horowitz (2016), Schultheis (2017), and Greco and Hedden (forthcoming). [9] Matheson's argument entails that, in the coin toss scenario discussed above, you are rationally required to believe that the coin won't land heads, rationally required to believe that it won't land tails, and simultaneously rationally required to believe that it *will* land either heads or tails. [10] Since this conclusion is hard to accept, I won't discuss his argument any further. What about the arguments from White, Dogramaci, Horowitz, Schultheis, Greco, and Hedden, then? It's not entirely clear to me which view these authors are defending (Kopec and Titelbaum 2016). So far as I can tell, they are defending versions of uniqueness that conflict with the *credal* version of liberalism but needn't conflict with the doxastic version of liberalism that I have been defending. Greco and Hedden's argument for uniqueness at least *suggests* an argument against doxastic liberalism, however, so it's worth discussing their argument. According to Greco and Hedden, we should accept their preferred version of uniqueness

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[9] Feldman is standardly listed as proponent of uniqueness, but in the 2007 paper usually cited in this context, Feldman doesn't really argue for it. The closest he gets is when he says that "[t]hinking about the case of Lefty and Righty suggests that one cannot reasonably choose belief or *disbelief* in a case like this. The only reasonable option is to suspend judgment. These considerations lend support to an idea that I will call 'The Uniqueness Thesis'" (p. 205, my italics). David Christensen (2007: 211) and Stewart Cohen (2016: 434) are other epistemologists who endorse versions of uniqueness, but these authors just take their respective versions of uniqueness for granted and use them as premises in their arguments.

[10] On Matheson's view (p. 365), belief is rationally required if $\Pr(p|E)$ is higher than 0.5, disbelief is rationally required if $\Pr(p|E)$ is lower than 0.5, and suspending on p is rationally permissible only in the rare case that $\Pr(p|E)$ is exactly 0.5.

because, if their preferred version of uniqueness were *false*, it would be hard to explain why Deference, below, is true.

> **Deference**: Agents should satisfy the following conditional: If *A* judges both that *S*'s attitude toward *p* is rational and that *A* doesn't have any relevant evidence that *S* lacks, then *A* adopts *S*'s attitude toward *p*. (forthcoming: 10)

Someone might be tempted to argue that, just as we should accept Greco and Hedden's version of uniqueness because it would be hard to explain why Deference is true if their version of uniqueness were false, we should accept conservatism because it would be hard to explain why the principle below is true if conservatism were false.

> **Deference for Judgments about Evidential Fit (DJEF)**: Agents should satisfy the following conditional: If *A* judges both that *S*'s attitude toward *p* fits *S*'s total evidence and that *A* doesn't have any relevant evidence that *S* lacks, then *A* adopts *S*'s attitude toward *p*.

We should avoid this temptation, however, since DJEF is false, and when we fix it, we get a principle that liberals will have no trouble explaining.

To see why DJEF is false, simply imagine that you think my belief in *p* fits my total evidence because you think believing *p* and suspending on *p both* fit my total evidence. In this case, there needn't be anything wrong with the following combination of attitudes: you think that my belief in *p* fits my total evidence, you think that you don't have any relevant evidence that I lack, and you *suspend* on *p* instead of believing *p*. But of course, if you suspend on *p* instead of believing *p*, then you don't adopt my attitude toward *p*. So the principle that really needs explaining is this one.

> **Independence**: Agents *needn't* always satisfy the following conditional: If *A* judges both that *S*'s attitude toward *p* fits *S*'s total evidence and that *A* doesn't have any relevant evidence that *S* lacks, then *A* adopts *S*'s attitude toward *p*.

But of course, liberals won't have a harder time than conservatives explaining why *this* principle is true. So the sort of argument that Greco and Hedden give for their preferred version of uniqueness doesn't support conservatism.[11]

4. Liberalism, Epistemic Agency, and Rational Disagreement

Epistemologists have grown increasingly interested in the relationship between belief and action, and the related question how epistemic rationality compares to practical rationality. To give four recent examples, Ernest Sosa (2011) argues that beliefs are a species of performance relevantly analogous to an archer's shot, Selim Berker (2013) argues that the epistemic rationality of holding a belief does not depend on its expected long-term consequences the way that the practical rationality of an action *does* depend on its expected long-term consequences, Stewart

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[11] For what it's worth, if Deference is supposed to be about doxastic attitudes (belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment) rather than credences, I'm inclined to think that Deference is false for basically the same reason that DJEF is false—namely, that there needn't be anything wrong with the following combination of attitudes: you think belief and suspension are *both* rationally permissible responses to my total evidence, you think that you don't have any relevant evidence that I lack, and you suspend on *p* instead of believing *p*.

Cohen (2016) argues that the rational status of an action depends entirely on the balance of one's reasons for and against performing that action while the rational status of a belief does not depend entirely on the balance of one's reasons for and against holding that belief, and Susanna Rinard (2017) argues that the rationality of a belief is determined in precisely the same way as the rationality of any action.

Now, of course, when we talk about rationality, it's important to be clear what we mean. As L.J. Cohen notes in the opening paragraph of his *Blackwell Companion to Epistemology* entry on rationality, "there are at least nine types of rationality" (2010: 663). And as Plantinga (1993) and Worsnip (2015) make clear, there are more than just the nine types discussed by Cohen. On *one* common conception of rationality, a person's belief is rationally permissible just in case it's propositionally justified, and it's propositionally justified just in case it fits her total evidence (cf. Conee and Feldman 2004). On this conception of rationality, the arguments in §§1-3 suggest that a person's belief can be rationally permissible without being rationally *required*, since belief and suspension can both fit the same body of total evidence.[12] Thus, the arguments in §§1-3 suggest that beliefs resemble actions in at least the following important way: just as your practical reasons for performing an action might put you in a situation where you are rationally permitted to perform that action and simultaneously rationally permitted to perform some alternative action instead, your epistemic reasons for holding some belief (*i.e.*, your evidence for the content of that belief) might put you in a situation where you are rationally permitted to hold that belief and simultaneously rationally permitted take some alternative doxastic attitude toward the relevant proposition instead. Thus, the arguments in §§1-3 undermine at least one reason for thinking that epistemic and practical rationality are fundamentally different things (cf. S. Cohen 2016).

These arguments also support the possibility of epistemically rational belief at will. As Philip Nickel (2010) and others point out, in cases where belief and suspension are both rationally permissible, it's hard to see why you couldn't rationally believe the relevant proposition at will.[13] Kurt Sylvan (2016) denies the possibility of cases where suspension and belief are both be rationally permissible, and he argues that, because these cases are impossible, rational belief at will is impossible. But the arguments in §§1-3 undermine Sylvan's reasons for denying the possibility of cases where suspension and belief are both be rationally permissible. According to Sylvan, the following claim is literally a datum and it entails that suspension and belief are never both rationally permissible. (I quote *verbatim*.)

> (UD) It is less than fully rational to believe at t that the evidence for p is sufficient but remain agnostic on p at t. This amounts to akratic underconfidence. (p. 1684)

As the arguments in §§1-3 make clear, however, UD is either false or consistent with the possibility of cases where suspension and belief are both rationally permissible. As Sylvan acknowledges (p. 1635), it's possible to think the evidence for p is sufficient *but not conclusive*, and UD is supposed to apply just as well to cases where you think the evidence for p is sufficient but not conclusive as cases where you think the evidence for p is sufficient *and* conclusive. So

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[12] Here and throughout, I'll use sentences like 'belief and suspension both fit the same body of total evidence' and 'the evidence for p supports believing p and suspending on p equally well' as shorthand for the much more cumbersome sentence 'it is neither true that belief doesn't fit the relevant total evidence nor true that suspension doesn't fit the relevant total evidence,' which is neutral between the various theories of vagueness.

[13] See Raz 1999, Ginet 2001, Frankish 2007, and McHugh 2014 for similar arguments.

consider the difference between what we might call 'balanced cases,' where you think the evidence for *p* is sufficient *because you think it supports believing p and suspending on p equally well*, and what we might call 'belief-favoring cases,' where you either think the evidence for *p* is sufficient *because you think it supports believing p better than suspending on p*. If UD says that we get akratic underconfidence even in balanced cases, then UD isn't any *datum* at all. Instead, it's obviously false. After all, there needn't be anything akratic about suspending on *p* while thinking that the evidence supports believing *p* and suspending on *p* equally well.[14] But on the other hand, if UD just says that we get akratic underconfidence in belief-favoring cases, then UD doesn't entail that suspension and belief are never both rationally permissible. After all, that you manifest akratic underconfidence in cases where you suspend on *p* while thinking that the evidence supports believing *p* *better* than suspending on *p* doesn't even *suggest* (much less entail) that a body of total evidence can't provide equal support to belief and suspension. So the arguments in §§1-3 both support arguments like Nickel's for the possibility of rational belief at will and undermine responses to these arguments like Sylvan's.

Unsurprisingly, the arguments in §§1-3 also support views on the steadfast end of the disagreement spectrum. Assume that liberalism is true, suppose we are epistemic peers, suppose I believe *p* on the basis of *E* while you suspend with respect to *p* on the basis of *E*, suppose we have discovered our disagreement about *p*, suppose that we have exactly the same credence in *p*, and (finally!) suppose that it's neither true that your attitude toward *p* doesn't fit *E* nor true that my attitude toward *p* doesn't fit *E*. Given these assumptions, it's hard to see how we could be rationally required to conciliate, even though we're epistemic peers and we know that we disagree.[15]

Since there *isn't* any difference in our credences, we can't conciliate by splitting the difference between our credences. And since there's no doxastic attitude between belief and suspension, we can't split any difference between our attitudes either. So the suggestion that we should conciliate by splitting the difference is a non-starter. But the suggestion that we should conciliate by converging on some attitude that one of us already holds also seems implausible. We might have excellent *practical reasons* for doing this. Perhaps we're just happier when we agree. But the question here is whether *epistemic* rationality requires that we converge. And the problem is, it's hard to see why epistemic rationality would require this.

After discovering that you are suspending on *p*, I am not rationally *required* to continue believing *p*, since (by hypothesis) I wasn't rationally required to believe *p* before discovering that you are suspending on *p*, and since I clearly don't gain evidence *for p* by discovering that you are suspending on *p*. And clearly, after discovering that you are suspending on *p*, I am still rationally *forbidden* from *dis*believing *p*, since disbelieving *p* would constitute a clear overreaction to your suspension on *p*. If disbelief didn't fit my total evidence before discovering that you are

[14] There needn't be anything incoherent about suspending on *p* while thinking that the evidence supports believing *p* and suspending on *p* equally well, this combination of attitudes needn't manifest any weakness of the will, you needn't be acting against your better judgment if you suspend on *p* while thinking that the evidence supports believing *p* and suspending on *p* equally well, and so on.

[15] Of course, these suppositions aren't consistent with what we might call 'the naïve threshold view of belief,' which says that, for fixed, context-independent values of '*x*' and '*y*,' necessarily, *S* disbelieves *p* iff her credence in *p* is at least as low as *x*, she suspends judgment on *p* iff her credence in *p* is higher than *x* but lower than *y*, and she believes *p* iff her credence in *p* is at least as high as *y*. For if the naïve threshold view of belief is true, you and I can't have the same credence in *p* *and* different doxastic attitudes toward *p*. But the naïve threshold view of belief isn't particularly plausible, and, on virtually every other theory of belief (including other threshold views of belief, like PCR), you and I *can* have different doxastic attitudes toward *p* while having the same credence in *p*.

suspending on *p*, it doesn't fit my total evidence after discovering that you are suspending on *p*. Thus, after discovering that we disagree, I am either rationally required to suspend on *p* or rationally permitted to continue believing *p*. Analogous considerations apply to you. After discovering that I believe *p*, you aren't rationally required to continue suspending on *p*, and you are still rationally forbidden from *dis*believing *p*, so you are either rationally permitted to continue suspending on *p* or rationally required to believe *p*. Given the setup of the case, however, our situations seem perfectly symmetrical. The suggestion that I am rationally required to suspend on *p* seems exactly as plausible as the suggestion that you are rationally required to believe *p*. So surely, I am rationally required to suspend on *p* iff you are rationally required to believe *p*. But this means that either I am rationally required to switch from belief to suspension while you are rationally required to switch from suspension to belief, or I am rationally permitted to continue believing while you are rationally permitted to continue suspending. Either way, rationality doesn't require that we converge on the same attitude toward *p*.

If we both stick to our guns, however, we don't do anything even resembling conciliation, so conciliationists must insist that I am rationally required to start suspending on *p* while you are rationally required to start believing *p*. But then what happens when we discover this new instance of disagreement? Should we swap our attitudes again, and again, and again, until we somehow fail to discover the most recent instance of disagreement? Surely not. But why not, on the conciliationist view? And what alternative course can conciliationism coherently recommend that we follow? It's hard to imagine satisfying answers to these questions. Much more plausibly, in a case like this, we can both stick to our guns; you can continue suspending on *p*, and I can continue believing *p*. And in this case, if we have a conversation like the one in the opening paragraph of this paper, we might rationally agree to disagree. So if the arguments in §§1-3 work, steadfast views seem to get the right result in cases where our shared total evidence supports belief and suspension equally well.[16]

The upshot is that there seems a natural and largely overlooked argument for the permissive view that I am calling 'liberalism' that (if successful) establishes an interesting similarity between beliefs and actions, supports the possibility of rational belief at will, and supports views on the steadfast end of the disagreement spectrum.

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[16] Objection: As Friedman (2013b), Sylvan (2016), and Cohen (2016) point out, belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment are not the only possibilities, since it's possible to take no attitude at all toward a proposition. So, plausibly, upon discovering that we disagree, we should conciliate by riding ourselves of *every* attitude toward *p* rather than adopting some common attitude toward *p*. Reply: I'm sympathetic to the idea that we might have no attitude toward a proposition when (as Cohen emphasizes) we have never considered that proposition or (as Friedman and Sylvan emphasize) we've only considered it very briefly. But of course, this idea doesn't help conciliationists. First, since you've considered *p* long enough to suspend on *p* while I've considered it long enough to believe it, it's unclear what this objection is suggesting we do. (Kill ourselves? That would be one way to rid ourselves of every attitude toward *p*.) Second, and more important, even if it were clear what this objection is suggesting we do, it would still be hard to see how *epistemic* rationality could require that we do this thing. Perhaps, according to this objection, we should rid ourselves of every attitude toward *p* by somehow forgetting about *p*, so that, after we forget, it's as if we never considered *p* in the first place. But even if there's some sense in which we should forget about *p*, it's hard to see how we could be *epistemically* required to forget about *p*. So even if it's possible for us to take no attitude at all toward *p*, there seems no way to make this objection work.

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