A Defense of Impermissivism

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a defense of Impermissivism, which is the thesis that there is never more than one rational response to a single body of evidence.

      Permissivism is the view that there is sometimes more than one rational response to a single body of evidence. It faces a troubling arbitrariness objection. One variety of Permissivism—Standards Permissivism—does not appear to face this objection. In Chapter One, I argue that the normative structure of Standards Permissivism is under-explored: there is no good explanation for why a subject is rationally required to adhere to her standard. Without such an explanation, the view both fails to sidestep the arbitrariness objection and fails to be plausible. After reviewing the various alternatives, I argue that the only way for a Standards Permissivist to explain the requisite normative force is by adopting the "Belief Account" of standards. I then explore some upshots of my argument: in particular, my argument has the consequence that Standards Permissivism is a form of Unacknowledged Permissivism.

      Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism can be understood as an alternative to Standards Permissivism in that both are potential responses to the arbitrariness objection. In Chapter Two, I argue that we should regard Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism as the more attractive option for an arbitrariness-avoidant Permissivist. This is partly because—as I argue in Chapter One—the Standards Permissivist is already saddled with the major drawback of Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism: that there are no acknowledged permissive cases. I argue that Unacknowledged Permissivism is false by presenting a variant of the original arbitrariness objection, but as applied to an ideal agent. In order to make this argument, I argue for a certain restriction on views about higher-order evidence: in particular, higher-order evidence that your doxastic state is rational should not affect the rational status of that doxastic state.

      In Chapter Three, I argue that even with the best available account of the normative force of standards, a new sort of arbitrariness worry arises for the Standards Permissivist. In particular, this arbitrariness arises when a subject mistakenly forms a belief that is inconsistent with her standard in a permissive case. I argue that the Standards Permissivist lacks the resources to provide a satisfactory solution in such a case. The view therefore faces an arbitrariness objection of its own.

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Table of Contents

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Introduction

Permissivism is the thesis that there is more than one rational response to certain bodies of evidence. The denial of Permissivism is Uniqueness: there is never more than one rational response to any body of evidence. A case is permissive if the evidence licenses more than one rational response towards the proposition in question.

The issue of whether a case is permissive most naturally arises when people disagree. Sometimes we can explain disagreement by appeal to a difference in evidence. For instance, if I watched the weather report last night and you watched it this morning, we might both be responding properly to our evidence and yet come to different conclusions. Other times, however, we are concerned with cases in which all parties appear to have the same relevant evidence. When people disagree in such cases, we might first of all ask what the right answer is. You think that it's going to rain this afternoon and I think that it won't. One of us is right and one of us is wrong— but that is not the question that will concern us here. Rather, our concern here is with what is rational. Supposing that we have all of the same relevant evidence, could we disagree about some matter of fact—say, whether it will rain tomorrow—and both be rational? Although couching the issue in terms of disagreement makes it vivid, the issue is not solely about disagreement. Even if there is nobody around to agree or disagree, you might wonder whether there is more than one rational response open to you. As such, the answer that we give to the question of whether Permissivism is true has implications for how we ought to think about rationality more generally.

There are reasons to be sympathetic to Permissivism. The most obvious of these reasons is that it seems like reasonable people disagree with each other all the time, and in some of these cases, share the same relevant evidence. We might have judgements about particular cases in which it seems like both parties are being rational and yet come to different conclusions. Or, we might

just think that it would be strange if there were really no epistemic leeway: Uniqueness makes rationality hard to come by—perhaps even obscure and mysterious.

There have been a variety of objections to the view which I will refer to as Simple Permissivism. By "Simple Permissivism" I mean "non-Standards Permissivism," i.e., versions of Permissivism that do not posit any further factor beyond the evidence, such as standards, upon which one's doxastic response depends. This is the view that there are some cases in which the evidence alone licenses more than one doxastic attitude towards some proposition *p*. The most notable objection to this view is Roger White's belief-inducing pill argument.

White's argument goes as follows. Suppose that you are in a known permissive case. You have the option either to look at evidence relevant to whether *p*, or to take a randomly selected belief-inducing pill that will give you a belief concerning whether *p*. You know that selecting a pill has only a fifty percent change of yielding a true belief. After having formed a belief in this way, you should judge that your belief is just as likely to be false as it is to be true. You should therefore give up the belief and suspend judgement instead. But the same problem presents if you decide to look at the evidence. Since you know the case is permissive, there is no reason to expect that considering the evidence will more reliably lead you to form a true belief than would selecting a pill at random. This is because the case is permissive: it is compatible with the evidence that you rationally believe *p*, and it is compatible with the evidence that you rationally believe not-*p*. Suppose that you find yourself being drawn one way or the other by the evidence. You know that even if you are perfectly rational, the chance of being drawn to the true belief is no better than if you had randomly selected a pill. You should therefore give up any belief formed by looking at the evidence, and suspend judgement instead. So Permissivism is false.

In response to this objection, the Permissivist position has evolved: Standards Permissivism appears to offer a solution to this problem. Some Permissivists posit epistemic standards to bypass White's objection while others posit epistemic standards for other reasons. The thought is that because different people might have different epistemic standards, we can appeal to a difference in epistemic standard to explain away the arbitrariness. There is a principled reason why you ought to believe *p* whereas I ought to believe not-*p*: you and I have different standards, and our standards give different results concerning what to believe. It is therefore not open to you to believe *p* and not open to me to believe not-*p*.

Despite the popularity of Standards Permissivism—which includes views like Subjective Bayesianism, Accuracy First, and Jamesian Value inspired views—there is no explanation of the most crucial feature of the view. Namely, how the epistemic standard manages to exercise normative force over the standard bearer. In Chapter One, I provide such an explanation. I begin by arguing that certain theories of standard-possession, and in particular, the dispositional account, fail to explain the normatively binding nature of standards. After reviewing the various alternatives, I argue that the best—and perhaps only—way for a Standards Permissivist to explain the requisite normative force is by adopting the Belief Account of standards. This is an account on which standards are beliefs or sufficiently belief-like in nature. I then explain some upshots of my argument. In particular, my argument has the consequence that Standards Permissivism is a form of Unacknowledged Permissivism. This is a significant result, because it challenges one major reason for preferring Standards Permissivism over Unacknowledged Permissivism: that the former seems to allow for acknowledged permissive cases. Part of the appeal of Permissivism is its ability to explain our intuitive judgements of cases that seem to be permissive. However, if Standards

Permissivism is a form of Unacknowledged Permissivism, then its ability to do this is far less satisfying.

Unacknowledged Permissivism is the thesis that there are permissive cases, but these cases are never rationally believed to be permissive. According to the Unacknowledged Permissivist, you cannot acknowledge that you are in a permissive case. In Chapter Two, I explain that Standards Permissivism and Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism can be understood as alternatives to one another when it comes to avoiding White's arbitrariness objection. I argue that insofar as one's motivation for being a Standards Permissivist is for reasons of arbitrariness-avoidance, one ought to instead be an Unacknowledged Simple Permissivist. The reason for this is twofold. First, Standards Permissivism faces a multitude of problems. Second, as I argue in Chapter One, Standards Permissivists are already committed to a form of Unacknowledged Permissivism. Being an Unacknowledged Simple Permissivist is therefore the superior option: it has no additional cost—since the Standards Permissivist has to be an Unacknowledged Permissivist anyway—and has the benefit of avoiding the issues faced when trying to reconcile the normative force of standards. I then argue that White's belief-inducing pill argument can be extended to encompass unacknowledged permissive cases, and that as a result, Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism is false. In order to make this argument, I argue for a restriction on higher-order evidence: getting evidence that your doxastic state is rational does not warrant a change in that doxastic state.

In Chapter Three, I argue that even if a Standards Permissivist likes the account of normative force provided in Chapter One, she will nonetheless face a new manifestation of the arbitrariness worry. In particular, this arbitrariness arises when a subject mistakenly forms a belief that is inconsistent with her standard in a permissive case. The Standards Permissivist ought to be able to say something about what you should do in such a case. Moreover, the Standards

Permissivist really ought to be able to explain why you should not modify your standard, but should instead correct the mistakenly formed belief. I argue that the Standards Permissivist not only lacks the resources to explain why you should not modify your standard in these cases, but that she is also unable to provide any satisfactory solution whatsoever.

One upshot of this dissertation is that the most popular version of Permissivism is saddled with hitherto unacknowledged commitments and problems that result from those commitments. Perhaps the most viable version of Permissivism is Unacknowledged Standards Permissivism, but this view will come with the arbitrariness that I point out in Chapter Three. It will also come with the commitments involved in explaining the normative force of standards. These are commitments to certain controversial views about non-evidentially justified beliefs and the primacy of coherence with one's own perspective. It isn't clear what is appealing about such a view: it appears to have strayed rather far from capturing the original intuitions that motivated it.

Chapter 1: Standards Permissivism and Normative Force

Abstract: Standards Permissivism is a version of Permissivism according to which what it is rational for a subject to believe is determined by her evidence and her epistemic standard. However, the normative structure of Standards Permissivism is underexplored. After reviewing the various alternatives, I argue that the best—and perhaps only—way for a Standards Permissivist to explain the requisite normative force is by adopting the Belief Account of standards. I then explain how this account manages to secure normative force. I also explain some upshots of my argument. In particular, my argument has the consequence that Standards Permissivism is a form of Unacknowledged Permissivism.

1   Introduction

Suppose that there are two subjects, A and B. They disagree with respect to whether *p*: A believes that *p* whereas B believes that not-*p*. Moreover, A and B have all of the same relevant evidence. Knowing this might lead us to form the judgment that at least one of them is not being fully rational. If we think that rationality requires that one base one's beliefs on the evidence, then it seems reasonable to suppose that fixing the evidence will also fix the rational response. This position is known as Uniqueness, which is the thesis that for any set of total evidence, there is a unique rational response.[1] Permissivism, on the other hand, denies this.[2] It is the view that there is more than one rational response to a single body of evidence.[3] According to Permissivism, it is possible that both A and B are fully rational, despite their disagreement in the face of their shared evidence.

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[1] For arguments in favor of Uniqueness, see White (2005, 2013), Christenson (2007), Feldman (2010), Jung (2015), Dogramaci and Horowitz (2016), Greco and Hedden (2016), Schultheis (2017), Horowitz (2019) and Stapleford (2018).

[2] For arguments in favor of Permissivism, see Rosen (2001), Douven (2009), Ballantyne and Coffman (2011), Brueckner and Bundy (2012), Kelly (2013), Meacham (2013, 2018), Schoenfield (2012, 2018), Kopec (2015), Podgorski (2015), Simpson (2016), Thorstad (2018), Jackson (2019), Titelbaum and Kopec (2019), Ye (2019) and Weisberg (2020).

[3] The Permissivist need not think that this is true of every body of evidence; she need only think that some body of evidence licenses more than one rational response.

Although Permissivism has pre-theoretical appeal to many, it must answer to several troubling objections. The most notable one is the arbitrariness worry.[4] In brief, the Permissivist's insistence that a body of evidence can license more than one rational response gives rise to the following result. Suppose that a subject knows that she is in a permissive case: it is rational for her to believe p, and it is rational for her to believe not-p. In such a case, were she to hold the belief that p (or the belief that not-p), the belief would be held arbitrarily. Because we have stipulated that she knows that both options are rational, there is no epistemic reason to ultimately favor belief that p (or belief that not-p).[5] Because there is no epistemic reason to ultimately favor one belief over the other, the holding of one belief over the other cannot be justified on epistemic grounds. If there is nothing that ultimately tells in favor of p over not-p, or vice-versa, then it appears that she would be unjustified in holding either belief. Roger White (2005) makes this intuition compelling by arguing that, in a known permissive case, the evidence is no better a guide to the truth than picking a belief at random. If, as the Permissivist claims, the evidence supports p and also supports not-p, then we should not expect the evidence to reliably guide us to the truth. But there is something epistemically defective about maintaining one's belief that p while also acknowledging that not-p has just as good of a chance of being true. It would therefore seem that the uniquely rational response in this case is to suspend judgement. In order for the Permissivist to avoid this objection, she must resist the charge of arbitrariness. She must provide some explanation as to why the choice is not arbitrary: she must explain why we ought to have one belief over the other.

Standards Permissivism is a version of Permissivism that, among other things, provides such an explanation. It therefore promises to avoid the arbitrariness objection. The view posits that

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[4] See White (2005).

[5] The thought is that there is no all-things-considered epistemic reason to believe p rather than not-p. Individual pieces of evidence might point in different directions, but the body of evidence as a whole will not ultimately favor one belief over the other.

each subject has an epistemic standard, and that what it is rational for each subject to believe is partially dependent upon this standard. Despite its theoretical virtues, little has been said about the finer details of how such a view would work. The epistemic standard is supposed to perform a certain epistemological function: bind the subject to a single doxastic response to the evidence. This is the mechanism by which the view manages to avoid the charge of arbitrariness. It also doubles as an explanation for why Permissivism is true: to the extent that there is nothing beyond the evidence upon which rational doxastic responses depend, it is hard to see what could make it the case that the evidence rationalizes *p* and also rationalizes not-*p*. Positing epistemic standards provides an answer to this question.

2   Standards Permissivism

2.1   Standards Permissivism Generalized

There are a variety of ways to think about epistemic standards. I will adopt the model proposed by Miriam Schoenfield (2013). Schoenfield's definition of a standard is a "function from bodies of evidence to doxastic states that the subject takes to be truth-conducive." Schoenfield's thought is that to the extent that one subject takes a certain such function to be truth-conducive but another subject takes a different such function to be truth-conducive, different doxastic responses are rationally warranted. This explains the possibility of rational disagreement given the same body of evidence.

Other views can be rightly understood as versions of Standards Permissivism. One such view is Tom Kelly's (2013) view according to which assigning different weights to cognitive goals accounts for the truth of Permissivism. On such a view, a subject's standard—though Kelly doesn't use this terminology—is her goal-weighting. One person might assign higher value to avoiding error while another might assign higher value to getting at the truth. The thought is that this would

allow for permissive cases in certain cases of borderline evidence—evidence that for a more epistemically risk-seeking person would warrant belief, but that for a more epistemically conservative person would warrant suspension of judgement. Another view that can be understood as a version of Standards Permissivism is Subjective Bayesianism. According to Subjective Bayesianism, each subject has a prior probability function. This is a function that assigns likelihoods to every proposition in light of every possible body of evidence. According to Subjective Bayesianism, many different priors are permissible, and to be rational is to have an acceptable prior and then conditionalize on one's evidence in light of the prior. If two subjects have the same evidence but begin with different priors, then at least in some cases, conditionalization on their priors will produce different results. Yet, both will be rational.

All of these views—and any view with the same general structure—face the same explanatory challenge. Namely, in order for any of the views to achieve their purported aim, there needs to be an explanation for why a subject is normatively bound to her standard. I argue here that the requisite normative force can be adequately explained only on a particular way of understanding the Standards picture—namely, on the Belief Account. To the extent that a Standards Permissivist view can be redescribed using Schoenfield's framework, it can also be understood as a version of the Belief Account. This is because Schoenfield's framework can be made to fit the Belief Account. And, to the extent that it can be understood in this way, I think there is an explanatory route available. If, as I argue later, a standards view cannot be redescribed as a version of the Belief Account, then the prospects of a defensible claim to normative force are rather dim.

According to Standards Permissivism, two people with the very same evidence can rationally differ as to whether *p*, provided that they have different epistemic standards. On

Schoenfield's picture, an epistemic standard is a function from bodies of evidence to doxastic states. To have a standard is to take that standard to be truth-conducive. The most crucial feature of the Standards picture is that one is rationally required to adhere to one's own standard. To believe in accordance with one's standard is to adopt the doxastic state that one's standard maps one's total evidence to. For instance, if my standard maps total evidence e to doxastic state d, then if I have total evidence $e,$ I am then rationally required to adopt d.

Not all standards are good standards, however. Various features might make a standard good or bad, and it is an open question as to what these features are. Internally inconsistent standards are strong candidates for bad standards. Such standards would make conflicting recommendations. For instance, a standard like this might say both, "the maximally truth-conducive response to evidence e is to believe p" and "the maximally truth-conducive response to evidence e is to believe not-p." Suppose that I have such a standard: am I rationally required to conform my doxastic state to my standard? It seems that the answer is no. Following this standard would produce incoherent beliefs. Other features also seem to make a standard bad. For instance, a standard that recommends that the subject switch to some other standard is bad. We might also think that there are more substantive requirements on what counts as a good standard. For instance, perhaps there is something wrong with having a standard that projects grue-like predicates.

The Standards Permissivist need not tolerate every standard. That is, she need not maintain that adherence to any standard whatsoever satisfies the requirement in question. Standards Permissivism can accept certain objective constraints on standards. Indeed, it must do so in order to avoid permitting obvious cases of irrationality. Although Standards Permissivists might disagree about which objective constraints good standards must meet, it is generally thought that they must

minimally be immodest and coherent.[6] There may be some flexibility when it comes to further

constraints, and it is an open question as to the extent and nature of these constraints.[7] For instance,

some Standards Permissivists might insist that any coherent standard is good, whereas others might

want to rule out grue-projecting or counter-inductive standards.[8] Regardless of what they take the

particular constraints to be, Standards Permissivists will agree that being rational requires, perhaps

among other things, both having a good standard and believing in accordance with that standard.

A principal merit of the view is that it is a version of Permissivism that avoids White's

arbitrariness objection. Permissivists are ordinarily left with the problematic consequences of

supposing that what it is rational to believe is fixed by the evidence, and that the very same

evidence could make it rational to hold one of several doxastic attitudes. Standards Permissivism

seeks to avoid the problem by positing that what it is rational to believe is fixed by the evidence

and the epistemic standard. Once we fix the evidence and the epistemic standard, there is a unique

rational response. As a result, the familiar sort of arbitrariness does not arise.

Differences in epistemic standards therefore explain the possibility of rational difference

between two subjects with the same evidence. In order to see how this works, consider A who has

standard *a* and B who has standard *b*. Both *a* and *b* are good standards. Both A and B have identical

evidence, *e*. Because of each subject's respective standard, it is uniquely rational for A to believe

p and it is uniquely rational for B to believe not-*p*.

2.2   Breaching the Standard

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[6]For a standard to be immodest is for it to regard itself as the maximally truth-conducive standard. See Lewis (1971) for a discussion of immodesty.

[7]Some might think that the Standards Permissivist will run into trouble from endorsing certain kinds of objective constraints. See Horowitz (2013) for an argument against moderate Permissivism.

[8] See Meacham (2013) for related discussion and a defense of moderate permissive Bayesianism.

On the standards picture, conformity to one's standard—provided that it is an acceptable standard—is a requirement of rationality. As such, failure to adhere to one's standard constitutes a mistake. If I fail to adopt the doxastic state that my standard maps my total evidence to, then I have made a rational error. To see what I have in mind, consider the following. My standard, S, maps total evidence e to doxastic state d. Doxastic state d includes belief that p. I have evidence e, but I mistakenly adopt doxastic state d', which is exactly like d except that instead of including belief that p, it includes belief that not-p. So, instead of believing p, I mistakenly believe not-p. This constitutes a failure to conform to my standard: as such, it is a rational failure on the Standards Permissivist view.

3   The Epistemic Standards Picture

3.1   Belief Account vs. Dispositional Account

To review: a standard is a function from bodies of evidence to doxastic states. To have a standard is to take it to be truth-conducive. There is more than one way to spell out what it is to take a standard to be truth-conducive. The two readings of this condition that have been considered in the literature are known as the belief account and the dispositional account.[9] As such, these are theories of standard possession, since they provide answers to the question of what it takes for a subject to have a particular standard. According to the belief account, having a standard is a matter of believing that it is truth-conducive. According to the dispositional account, having a standard is a matter of being disposed to conform one's doxastic state to the deliverances of that standard.

I claim that the Standards Permissivist should adopt of the belief account of standards. It is not at all obvious how we are to explain the normative force of standards on the dispositional

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[9]See Li (2019).

account. In contrast, a thorough examination of the structure of the normative requirements that standards must impose reveals that the belief-account has the capacity to explain this normative force. I explain what I take to be the best way of understanding how such an account would go.

3.2   Problems for a Dispositional Account

There are a variety of problems for a dispositional account of standards. There is first of all the issue of how we are to pick out an agent's standard qua disposition. Since ordinary agents won't conform perfectly to their own standard—because ordinary agents make mistakes—the disposition in question cannot be a summary of an agent's actual belief-forming behavior. If it were merely a summary, the Standards Permissivist would have to think either that 1) any standard can be normatively binding, and moreover agents always conform perfectly to their standards, or 2) almost nobody has an acceptable standard. The Standards Permissivist doesn't want to say either of these things. Moreover, even if an agent's dispositions come apart from and fare better than her actual belief forming behavior, those dispositions are likely still far from ideal. We must therefore regard an agent's epistemic standard as some sort of idealized disposition.

Han Li (2019) discusses idealized dispositions at length. In particular, Li points out that justifying certain ways of characterizing idealized dispositions over others is nontrivial. Li also raises the question of why we should regard a subject S's idealized disposition (and thus S's standard) as D rather than some nearby disposition, D'.

If both D and D' are non-identical acceptable standards, then there will be some cases in which they produce different results concerning what to believe. It is therefore nontrivial which of these standards S has, since they impose different rational requirements. But since both are idealizations of S's belief-forming dispositions, it isn't obvious in virtue of what D rather than D'

is S's standard. This is especially true when we get down to very fine-grained differences: imagine that D and D' differ concerning only one evidence and proposition pair.

Moreover, Li points out that the Standards Permissivist who conceives of standards as idealized dispositions will run into trouble when it comes to attributing bad standards to some people. The problem is that everyone's actual belief-forming behavior will be suboptimal, whereas any idealization will be optimal (in the sense of being a good standard). It isn't clear what someone who likes the idealization solution should say about what it is to have a bad standard. If one's standard is determined by some idealization of one's belief-forming behavior, then it seems like we are stuck attributing good standards to everyone. But this isn't what the Standards Permissivist wants to say.

Although these are legitimate issues, and further reasons to be skeptical of the dispositional account, they are not my concern here. Let us grant for the sake of argument that there is a principled answer to the question of which dispositionally-determined standard an agent has and that this answer aligns with our intuitive judgments. Why should we think that such an account could explain the normative force of standards?

3.3   Dispositions and Normative Force

I will explain and expand on an argument that Han Li makes against the possibility of dispositions providing normative force. Han Li argues that, however we construe it, a dispositional account will fail to satisfy the normative criterion. Consider the following case:

> Assume, as is plausible, that there is more than one ideal set of tennis dispositions, as there is more than one ideal tennis ''playstyle''. If this is true, then there is a natural way to advise a tennis player. We look at which playstyle a player possesses—which involves looking at a player's tennis dispositions, and figuring out which idealized playstyle her dispositions are ''closest'' to. We will call this her playstyle. And then we say ''perfect your playstyle''. If she successfully does this, we would think that she is playing perfect

tennis. Imagine a player who almost perfects her playstyle. But suppose that, for whatever reason, she does not completely embrace it. Instead, every leap day she behaves as if she was perfectly embracing a different playstyle. This may be extremely difficult, since it involves changing her style of play in very small set of cases. But suppose that, against the odds, she is successful at perfectly adopting a different playstyle for 1 day every 4 years. (Li, 2019)

Li notes that there may be practical costs to doing this—it is surely more difficult to perfect two playstyles rather than just one. But to the extent that a tennis player does it, it doesn't seem like we have any grounds upon which to criticize her tennis playing. To make the analogy with the epistemic case abundantly clear, consider the following.

Alice has a disposition—indeed, an ideal disposition—to form beliefs in accordance with standard A. Standard A is therefore her standard, and it is a rational standard. To the extent that she perfectly adheres to standard A, she is epistemically ideal. Standard B is also a rational standard—it is just as good as standard A. But standard B is not *Alice's* standard. This is because she is not disposed to form beliefs in accordance with standard B. Suppose that, every so often, she forms beliefs in accordance with standard B anyway. Is there anything wrong with that?

The Standards Permissivist who likes the dispositional account is committed to thinking that there is something wrong with it, and that the problem is explained by the fact that Alice is not disposed to follow standard B. My claim is slightly different than Li's: whether or not there is something wrong with this, the problem cannot be explained by Alice's having one disposition as opposed to another.

Perhaps there is something wrong with it. The case as I've written it is underspecified. Does Alice's entire doxastic state change every so often, with everything flipping back and forth between consistency with standard A and consistency with standard B? Or, does Alice keep everything the same except go forward differently? This is where there is a disanalogy with tennis: in Li's example, the tennis player is judged only on the basis of new moves that she makes. That

is, on the leap day, we judge the tennis player only by the tennis-playing she does that day. But in the epistemic case, there is an additional complication. There is not only the belief-formation that Alice does that day, but also the doxastic residue, so to speak, of beliefs formed on other days. And a judgement of one's doxastic state is a product of both of these factors. Let's consider the two possibilities in turn.

First is the issue of what we should say about a case in which Alice keeps her doxastic state the same but forms any new beliefs in accordance with standard B. We have stipulated that although she forms new beliefs in accordance with standard B, she still nonetheless has standard A. She is disposed to conform to standard A—she just doesn't do it. She conforms to standard B instead. It might be that doing this would result in incoherent beliefs—indeed, it seems likely. But the problem with this is the incoherence, not the fact that she forms beliefs against her disposition.

To see this, suppose that Alice, while she still has standard A and standard-A-coherent-beliefs, starts forming beliefs in accordance with standard B. She now has beliefs that are incoherent with her existent beliefs. All of a sudden, her disposition changes: now she actually does have standard B. The rational thing to do now, according to the Standards Permissivist, is to form beliefs in accordance with standard B. She still has her standard-A-coherent-beliefs, however. As such, she is equally incoherent at the moment just before and just after her disposition, and thus her standard, changes. It is hard to make sense of there being something extra that is wrong in the moment just before, but not in the moment just after, the switching of her disposition. The thought is that the amount of incoherence in her doxastic the same is exactly the same. The only difference is that the facts about her disposition have changed. It is hard to see why, in this case, this would make any epistemically relevant difference.

Next, let's consider what we ought to say about a case in which the entirety of her doxastic state switches back and forth between being A-standard-compliant and B-standard-compliant. Note that, all the while, she has standard A. In this case, I think we should agree that there is nothing epistemically wrong with her at any given point in time—even when she is disposed to have standard A but has an entire doxastic state consistent with standard B. If we look at any single time-slice, we will be unable to locate a problem. Perhaps we will take issue with the diachronic incoherence. But, once again, the issue here is not explained by anything having to do with her dispositions. The problem is that she keeps switching from one thing to another.

3.4   More on Dispositions

Consider the following case. Suppose that I have a lot of money to give away, and I have two equally worthy charities in mind, A and B. I am disposed to give money to charity A. Nonetheless, it seems that it would be permissible for me to give the money to charity B instead. In this case, it is clear that a disposition to φ does not ground a requirement to φ. Suppose further that someone offers me a pill that will hereafter make me disposed to give money to charity B. It seems that it would be permissible for me to accept the pill. In this case, a disposition to φ grounds neither a requirement to φ nor a requirement to remain disposed to φ. It seems that the case of standards is relevantly similar to this case.

3.5   Varieties of Standards Permissivism

Before I explain my account of the normative force of standards, I will consider several different versions of Standards Permissivism and highlight the challenges they face with respect to

normativity. I argue that such accounts only succeed to the extent that we can reframe them as versions of the Belief Account.

3.5.1   Jamesian Values

Tom Kelly proposes differently weighted cognitive goals as an explanation for why one body of evidence might make it uniquely rational for me to have one doxastic attitude towards p and uniquely rational for you to have a different doxastic attitude towards p. Perhaps there are other cognitive goals with similar trade-offs, but the example Kelly gives is of assigning different relative weights to the cognitive goals of 1) not believing what's false and 2) believing what's true. Kelly's thought is as follows. Someone with more concern for avoiding false belief is rational to have a higher evidential threshold for belief, whereas someone with more concern for believing the truth is rational to have a lower evidential threshold for belief. If someone assigns high value to avoiding belief in falsehoods, it might be rational for her to suspend judgment in certain borderline cases in which, say, the evidence supports p to degree D. In that very same case—i.e., a borderline case in which the evidence supports p to degree D—a person with more concern for believing the truth than for avoiding falsehoods might rationally believe p. Kelly points out that even if we use a gradational framework like credences, a similar point will hold.[10] For instance, two agents might differ with respect to the relative values they assign to the goal of minimizing inaccuracy versus lowering the variance in inaccuracy.

Why would having a particular weighting of cognitive goals make it uniquely rational for you to have one doxastic state as opposed to another? In order for this to work, a goal-weighting must exercise normative force over the subject. Having a certain goal-weighting must make it

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[10] Kelly credits Rachiele (unpublished) with this point.

rationally required to adopt doxastic states consistent with that goal-weighting. But that is not all that it has to do: it must also rationally preclude switching goals. Suppose that nothing stops you from changing your goal-weighting. You are free to (non-irrationally) change your mind at any point.[11] It's just that you'll also need to revise your doxastic state to accord with your new goal-weighting. In this case, it would be merely a wide-scope requirement: be such that your goal-weighting and doxastic state cohere. Perhaps Kelly would be satisfied with a wide-scope requirement. However, I argue below that such a view cannot manage to secure even a wide-scope coherence requirement.

There is a puzzle here: why must your doxastic state cohere with a goal that you have? It doesn't seem like there's anything about the nature of a goal—even a cognitive goal—that would make it irrational for you to hold this goal and yet have a doxastic state that fails to achieve—or even aim at achieving—the goal. Take the following case. Suppose I have the cognitive goal of believing as many falsehoods as possible. This goal doesn't exercise normative force over me: I would be epistemically better off to systematically fail to meet my goal. Perhaps only certain goal-weightings are acceptable, and to the extent that we have one of the acceptable ones we are normatively bound to it. Let's grant this. It is still puzzling why such a goal—even a good goal, epistemically speaking—should exercise any normative force over us.

Suppose that I assign higher value to believing the truth and have the corresponding goal-weighting. However, for some reason, I systematically fail to meet this goal. I am always cautious—requiring more evidence rather than less to form beliefs—but permissibly so. Were I to have the opposite (yet still acceptable) goal-weighting, I would be epistemically flawless. But because I have the goal-weighting that I do, I am epistemically irrational. Let's even suppose that

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[11] I say "non-irrationally" to remain neutral between a rational and arational change.

I am perfectly aware of what's going on—I don't falsely believe that I am achieving my goal while unbeknownst to me I am systematically failing. I am well aware of my systematic failure, but I don't seem to be able to control it. I wish that I were otherwise—perhaps I even attempt to change—but nothing seems to work. I still form beliefs cautiously. It seems like there is some kind of internal conflict going on here, but it is difficult for me to see why this would make me epistemically flawed. Perhaps I am practically flawed insofar as I have a goal and cannot manage to achieve it. But it isn't obvious to me why having a goal should affect what it is rational for me to believe.

Suppose further that I accept that I am irrational and want to remedy my irrationality. Since I cannot manage to change my doxastic behavior, I decide instead to change my goal. It seems strange to think that revising my goal—not because I especially like the new goal, but because I want to count as rational—would solve the problem. It seems that doing this would go against the spirit of the view. I change my goal only in pursuit of a further goal—to be rational.

Consider a moral analogue. Suppose that I want to do good and two options are equally morally worthy: volunteering at the homeless shelter and delivering meals to the elderly. I have a goal of delivering meals to the elderly. However, I have a pathological fear of driving, so despite my best efforts, I never manage to achieve this goal. Instead, I always go to the homeless shelter, which I can reach on foot. Though I may be practically flawed, there doesn't appear to be anything morally problematic about this case.

3.5.2 Subjective Bayesianism

Another view which can be understood as a species of Standards Permissivism is Subjective Bayesianism. According to Subjective Bayesianism, each subject has a prior. Moreover, any

coherent prior is permissible. Though there is disagreement as to what the requisite coherence amounts to, it is generally accepted that there are many permissible priors. Provided that her prior is acceptable, a subject is rational to the extent that she adopts the doxastic state determined by her evidence and her prior. This explains why two subjects with different priors may rationally hold different credences in *p* given the same evidence. It is uniquely rational, say, for me to have credence 0.5 in *p* but uniquely rational for you to have credence 0.55 in *p*. Or, alternatively, there may be cases in which *e* is evidence for *h* for me, but evidence for *not-h* for you. In either case, this is because our shared evidence produces a different answer in combination with my prior than it does in combination with your prior.

Let's consider the question of why you must conform to the deliverances of your prior while I must conform to the deliverances of mine. On the Subjective Bayesian picture, the prior manages to exercise normative force over the subject. If it didn't, then it would be permissible for me to have otherwise acceptable credences—that is, credences consistent with some other good prior—that failed to align with my prior.

One view about what it is to have a prior is that one's prior is one's disposition to form a credence on the basis of evidence. I argue above against a dispositional theory of standard possession, and I take my arguments to be applicable here as well. Dispositions aren't the sort of thing that could normatively bind one to a prior or to any sort of epistemic standard.

The Subjective Bayesian can adopt a belief-account of priors: to have a prior is to believe that a certain probability function is the right description of the world. To the extent that having a prior amounts to believing that certain doxastic responses are truth-conducive, then everything I say later on about the belief-account of Standards Permissivism applies also to the Subjective Bayesian. That is, the Subjective Bayesian can employ the same account of normative force that I

offer here. I think that this point holds generally: to the extent that something in the vicinity of an epistemic standard can be construed as belief-like, there is an answer available as to how that standard might exercise normative force.

3.6   Normative Force

The Standards Permissivist must be able to explain the normatively binding nature of epistemic standards. The view is mysterious and implausible without such an explanation. It is therefore a considerable draw of the belief account that it can provide this. But to the extent that the candidate standard is irreducibly a disposition, preference, goal, value, or weighting of values, I don't think that this account—or any account, for that matter—is available.

In this section, I offer an account of the normative force of standards. The account relies crucially on standards being belief-like in nature, and details what I take to be the best available explanation for the normative force of standards. It is intended to be well-received by the Standards Permissivist.

Epistemic standards are meant to explain how the following two positions—which seem to be in tension with one another—can nonetheless both be true:

A) at any given time, each subject has a single rational response to any given body of evidence

B) for some bodies of evidence, there is more than one rational response that it's possible for a subject to have

The epistemic standards view requires that every rational subject have a standard. Since standards are functions from bodies of evidence to doxastic states, each standard picks out one doxastic response for each body of evidence. The rational response for a subject is the doxastic state picked

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out by her standard given her evidence. The result is that each subject has only a single rational response to any particular body of evidence. Since it is a presupposition of the view that there are multiple good standards, subjects may rationally differ even if they are faced with the same evidence.

This sounds pretty good, but in order for this story to make sense, more has to be said. There needs to be an explanation for why a subject is rationally required to follow her standard. After all, if each subject had a standard but there was no particular requirement to conform to it, then the explanation would fail. The question, then, is how possession of a standard manages to restrict the permissible doxastic responses to a single option. It seems to require that the standard exert normative force over the subject. How this might happen is an issue which has not been extensively discussed in the literature. The aim of this section is to explain what I take to be the best available response on behalf of the Standards Permissivist to the question of why it is that a subject is rationally required to follow her standard.

In order for a subject to be meaningfully bound by her standard, it must be that a subject is rationally required to do two things. First, she must be required to (1) conform her doxastic state to the deliverances of her standard. This means that if she has standard S, and standard S maps evidence e to doxastic state d, then if she has evidence e, she is rationally required to have d. Second, she must be rationally required to (2) maintain her current standard rather than switch to some other good standard. If we can explain requirements (1) and (2), then we can explain the normative force of the standard.

I think that the belief account provides us with an explanation for these requirements. Recall that on the belief account, what it is to have a standard S is to believe that S is maximally truth-conducive. Here is how the explanation goes. In virtue of a subject's having a standard,

certain requirements are generated. This is because to have a standard is to believe that it is maximally truth conducive. Believing that the standard is maximally truth-conducive is what generates the rational requirements in question. It is generally true that other things being equal, a subject is rationally prohibited from believing anything that fails to cohere with her current beliefs. Failure to abide by (1) or (2) would be incoherent with believing that *S* is maximally truth conducive. Failing to uphold condition (1) or (2) would therefore violate this general principle. Since the subject currently believes that standard *S* is maximally truth-conducive, she is rationally required to both (1) conform her doxastic state to the deliverances of her standard and (2) maintain her current standard. In what follows, I will unpack this explanation further.

It might seem strange to think that something as innocuous as belief could generate such demanding rational requirements. After all, it would be these beliefs that determine—in combination with the evidence—what it is rational for a subject to believe. Moreover, we might wonder about the fact that generally speaking, beliefs should be based on the evidence. In the case of this explanation, that order of priority does not apply. This is because the epistemic standard must be something whose rational status does not depend on the evidence. The role that it plays crucially depends on its ability to vary independently of the evidence. The standard, then, is prior to the evidence in some sense. Because the belief account posits that to have a standard is to believe that it is maximally truth conducive, the rational status of the belief that *standard* S *is maximally truth conducive* does not depend on the evidence. So, in order for this explanation of the normative force of standards to make sense, beliefs must be able to simultaneously (1) be such that their rational status does not depend on the evidence and (2) partially determine the rational status of other doxastic items.

Belief is arguably able to satisfy these conditions. It is comprehensible that there could be beliefs that provide justification for others either without themselves being justified, or without having their justification from an evidential source. One version of the first view is Crispin Wright's notion of entitlement.[12] Another is Fred Dretske's conception of epistemic rights.[13] A version of the second is Gilbert Harman on belief revision.[14] The rational status of the requisite sort of belief would be free from dependence on evidence, but, crucially, such beliefs would still be capable of exerting their own rational pressure. Assuming, then, that beliefs can—at least arguably—be the sort of things that can exert rational pressure without themselves being justified evidentially, let us see how the rest of the explanation goes.

Beliefs can exert rational pressure because they are bolstered by two general rational requirements. These are the requirement to be coherent and the requirement to use one's current perspective. It might sound strange to say that there is a requirement to use one's current perspective. I have in mind something like *believe in a way that seems right from your current perspective* or, alternatively, *use the things that you now believe as premises in your reasoning*. The purpose of this requirement is to rationally prohibit altering one's beliefs in a way that—by

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[12] Although Wright specifically avoids claiming that the supposed entitlements are to beliefs—and instead works with a notion of "trustings" or "acceptances,"—this is a view according to which we have some epistemic entitlement to trust or accept certain propositions even though we have no evidential—or, for that matter, any other sort—of warrant stemming from any other type of reasoning or "cognitive achievement." See Wright (2004) and Wright (2014).

[13] Dretske focuses on perceptual beliefs, claiming that because we cannot help but believe that things are as they perceptually seem to us, we have an epistemic right or entitlement to those beliefs. False perceptual beliefs that a responsible reasoner could have avoided do not count among the entitlements. Perhaps one could make the case that certain non-perceptual beliefs (i.e. standards) meet these conditions. See Dretske (2000).

[14] Harman argues that, in the absence of special reason not to, we are justified in continuing to hold the beliefs we now hold. Harman's view has implications for the following sort of case. Consider a subject who comes to believe *p* exclusively on the basis of some (unbeknownst to her) false information, *i*. Later, upon learning that *i* is false, the subject fails to correct her apparently unjustified belief that *p*. According to Harman, because people do not—and indeed, should not—keep track of their justifications for each belief, there will be cases like this in which the subject is nonetheless justified in retaining the belief that *p*, since she may not remember what the belief was based on. On such a picture, we can be justified in holding a belief despite the fact that we fail to have any evidence in support of it. See Harman (1986) and Harman (2001).

one's current lights—seems wrong. Together, these two requirements generate the requirement to believe in a way consistent with one's current perspective.[15]

Finally, here is how normative force arises in the case of standards. To believe against one's standard would put one in an incoherent state.[16] Because there is a rational requirement to be coherent, there is a rational requirement that one's beliefs and one's standards match. It would therefore be incoherent to maintain a standard and yet fail to believe in accordance with it. However, this is a wide-scope requirement. The requirement to be coherent would therefore not suffice to bind one to one's standard. This is because one could satisfy the requirement with any coherent set of standards and doxastic states. But, because there is a rational requirement to use one's current perspective, it is not a viable option to satisfy the wide-scope coherence requirement by entering into a coherent state not sanctioned by one's current perspective, i.e. by switching standards. One is therefore rationally required to be coherent in a very particular way—the way that is coherent with what one now believes. If this is right, then the Standards Permissivist has an answer to the question of why a subject is rationally required to adhere to her standard.

3.7   Switching Standards

We might wonder whether the above really explains why a subject is rationally required to maintain her current standard, i.e. not to switch standards. Suppose that we could instantaneously change our standard, S, to another good standard, S', and our doxastic state, d, to the corresponding doxastic state, d', with which it coheres. If the switch were instantaneous, then there would never be a moment at which we simultaneously had S and yet believed against the recommendation of

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[15] This is, in effect, making the wide-scope rational requirement of coherence into a narrow-scope requirement to be coherent with what you currently believe.

[16] This is because the standard says something like, "given evidence e, the most truth-conducive doxastic response is to believe p." If one believes against one's standard, i.e. by believing not-p instead, then one in effect believes both not-p and that not-p is likely to be false.

S. There would be no incoherence in such a case and therefore nothing wrong according to the Standards Permissivist. We might wonder whether or why anything would be troubling about such a change without appealing to considerations of consistency over time. But, I think that there is an easier answer.

If one were given the option to switch one's standard, it would be irrational to judge that one would be epistemically better off if one were to switch. This is because such a judgment would conflict with the deliverances of one's current standard and thus constitute a way of being incoherent with one's current perspective. This is why having a standard makes it rationally required that we not form such a judgment. If we cannot rationally form such a judgment, then we cannot rationally switch if the rational formation of such a judgment is required for rational switching. And, it seems that the rational formation of such a judgement is required for rational switching.

3.8   Summing Up

The normative force of standards is therefore explained by the belief account. The explanation consists of (1) why a subject is required to conform her doxastic state to her standard and (2) why a subject is prohibited from switching standards. Together, these explain why a subject is normatively bound by her standard.

We have been working with the assumption that having a standard is a matter of believing that it is truth-conducive. It is worth considering the precise form that this might take. I will here assume that the standard is had by having a set of beliefs. The format of the standard would therefore resemble a list of beliefs: (1) *concerning whether* p, the *maximally truth conducive doxastic response to total evidence* e *is believing p*, (2) *concerning whether q, the maximally truth-conducive doxastic response to total evidence* e *is believing* not-q, and so on. In other words, for

each body of total evidence, there is a belief concerning the maximally truth-conducive doxastic attitude toward any particular proposition.

4   Cognitive Abilities

Is there another way out for the Standards Permissivist? Robert Simpson (2017) puts forth an explanation for why an agent is normatively bound to one epistemic standard instead of another. In short, his view is that an epistemic agent is normatively bound to a particular standard in virtue of having certain cognitive abilities that align favorably with that standard. The truth-conduciveness of a standard is not determined by the standard alone, but by the standard in combination with the cognitive abilities of the agent in possession of the standard. The thought seems to be that you're normatively bound to your standard because it aligns in the right way with your particular cognitive abilities. Simpson gives an example in which Nancy Drew and Veronica Mars are investigating a crime and disagree about who they think the culprit is. Simpson writes,

> Suppose firstly that Mars and Drew employ different epistemic standards, i.e. they use different methods for assessing and interpreting their evidence in order to form their beliefs…they have different methods for evaluating the probative force of testimonial evidence…Mars is excellent at recognizing insincere testimony – she's very sensitive to various subtle verbal and non-verbal tell-tale markers of insincerity – and thus she interprets different instances of testimony differently, ascribing a different probative force to insincere testimonial evidence. Drew is not very good at identifying insincere testimony, but she is excellent at making holistic, gestalt assessments of the combined probative implications of large bodies of disparate evidence...Mars applies her standards because she's cognitively well-equipped to apply them. She has the kind of perceptual and attentional abilities that enable her to accurately judge the sincerity of testimony. In a similar way, Drew is cognitively well-equipped to apply *her* standards. She has a particular imaginative facility that enables her to formulate credible explanatory narratives, based on gestalt interpretations of diverse bodies of evidence. (Simpson, 2017)

In this section, I will argue that this way of securing normative force doesn't work. The first thing to note is that Simpson takes his view to be in dialogue with Schoenfield's (2014) view. He takes

it to be a modification of Schoenfield's view that avoids what he sees as a reemergence of White's arbitrariness worry, but at the level of the standard itself. In short, his aim is to explain why it can be permissible to believe *p* in response to evidence *e* and also think that someone else is rational in believing not-*p* in response to the same evidence. Isn't this the original aim of Standards Permissivism? Yes, but according to Simpson, Standards Permissivism fails on the grounds that there's no principled way of rationally preferring your own standard if you simultaneously recognize that another standard is just as good. Although he takes his view to be a solution to this problem, I argue that 1) it is difficult to make sense of his view on Schoenfield's picture and 2) even if we think about his view in a more general way—i.e. not within the confines of a view like Schoenfield's—it still fails to provide normative force.

To begin, there are several ways of explaining what is going on in the case above. The first is that Mars and Drew have different evidence: the reason why Mars forms accurate beliefs about the sincerity of testimony is that she has more extensive relevant evidence. This could be because she has more extensive background evidence or because the evidence she gets when watching someone's testimony is more fine-grained. However, it is a stipulation of Simpson's case that Mars and Drew have the same evidence. It seems like Simpson's aim, then, is to insist that cognitive blind spots don't imply a difference in evidence and also don't imply irrationality. Although Simpson doesn't use the term "cognitive blind spot," I think that this is what he is describing. Mars and Drew each have a different sort of cognitive blind spot. Mars has a blind spot when it comes to assessing big picture evidence, whereas Drew has a blind spot when it comes to assessing testimonial evidence. Perhaps there is a sense in which both are rational—neither of them is doing too badly, after all. It is part of Simpson's case that each has a pretty good track record. But this seems to be missing the point: surely it would be better not to have any blind spots at all.

To the extent that we are to understand Simpson's view on Schoenfield's picture, what should we think is going on here? Presumably, Mars and Drew have different priors. They aren't just different, however. Mars' prior is superior when it comes to testimonial evidence, and Drew's prior is superior when it comes to big picture evidence. Simpson takes himself to be adding an additional factor—one's cognitive abilities—into the mix. But it is difficult to see where this could factor in. If Mars and Drew simply have different priors—whether that's the result of differing cognitive abilities, random chance or anything else—Simpson's picture explains little. The cognitive abilities in question seem to be inefficaciously floating on top of everything else.

What if we regard the prior as a type of software that must be implemented, as Simpson at one point alludes to? If someone has a cognitive blind spot, it seems reasonable to think that this amounts to a failure to take evidence into account properly when it comes to some particular area. Perhaps Simpson's thought is that different priors would be superior depending on how well the agent could execute them. But, if the agent will almost certainly fail to adhere to their prior when it comes to, say, testimonial evidence, then it should make no difference what the prior says about testimonial evidence. It doesn't seem like certain priors could have an accuracy advantage for one person over another. It is therefore hard to see what Simpson's view could amount to.

However, let's grant to Simpson for the sake of argument that certain priors confer an accuracy advantage depending on the characteristics of the person in question. Here's an initially plausible way of understanding Simpson's view: you should have whatever prior would produce the most accurate result for you.

Perhaps we could be tempted by such a view in the case of Nancy Drew and Veronica Mars. Maybe if Mars were to have a good standard with respect to big-picture evidence she'd always performs terribly, but when she has a middling standard with respect to it, she performs

middlingly. Since it is better to be middling than terrible, it is better for her to have a standard that is slightly worse in this respect. This is why she is normatively bound to her standard as opposed to Drew's standard. But there is something deeply wrong about such a view.

Consider the case of Oppy. Oppy always thinks the opposite of what her standard recommends due to some psychological quirk. It is worth noting that, on such a view, a standard cannot be disposition-like, because Oppy is not disposed to conform to it. If the standard is belief-like, then Oppy will exhibit doxastic behavior that is radically incoherent. She will have a bunch of beliefs about what is truth-conducive, and then believe the things that she takes to be not truth-conducive. Nonetheless, let's bracket all of this—let's assume that for some reason this incoherence is acceptable. We can imagine that if Oppy's standard says to have credence 0.7, she adopts credence 0.3. If her standard says to adopt 0.1, she adopts 0.9. Such a person would be better off—in terms of arriving at true beliefs—with a highly inaccurate prior—the complement of the best prior, or something like. But it seems absurd to say that such a person is rationally required to have that lousy prior. Consider a moral analogue. Suppose that the standard that morally binds you is the one such that—if you have it as your moral standard—will produce the best result. Imagine that you're a moral contrarian, and so to the extent that morality requires you to murder everyone, you don't murder anyone. But it is absurd to think that you are morally required to murder everyone.

There are two different issues here that seem to be frequently run together. First there is the issue of what, a priori, you should believe. Second, there's the question of what is a reasonable expectation given what your psychology allows. I agree that there is a sense in which someone who, let's say, really cannot understand math, no matter how hard they try—perhaps they are "math blind"—is not epistemically *blameworthy*. That is, we couldn't have expected them to do

better. But nonetheless, there is still a sense in which there was better to be done, even if this is inaccessible to them. And this better-to-be-done is not just about having right answers. Someone could object that there is a "better to be done," and that's to believe all the truths. But we can't make use of that, so rationality must be indexed to your abilities.[17] First of all, this argument isn't valid: it would require further argumentation to get the conclusion that rationality must be indexed to your abilities. Second, consider the Mars and Drew case. It's not as though Mars is just lucky when it comes to testimony or has direct access to the truth. But she is certainly doing something better than Drew when it comes to testimony. It seems like she somehow has better access to the right evidential support relations.

To the extent that Simpson is aiming at the "reasonable expectation" picture of rationality, perhaps we could make sense of his view. In this case, I think the most promising way for him to go would be to say that one's standard is fully determined by one's cognitive abilities. This need not commit Simpson to a view on which people can never fall short of their standard—it's just that the best we can expect from them is capped at a certain level. However, once again, just because I can't see something doesn't mean that there's nothing there to be seen—Simpson himself seems to accept this point when he acknowledges that Mars can see what the testimonial evidence supports whereas Drew can see what the big picture evidence supports, but not vice-versa. And this latter notion of rationality is what I am here concerned with. Simpson's view does not provide an answer when it comes to an agent being normatively bound to one standard over another in this latter sense.

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[17] Weatherson (2019) objects to a similar position. He argues that on the most plausible understanding of guidance, this leads to the conclusion that all rationality requires is to do what seems right. Evidential relations might be inaccessible to us. Similarly, conditionalization can be inaccessible to us if we are ignorant of that. The same goes for probabilism. If ignorance is enough to make us unable to be guided by a norm, then because people can be ignorant of any norm, the only thing we are ever guaranteed to have the ability to be guided by is whatever we believe is the right thing to do. But that doesn't seem like the right picture of rationality.

5   A Consequence of My Argument: Unacknowledged Standards Permissivism

Because I argue that such views can exercise normative force—and therefore achieve their purported aim—only if they are versions of the belief-account, one consequence of my argument is that all of these views are actually versions of Unacknowledged Permissivism—that is, Unacknowledged Standards Permissivism. Unacknowledged Permissivism is the view that there are permissive cases only if they are not rationally believed to be permissive. This result is significant, because many Standards Permissivists take their views, either by default or by design, to be versions of Acknowledged Permissivism. Although I claim here that Standards Permissivism is a version of Unacknowledged Permissivism, I will distinguish between two views: Unacknowledged Standards Permissivism and Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism. By "Simple Permissivism" I mean "non-Standards Permissivism," i.e. versions of Permissivism that do not rely on any further factor, such as standards.

The commitment to self-recommending standards is, in effect, a commitment to an unacknowledged version of Permissivism and a commitment to the belief-account of standard possession. Why think this? Well, if standards were dispositions, then we would be unable to explain the requirement that one's standards be self-recommending. It is part of self-recommendation that what your standards are and what you believe the good standards are must be the same. If you have the dispositional account, there is no way to explain what is wrong with the following: I have a certain set of standards, and I form beliefs in accordance with them. One of my beliefs is about the best set of standards, and that's a different set of standards than the one I have. If you ask me what standard you should adopt, I'll still consult my standard, but I'll tell

you that the best standard is some other standard. In other words, the standard must be belief-like in nature to secure the requirement of self-recommendation.

There are two points here:

1) a commitment to the requirement of self-recommendation is also a commitment to Unacknowledged Permissivism

2) a commitment to self-recommending standards is also a commitment to the belief-account

These two points are co-explanatory, since to the extent that something is a belief (as opposed to a disposition, etc.) it rationally precludes having a belief to the contrary. Part of what it is to have a standard is to think—and be required to think—that your standard is the best standard with respect to truth-conduciveness. This requirement can't be motivated with a dispositional account. And to the extent that you think that your standard is the best standard, you think other people are making mistakes. It's inconsistent with Standards Permissivism that you could recognize permissive cases.

To make the second point more vivid, consider the following. You ask me whether it is going to rain tomorrow. I look at my standard and see what it says. I then report back to you whether or not I think it's going to rain. Next, you ask me what kind of standard you should adopt. In order to answer this question, I use the same procedure that I used to answer the question of whether it would rain tomorrow. That is, I look at my standard and see what it recommends. The point is that you use the same tools to answer both questions. But it is not only that you in fact do this—it's that you are rationally required to do this in both cases. It is part of the Standards

Permissivist view that something is wrong with you—epistemically speaking—if you don't do this. This method produces something that—intuitively at least—is rather belief-like in the case of figuring out whether or not it will rain tomorrow. A rational agent will use the same method to answer the question of what standard you (or anyone) should have. It stands to reason that the output here is also belief-like.

Let's revisit the point about Unacknowledged Permissivism. To review: to the extent that you think that your standard is the best standard, you think other people are making mistakes. It is therefore inconsistent with Standards Permissivism that you could recognize permissive cases.

Perhaps you'll say that there's a difference between truth-conduciveness and rationality. I think that this misses the point. The issue is about what, from your own perspective, will get you to the truth. You can't look at some other person and think, "despite our disagreement, I think that their epistemic standard—and resultant doxastic attitude towards *p*—is just as truth-conducive and likely to be right as mine." Perhaps you can grant them points for being procedurally proficient. Managing to conform to their own standard might be difficult and require skill. So, although you can admire them for being thoroughgoing with their standard, you also think that they are wrong, and not just in their conclusion. You think that they are wrong to think that *e* doesn't support *p*. You think their whole way of thinking about things—to the extent that it diverges from yours—is wrong and not truth-conducive.

Moreover, if it is a legitimate move to have acknowledged permissive cases on a Standards Permissivist view, then we should be able to make the same move for Simple Permissivism. Consider White's belief-inducing pill case. I have in mind the following aspect: I recognize that you believe *p* on the basis of evidence *e*, and that you are rational. I don't think you are doing anything wrong. I think your assessment of the evidence is just as good as mine. But, as White

argues, if I don't think that you are doing anything wrong—if I think that you are rational in the sense of being just as likely to be correct as I am—then I can't maintain my belief. The result of recognizing both options as being equally truth-conducive seems to bother us here. But this is what it would be to recognize a permissive case even for the Standards Permissivist. Standards Permissivists aren't generally troubled by the possibility of acknowledged permissive cases, but my point is that they should be. The cases should strike us as equally bad.

Schoenfield writes,

> Here is another way of seeing what is going on: there is a sense in which Sally thinks of alternative standards as "just as good" as her own and a sense in which she does not. For Sally thinks that although her standards are more truth conducive than some alternative, other standards may be just as rational. We might cash this out by thinking that the principles of rationality are going to be general: they will be principles about what kinds of considerations count in favor of what kinds of hypotheses. But these sorts of general considerations are not sufficiently robust to pin down a unique doxastic state given by any body of evidence. So even if Sally and her friend both conform to these principles, their standards may differ with regard to how exactly they weigh the different considerations and thus, in any given case, Sally and her friend might rationally come to different conclusions. (Schoenfield, 2014)

According to Schoenfield, there is nothing wrong with thinking that someone else is rational but in possession of a non-optimal standard. There's a sense in which you can redefine the terms of the discussion. But you are still committed to thinking that they are wrong in their assessment of the evidence. To the extent that you think your standards are more systematically truth conducive—whether you arrived at these standards by lucky accident or otherwise—you nonetheless cannot think that the standards themselves manage to be superior by accident. That is, you are committed to thinking that your standards are glomming onto truths about evidential supports relations that your peer's standards fail to be responsive to.

If we like a view like this—a view on which we can think others are rational but no good at getting to the truth—we should wonder why we needed standards at all. Why not just go back

to Simple Permissivism and say that we can recognize other perspectives as equally rational but less truth-conducive? In this case, there is a puzzle about what could explain the fact that we are both rational in our disagreement. That's the problem that the standards picture was trying to solve—the answer, of course, being that differences in standards explain it. I claim that the Standards picture doesn't offer a superior explanation of rational disagreement than does non-standards Permissivism. Because of this, I think that making an appeal to a difference between "rational" and "truth-conducive" makes no more sense on the standards picture than it does on the non-standards picture. And, I argue, it doesn't make sense on the non-standards picture. So, this explanation isn't available to the Standards Permissivist.

Here is why I think that differences in standards don't explain rational disagreement any better than the fact of disagreement itself. The question we are asking is, "why am I uniquely rational to believe *p* while you're uniquely rational to believe not-*p*?" Consider the following answer: "because I think *p* is true and you think not-*p* is true." That doesn't sound like much of an explanation. But I think that is what the Standards view is saying, just more long-windedly. Standards Permissivism says that it's not just because *you think* p *is true*, it's because *you think that believing that* p *is the most truth-conducive doxastic response to evidence* e. But, barring some nuance, doesn't that just mean that you think *e* supports *p*? Or, alternatively, that you think *p* is likely to be true given *e*? If that's right, then it sounds like my thinking that *e* supports *p* and your thinking that *e* supports not-*p* explains why our disagreement is rational. This is more or less the original proposal, which seemed pretty dubious: the fact that I think *p* is true and you think not-*p* is true explains why our disagreement is rational. Suppose we ask someone, "why do you believe *p*?" and they answer, "because I think the evidence supports it." I suppose this rules out the belief being held on the basis of non-evidential reasons. But it was always part of the picture—in the

discussion of Uniqueness and Permissivism, at least—that the beliefs in question were formed on the basis of evidence. It is strange to think that "I think e supports p" illuminates anything. Wasn't it already obvious that a reasonable person who thinks p on the basis of e thinks, at least tacitly, that e supports p?

If we insist that this explanation is available on the non-standards picture, then this undermines our reason to posit standards to begin with.[18] To resist this line of argument, one would have to maintain that there is an important difference in the level of explanation offered by standards and non-standards Permissivism. Perhaps my criticism was too quick: Standards Permissivism does offer a sort of explanation. In particular, it can provide the coherence-centered account that I've detailed above. The rational disagreement is explained not by the fact that you think that e supports p, but by the fact that you think e supports p and you're rationally required to be coherent with the belief that e supports p, so long as you have it. But, once again, it's a bit odd to find this explanation more satisfying than the following one: I think "p." Then I get evidence e. Now that I believe p, I'm rationally required to be coherent with that belief, so I form the belief that e supports p. It seems like the Standards Permissivist would have to accept that this would be just as good of an explanation. That is, unless there's a principled reason for why beliefs about evidential relations—and not just any random belief—can be the kind of thing that provide justification for others either without themselves being justified, or without having their justification from an evidential source. In other words, there would need to be good reason to exclude certain types of belief from playing this role.

6   Conclusion

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[18] There could be other reasons to posit standards—I mean no arbitrariness motivated reason.

I have argued here that the Standards Permissivist needs an account of the normative force of standards, and that no existing account manages to explain it. Without such an account, the view makes little sense. I explain why each of the various other options fails—in particular, standards as dispositions and differently-weighted cognitive goals, as well as the possibility of normative force deriving from differing cognitive abilities. I offer what I take to be the only plausible account: standards exercise normative force in virtue of being beliefs. If we accept the possibility of non-evidentially justified beliefs, then this picture can get off the ground. This view—which I argue is the only viable view—has the upshot that Standards Permissivism is committed to Unacknowledged Permissivism.

Chapter 2: Against Unacknowledged Permissivism, and Some Thoughts on Higher-Order Evidence

Abstract: In this chapter, I argue that Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism is false. Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism can be understood as an alternative to Standards Permissivism in that both are potential responses to Roger White's arbitrariness objection. I present an alternate version of White's belief-inducing pill argument as applied to an ideal agent. In order to make this argument, I argue for a certain restriction on views about higher-order evidence. In particular, higher-order evidence that your doxastic state is rational should not affect the rational status of that doxastic state.

1   Introduction

1.1   Overview

The Permissivist can respond to Roger White's belief-inducing pill argument in one of two ways. She can either adopt Standards Permissivism—discussed at length in Chapter One—or Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism. According to Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism, what it is rational to believe is determined by the evidence alone. There is nothing about any particular individual—such as a standard—that binds a subject to one rational response over another. This is to be contrasted with Unacknowledged Standards Permissivism. As such, in Unacknowledged Simple Permissive cases, multiple options are open to a single individual. That is, provided that they do not rationally believe that more than one option is rationally open to them.

Each of these views avoids the arbitrariness objection in a different way. In this chapter, I argue that 1) because Standards Permissivism suffers from a multitude of unresolved issues, and 2) because Standards Permissivism—as I argue in Chapter One—is already committed to Unacknowledged Permissivism—the Permissivist who wants to avoid arbitrariness should be an Unacknowledged Simple Permissivist rather than a Standards Permissivist. I then argue that there is a modification of White's argument that works against the Unacknowledged Simple Permissivist, and so Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism is false.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, I argue that although Standards Permissivism is often taken for granted as the solution for a Permissivist troubled by White's objection, this treatment is overly optimistic. Such views suffer from a variety of objections of their own, and these objections are serious and largely unaddressed. It is therefore worth considering the other option for the arbitrariness-avoidant Permissivist: Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism. Although this view might not deliver everything that the Permissivist wants, it doesn't suffer from the problems faced by the Standards Permissivist. Moreover, it manages to remain truer to some of the original motivations for Permissivism. And, finally, the major drawback of Unacknowledged Permissivism—the fact that there are no acknowledged permissive cases—is now something that the Standards Permissivist must contend with anyway.

Such a view has been developed by Cohen (2013) and Smith (2020). However, I argue that this solution is ultimately unavailable to the Permissivist. I do this by presenting a strengthened version of White's belief-inducing pill argument which widens the scope of the objection to include unacknowledged permissive cases. In order to make this argument, I argue in favor of a restriction on views about higher-order evidence: getting higher-order evidence that your doxastic state is rational should not affect the rational status of that doxastic state.

1.2   Arbitrariness Objection: Belief-Inducing Pill Argument

White's arbitrariness objection to Permissivism is as follows. Suppose that you are in a known permissive case. You have the option either to look at evidence relevant to whether p, or to take a randomly selected belief-inducing pill that will give you a belief concerning whether p. If you choose to take the pill, you ought not retain the belief thus formed: you know that there is just a fifty percent chance of selecting a pill that corresponds to the truth of p. After having formed a

belief in this way, you should judge that your belief is just as likely to be false as it is to be true. But the same problem presents if you decide to look at the evidence instead. Since you know the case is permissive, there is no reason to expect that considering the evidence will more reliably lead you to form a true belief than would selecting a pill at random. This is because the case is permissive: it is compatible with the evidence that you rationally believe *p*, and it is compatible with the evidence that you rationally believe not-*p*. Suppose that you find yourself being drawn one way or the other by the evidence. You know that even if you are perfectly rational, the chance of being drawn to the true belief is no better than if you had randomly selected a pill. You therefore ought not retain any belief formed by looking at the evidence.

1.3 Responses to Arbitrariness

This objection is rather troubling for the Permissivist—so troubling, in fact, that much of the subsequent literature has been devoted to rescuing Permissivism from it. Broadly, there are two main approaches to this. The first is to introduce what I will call a further factor: something beyond the evidence upon which the rationality of one's doxastic state depends. Examples of further factors include epistemic standards, epistemic values and Bayesian priors. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to all such views as Standards Permissivist views, and all such further factors as standards. The second approach is to endorse Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism, which is the view that there are permissive cases only if they are not rationally believed to be permissive.

Standards Permissivism avoids White's objection because an appeal can be made to the agent's particular standard as the explanation for why, in such a case, taking a belief-inducing pill at random is not epistemically on a par with looking at the evidence. Looking at the evidence will allow the agent to respond in accord with her own epistemic standard, whereas taking a pill at

random will not. Taking a pill at random will likely produce a belief inconsistent with the deliverances of her standard. And—from her own perspective—a belief that is inconsistent with the deliverances of her standard is less likely to be true.

The second approach is to bypass the introduction of standards and instead target the fact that White's argument depends on the permissive case being acknowledged as such. The upshot is that the conclusion applies only to acknowledged permissive cases. It is therefore not an objection to a view known as Unacknowledged Permissivism. This is the view that there are permissive cases only if they are not rationally believed to be permissive. Such a view has been defended by Stewart Cohen (2013), Nathaniel Sharadin (2015) and Julia Jael Smith (2020).[19] This view has not received much attention, either as an alternative to Standards Permissivism or otherwise. Because White's argument targets neither Standards Permissivism nor Unacknowledged Permissivism, the argument should be understood as an objection to Acknowledged Simple Permissivism. My goal in this paper is to formulate an argument in the same spirit as White's against all of Simple Permissivsim—acknowledged and unacknowledged.

2   Standards Permissivism

2.1   What is it?

Standards Permissivism posits some further factor—beyond just the evidence—upon which a subject's doxastic response depends. An important motivation for this posit is the avoidance of arbitrariness, though there may be other reasons to posit standards. Consider Miriam Schoenfield's (2013) epistemic standards view. On this view, epistemic agents have epistemic standards, which are functions from bodies of evidence to doxastic states. To have a standard is to take that standard

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[19] See Ballantyne and Coffman (2012) for an objection to such a view.

to be truth-conducive. Crucially, one is rationally required to adhere to one's own standard. To believe in accordance with one's standard is to adopt the doxastic state that one's standard maps one's total evidence to. For instance, if my standard maps total evidence e to doxastic state d, then if I have total evidence e, I am then rationally required to adopt d.

Permissivists are ordinarily left with the problematic consequences of two suppositions. First, that what it is rational to believe is fixed by the evidence, and second, that the very same evidence could make it rational to hold one of several doxastic attitudes. Standards Permissivism attempts to avoid the problem by denying the first and positing that what it is rational to believe is fixed by the evidence and the epistemic standard. Once we fix the evidence and the epistemic standard, there is a unique rational response.

Other factors might play the role that standards do here. For instance, Tom Kelly's (2013) view makes use of differently weighted cognitive goals. Subjective Bayesianism posits that epistemic agents have prior probability functions—that may differ—and partially determine what it is rational for them to believe. There may be other further factors worth considering as well. While these views differ from one another about the details of the further factor in question, they are all views such that the rational response to the evidence depends on some further factor in the same relevant way. They are all examples of what I am referring to as Standards Permissivism.

Part of what makes Standards Permissivist views attractive is that they bypass the arbitrariness concerns raised by White's objection. They do this by providing an explanation for how two people with the same evidence could rationally differ as to whether p. This explanation is that that what it is rational to believe is a product of two factors rather than just one. These two factors are the evidence and one's standard. As a result, two people with the same evidence might differ with respect to their standard and thus rationally come to different conclusions.

2.2   Problems with Standards Permissivism

2.2.1 Explanatory Challenge

If Standards Permissivism provides a way out of the arbitrariness objection, why would someone want to be a Simple Permissivist? Despite its apparent success, Standards Permissivism faces several major problems. First—and I think foremost—is a major explanatory challenge: in order for the view to do away with arbitrariness, it must be that each subject is normatively bound to her standard, cognitive goals, prior or the like. However, it has been taken for granted that standards can provide the requisite normative force.

I argue in Chapter One that providing a plausible account of the requirement to adhere to one's standard is nontrivial, and I offer such an account. But, as I argue in Chapter One, the best— and perhaps only—available account hinges on the truth of several contentious positions. I take it that not all those sympathetic to Standards Permissivism would be content to accept the necessary commitments.[20]

Moreover, it is a consequence of my argument that Standards Permissivists are committed to Unacknowledged Permissivism. As such, the only viable version of Standards Permissivism is Unacknowledged Standards Permissivism. If that's right, then the Unacknowledged Standards Permissivist should cut out the middle-man and be an Unacknowledged Simple Permissivist. If they are committed to being Unacknowledged Permissivists in some form or other, why not go with the simpler option?[21] Moreover, as I argue in Chapter Three, Standards Permissivism faces

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[20] In particular, these are commitments to the possibility of non-evidentially justified beliefs that can themselves affect the rational status of other doxastic items.

[21] This assumes that the motivation for being a Standards or Unacknowledged Permissivist is avoidance of arbitrariness. If the reason for being a Standards Permissivist is motivated by other concerns, then this point won't hold.

an arbitrariness puzzle of its own that arises in certain cases of incoherence. It is therefore on worse footing than Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism on several counts.

2.2.2 Rationally Questioning One's Standard

Standards Permissivism faces many other problems. Julia Jael Smith (2021) argues that Standards Permissivist views are problematic in virtue of the fact that they require subjects to adopt strictly immodest inductive methods. That is, subjects are required to regard their own standards as more truth conducive than alternatives. But if you accept that having a standard involves treating it as more truth conducive than alternatives, a puzzle arises: shouldn't you be able to rationally come to question your own standards? It seems like there are certain cases in which it would be reasonable, or even rationally required, to question your standards. Moreover, if you happen to have bad standards, presumably you ought to be able to somehow discover this and rationally change them. But if you accept the Standards picture, then you must think that subjects take their own standards to be the most expectedly accurate. As a result, the standards picture is committed to there being no evidential situation that could ever make you come to rationally question your standards. Yet it seems that we should be able to rationally question our own standards.

There is a further problem in the vicinity of Smith's worry: what about the case of having a bad standard? It seems like it is all the more important to be able to rationally come to question a bad standard. The problem here isn't that your standard must be immodest. This is because you're normatively bound to a standard only if it is a good standard. So even if you have an immodest standard that is bad, you won't be required to conform to it. It would therefore not be irrational to question a bad standard. But it would also not be *rational* to question it. Presumably, we want such questioning to have a chance at counting as rational. But it is unclear upon which basis one's

questioning it could count as rational. Failing to have a good standard is a little bit like having no standard—at least, in the sense that there seems to be no answer to the question of what you should believe.[22] We would need to appeal to something independent of any standard in order to explain why questioning a bad standard is rational, but this move isn't available to the Standards Permissivist. The Permissivist can say that it would be *better* for me to switch to a rational standard. But don't we also want to say that it would be *rational* for me to switch to a rational standard—or, at least that there is some rational way to do so?

2.2.3 Undermining Motivation

Finally, to the extent that we are sympathetic to ordinary motivations for Permissivism, we might think that Standards Permissivist views leave something to be desired. Such views do not capture the intuitions that motivate a Permissivist view to begin with, and perhaps even undermine some of those motivations.

The explanation on offer from Standards Permissivism is as follows: the reason why A and B can rationally disagree despite both having total evidence *e* is that there is something about A that makes it uniquely rational for A to believe *p* whereas there is something about B that makes it uniquely rational for B to believe not-*p.* But we shouldn't have to look inside your head and see what your standard is in order to determine whether you've been rational. It's taken as a datum by many Permissivists that in certain paradigm cases both parties are clearly being rational. By endorsing Standards Permissivism, we leave it open that in fact, it could just as easily be that one party is misapplying her standard, and isn't rational after all. But if that option is available, it is more difficult to motivate Permissivism. This is because it undermines some of our reason for

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[22] This seems to me to be a separate worry from that of how you get a standard in the first place.

assuming people are rational by default. It does this by making a further question applicable: did she correctly apply her own standard? The original thought was that we can tell, just by observing a case, that both people are rational. After all, they've both thought about the evidence carefully, and we can't find anything obviously wrong with their reasoning. But now it's not so obvious—we have to leave it open that one or both parties is misapplying their standard. Things might look okay to us from the outside, but this is no longer good enough. Now that that's an option, we cannot take the rationality of both parties as a datum any longer. This is why Standards Permissivism undermines some of the motivation for Permissivism.

2.2.4 Mind-Changing

The original motivation appeals to the idea that two people—alike in all relevant respects—are each free to go either way in certain cases. Suppose that two scientists, A and B—equally well educated, sharing all of the relevant evidence, and having discussed with one another their respective reasons for belief—disagree as to whether *p*. After a while, scientist A changes her mind, coming to believe what scientist B does. The phenomenon of changing one's mind seems like a paradigm case of a phenomenon that Permissivists care about and want to explain. However, Standards Permissivists will be forced to say that scientist A is making a rational error at some point, either before or after changing her mind.[23] It is not consistent with Standards Permissivism that someone could rationally hold a belief and then rationally change her mind on the very same issue without also having undergone a change in either standard or evidence.

2.3   Upshot for Unacknowledged Permissivism

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[23] That is, unless they want to deny that the relevant evidence and standard could have remained fixed—i.e. to insist that there must always be a relevant evidential change in such cases, or an arational change of standards.

The Unacknowledged Simple Permissivist avoids both the arbitrariness objection and the problems faced by Standards Permissivism. Moreover, as I argue in Chapter One, because Standards Permissivists are committed to Unacknowledged Permissivism, the Standards Permissivist is already saddled with the major drawback of Unacknowledged Permissivism: that there are no acknowledged permissive cases. The result is that we should regard Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism more favorably than we might have previously. In fact, it appears to be the strictly better option for an arbitrariness-avoidant Permissivist.

Notably, Julia Smith (2020) defends Unacknowledged Permissivism, but doesn't seem to regard it as an alternative to Standards Permissivism. She seems to be a Standards Permissivist, but notes that even if we are not Standards Permissivists, we should still be sympathetic to Unacknowledged Permissivism.[24] I am carving up the space of views in such a way as to make sense of choosing one or the other in order to save Permissivism from arbitrariness. One could therefore choose either Standards Permissivism or Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism.

3   Ideal Agent Argument

I have argued that Unacknowledged Permissivism is on stronger footing than Standards Permissivism if one's concern is avoidance of arbitrariness. In this section, I present a strengthened version of White's belief-inducing pill argument. The conclusion is that there are no simple permissive cases, acknowledged or unacknowledged. So Simple Permissivism, acknowledged or unacknowledged, is false.

It is worth stating explicitly that I am here committed to a picture of rationality on which what is rational for an ordinary agent aligns with the ideal agent. We are granted no epistemic

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[24] I am not sure what motivates Smith to go the Unacknowledged *and* Standards route, but that route will not be considered here. My argument has nothing to say about Unacknowledged Standards Permissivism.

leeway in virtue of being less than ideal. What you are rationally required to do—with respect to your doxastic states—is the same thing than an ideally rational agent would do in your situation.

I will be using the following term:

Rationalize: Evidence *e* rationalizes belief *p* just in case it's possible for an agent whose total evidence is *e* to rationally believe *p*.[25]

White gives an argument that applies to Acknowledged Simple Permissivism. I will not defend that argument further. My claim is that if we accept White's argument, we should also accept the following extension of that argument.

Here is the argument:

Suppose that Simple Permissivism is true.

1. For any permissive case (i.e. a body of evidence, *e*, that is permissive with respect to at least some proposition, *p*), known or unknown, there is some possible ideal agent who could find herself with *e*.

Take a permissive case in which the evidence is *e* and what's at issue is whether *p*. Consider a possible ideal agent, Ida, who has *e* as her evidence.

2. If the case is permissive, the evidence rationalizes *p* and rationalizes not-*p*.

3. If the evidence rationalizes *p* and rationalizes not-*p*, then Ida might have either belief.

4. Ida would see that *e* rationalized *p* and rationalized not-*p*.

5. Ida would then judge that believing either conclusion would be no more likely to get her to the truth than selecting a pill at random.

6. Ida would therefore have neither belief.

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[25] I don't thereby mean to suggest that it would be rational to hold two incompatible beliefs in a permissive case. There does seem to be a legitimate question there for the Permissivist: how does she explain why it is not rational to hold both beliefs, given that the evidence rationalizes one and rationalizes the other? However, I won't be exploring the issue further here.

7. If Ida would have neither belief, then the evidence must not rationalize either belief.

8. If the evidence doesn't rationalize either belief, then the case isn't permissive.

Conclusion: There are no simple permissive cases, acknowledged or unacknowledged. Simple Permissivism is false.

The intuitive thought behind this argument is that any unacknowledged permissive case could be an acknowledged permissive case. Later on, I will consider several objections. However, I will first consider the biggest objection: what if ideal agents, in seeing what their evidence supports, have extra evidence? Below, I will reformulate my argument to deal with this objection and then defend an additional premise: White's Claim.

4 White's Claim

Roger White (2005) writes, "it is natural to suppose that a belief can always rationally survive learning the epistemic value of one's evidence. That is, if it is rational to believe P given evidence E, then it is rational to believe P given E and E′, where E′ correctly states what attitudes towards P are rationally permissible given E." Julia Smith (2020) points out that the truth of Unacknowledged Permissivism depends on the falsity of White's Claim. She then argues that we don't have adequate reason to accept White's Claim. Smith writes,

> If White's claim is correct, UP must be false. To see this, recall that according to UP, there are possible cases in which E makes rational belief that P and E makes rational belief that not-P. (Smith 2020)

Smith continues,

Also according to UP, rationality prohibits me from believing P on the basis of E while

believing that an incompatible attitude towards P is rational. (Smith 2020)

In other words, the reason why Unacknowledged Permissivism requires the falsity of White's

Claim is as follows. If E and E + E' support the same doxastic states, then, if E rationalizes belief

in *p* and rationalizes belief in not-*p*, then so must E + E'. So, assuming Permissivism is true, it

must be rationally permissible to both acknowledge that a case is permissive (i.e., to get E + E')

and to retain the belief you had (or might have had)[26] before you got E' and had only E. And,

because this might have been either belief in the former case, it must be that either belief is

permissible in the latter case as well. There is nothing about finding out that a case is permissive

(i.e., going from having E to having E + E') that could explain why a doxastic state that is rationally

permitted on the one body of evidence is not rationally permitted on the other.

With this in mind, we can now examine on which grounds Smith rejects White's Claim.

Smith writes,

> Still, suppose we grant the assumption that facts about whether a belief is rational for a
> subject are reducible to facts about what the subject's evidence supports. It's true that,
> given this assumption, my learning that E supports not-P cannot change the fact that E
> supports P and thus cannot change the fact that believing P on the basis of E is rational.
> However, learning that E supports not-P can change whether it is rational for me to go on
> believing P– for my total evidence is no longer E. My evidence has expanded from E to E
> + E', where E' correctly states which attitudes are rational for someone who possesses
> evidence E. So while it's true that learning E' will not change the fact that belief that P is
> still rational on E, when I learn E', it is not guaranteed that my belief that P will still be
> rational on my total evidence, which now includes more than just E. The above argument
> for White's claim fails, then, because it neglects to account for the possible change in the
> rationality of my attitude towards P that can occur when my total evidence changes. (Smith
> 2020)

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[26] I say this to account for the possibility that you could get E + E' all at once.

Smith's point is that there isn't any reason to think that White's Claim is true. Given that E and E + E' are evidentially distinct, we shouldn't automatically expect that they should support the same doxastic states. Moreover, Smith also seems to imply that the very fact of evidential difference (i.e., the fact that there is an evidential difference between E and E+E') should give us prima facie reason to think that they support different doxastic states. Smith continues,

> …it is unclear why we should think that a subject who learns the epistemic value of her evidence for P would still be rational to believe P, since her evidence about P has now changed. I conclude that White's claim is not an adequate basis for rejecting UP. (Smith, 2020)

Smith dismisses White's Claim on the grounds that there is no positive argument in favor of it, it isn't as intuitive as White seems to have indicated, and that there is perhaps prima facie reason to think that it is false.

The revised Ideal Agent Argument that I make in Section 5—that is, the argument revised in response to an objector who thinks that ideal agents have extra evidence—depends on the truth of White's Claim. As such, I argue in favor of it in Section 6. Although I defend White's Claim in the service of the argument in Section 4, I take this defense to have independent import to the debate about higher-order evidence.

5   Ideal Agent Argument for Ideal Agents with Extra Evidence

The following Argument is revised in order to respond to an objector who thinks that ideal agents have extra evidence. I will not argue that ideal agents do not have extra evidence. Rather, I will argue that even if they do, this poses no problem.

Suppose that Simple Permissivism is true.

1. For any permissive case (i.e. a body of evidence, e, that is permissive with respect to at least some proposition, p), known or unknown, there is some possible ideal agent who could find herself with $e + R_{Ideal}$, which is e plus conclusive, non-misleading evidence about what e supports concerning p.

Take a permissive case in which the evidence is e and what's at issue is whether p. Consider a possible ideal agent, Ida, who has e as her evidence.

2. (White's Claim) $e + R_{Ideal}$ supports the same doxastic state as e

3. If the case is permissive, the evidence rationalizes p and rationalizes not-p.

4. If the evidence rationalizes p and rationalizes not-p, then Ida might have either belief.

5. Ida would see that e rationalized p and rationalized not-p. (Follows from P1)

6. Ida would then judge that believing either conclusion would be no more likely to get her to the truth than selecting a pill at random.

7. Ida would therefore have neither belief.

8. If Ida would have neither belief, then the evidence must not rationalize either belief.

9. If the evidence doesn't rationalize either belief, then the case isn't permissive.

Conclusion: There are no simple permissive cases, acknowledged or unacknowledged. Simple Permissivism is false.

6   Preliminary Defense of the Premises

I will go through and consider each premise, noting where the argument might be resisted along the way. Premise 2 (White's Claim) will be discussed at length. I will here defend the other premises before launching into a defense of White's Claim.

Premise 1: *For any permissive case (i.e. a body of evidence, e, that is permissive with respect to at least some proposition, p), known or unknown, there is some possible ideal agent who could find herself with e + R , which is e plus conclusive, non-misleading evidence about what e supports.*

This premise has already been reformulated in order to deal with what I think is the most substantial objection to it. See Section 3 for the original formulation of the premise.

Premise 2 (White's Claim): *$e + R_{Ideal}$, where R_{Ideal} is conclusive, non-misleading higher-order evidence about what e supports concerning p, supports the same doxastic state as e* concerning *p*.

See Section 6 for a lengthy defense.

Premise 3: *If the case is permissive, the evidence rationalizes p and rationalizes not-p.*

This premise just follows from the supposition that Simple Permissivism is true. One might argue that what the evidence supports is not an objective matter. The Standards Permissivist will take this route. It is already part of such views that the evidence alone does not determine the rationality of a doxastic state. Rather, what the evidence supports is relative to something like a standard. My argument therefore does not target the Standards Permissivist and does not aim to.

Premise 4: *If the evidence rationalizes p and rationalizes not-p, then Ida might have either belief.*

See Section 7: Objections and Replies for discussion and response to a possible objection involving a quirkily disposed ideal agent.

Premise 5: *Ida would see that e rationalized p and rationalized not-p.*

This follows from Premise 1.

Premise 6*: Ida would then judge that believing either conclusion would be no more likely to get her to the truth than selecting a pill at random*

Since this is more or less the same as one of White's premises, I will not defend it further here.

Premise 7*: Ida would therefore have neither belief.*

This is more or less the same as one of White's premises, so I will not defend it here.

Premise 8: *If Ida would have neither belief, then the evidence must not rationalize either belief.*

Objector: Even though Ida would have neither belief, an ordinary agent might still rationally hold one or the other. What is rationalized for Ida is not the same as what is rationalized for an ordinary agent.

Response: Ida is perfectly rational. If the evidence rationalized either response, she would have believed it. It seems like it would be hard to argue that the evidence might rationalize either belief, but just not for an ideal agent without appealing to some further factor like a standard. Unless you want to say they just have different evidence, which seems like it would be an objection to Premise 1 instead. So, if it's not a further factor or different evidence, it is not clear what could explain the difference.

Premise 9: *If the evidence doesn't rationalize either belief, then the case isn't permissive.*

This just comes from the stipulated definition of "rationalize" and the definition of a permissive case.

7 Defending White's Claim: Preliminary Considerations

7.1 Formulating White's Claim

White's original claim is as follows:

White's Claim (Original): If it is rational to believe P given evidence E, then it is rational to believe P given E and E′, where E′ correctly states what attitudes towards P are rationally permissible given E.

I am going to defend White's Claim by defending a view from which White's Claim follows. In particular, this is the view that if it is rational to believe P given E, then it is rational to believe P given non-misleading higher-order evidence about what E supports concerning P. White's Claim is the extreme version of this: in his formulation, you get conclusive, non-misleading higher-order evidence about what E supports concerning P.

In order to make the link between White's Claim and the principle that I will be defending more perspicuous, I will formulate White's Claim in the following way. This formulation also highlights the relationship between White's Claim and certain views about higher-order evidence which, in turn, I use to further motivate White's Claim.

White's Claim (my formulation): $e + R_{Ideal}$, where R_{Ideal} is conclusive, non-misleading higher-order evidence about what e supports concerning p, supports the same doxastic state as e with respect to p.

I will defend White's Claim by defending the following generalized principle in the vicinity of White's Claim. White's Claim follows from this principle.

Generalized Principle in the Vicinity of White's Claim: $e + R$, where R is (non-misleading) higher-order evidence about what e supports concerning p, supports the same doxastic state as e with respect to p.

7.2   Preliminary Intuitive Motivation

7.2.1   Never Enjoying the Fruits of Your Labor

Consider Evie, who has evidence e. She rationally believes p on the basis of e. Suppose that e and

$e + R$, where R is not misleading, rationalize different doxastic states with respect to p. Then Evie

can be rational in this case only by failing to know what her evidence, e, supports.[27] We get this

result for the following reason. First, in order for Evie to know what her evidence supports, she

would have to have R. That is, she could not have knowledge that her evidence supported her

conclusion without having R. Second, as soon as Evie knows what her evidence supports, she will

have different evidence, $e + R$, and by stipulation, e and $e + R$ support different doxastic states

with respect to p. If e and $e + R$ rationalize different doxastic states with respect to p, then the only

way for Evie to rationally believe p on the basis of e is to be such that she does not know what e

supports with respect to p. This is counterintuitive: it seems like knowing what her evidence

supports should, minimally, be consistent with rationality. It even seems like the sort of thing that

ought to count in her epistemic favor—surely she is more rational rather than less if she can see

that her evidence supports the conclusion that she holds.

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[27] We can think of R as anything from some non-misleading evidence concerning what e supports all the way to non-misleading conclusive evidence concerning what e supports. Alternatively, we could think that the additional evidence just is the knowledge of what e supports, rather than some additional evidence upon which the knowledge is based. Either way, I think that the point I am making will hold. The important thing is that R bears on whether e is evidence for p.

This has counterintuitive consequences for rationality. It seems to exclude the possibility of a reliable epistemic link between one's evidence and a rational response to that evidence. It rules out the possibility of the rational response being formed, in some sense, because it was recognized to be supported by the evidence. We would have to rule out using the fact that p is supported by the evidence as a step in the process of concluding that p, since using this as a premise in reasoning seems to involve knowing (or at least justifiably believing) what one's evidence supports. And knowing—or justifiably believing—that one's evidence supports come conclusion involves having R.

Once the belief that p is formed, it's hard to see why having that (rational) doxastic state does not involve knowing what the evidence supports. It surely involves at least a tacit belief that the evidence supports p. And this tacit belief could be made explicit by considering the question. To put it another way: if I believe p on the basis of e, then at least in some sense I'm committed to the claim—or perhaps tacitly believe—that e supports p. Now assume that I'm rational in believing p. It is weird to think that if I turn this tacit belief—the tacit belief that e supports p—into knowledge, it would undermine the rationality of my belief that p. Why is tacit belief acceptable, but knowledge destructive? For this reason, we should maintain that e and $e + R$, where R is not misleading, support the same doxastic state concerning whether p.

7.2.2   Regress Worry

When Evie moves from having e to having $e + R$, she doesn't know what $e + R$ supports. If she did, then she'd be in a different state, $e + R + R2$, where $R2$ is non-misleading higher-order evidence concerning what $e + R$ supports with respect to p. But this view generates an implausible kind of instability: as soon as she figures out what her evidence supports, and therefore what she

ought to believe, she's in an unfortunate epistemic situation. She now has new evidence and no knowledge of what that evidence supports. In fact, she'll never be able to enjoy the fruits of figuring out what her evidence supports, because on this picture it's a moving target. Learning what her total evidence supports changes what her total evidence supports, so as soon as she finds out what it supports, it is no longer applicable. On such a picture, then, it would seem that one never has any rational doxastic states.

Someone could have the view that the regress stops at some point. But the most natural place for it to stop is at the first step. If someone wants to argue that it stops at some point, but not at the first step, then they will have to provide some independent reason for thinking that this is the case.

8   White's Claim and Higher-Order Evidence

8.1   Background Considerations

The point that I intend to make here is interesting in its own right. It is therefore worth thinking about regardless of any application to my argument against Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism.

White's Claim is intertwined with the debate about higher-order evidence. In this section, I will explain how it relates to issues of higher-order evidence and how it fits together with various stances that one might take towards higher-order evidence. The truth or falsity of White's Claim has important upshots for which views of higher-order evidence are tenable. And, conversely, which views about higher-order evidence are independently plausible has upshots for what we should think about the truth of White's Claim.

8.2 e + R / e + I Distinction

Higher-order evidence is evidence about evidential relations. To get higher-order evidence is to get some evidence that bears upon whether or not *e* is evidence for *p*. One of the contentious issues concerning higher-order evidence is whether or not getting it could change what it is rational for you to believe is supported by your first-order evidence. The discussion of higher-order evidence generally concerns cases of misleading higher-order evidence. According to Kevin Dorst (2020), we can understand the issue as concerning the plausibility of whether it is "…possible to get misleading higher-order evidence: to have evidence that supports q, but then get evidence that makes it rational to believe that one's evidence didn't support q." As such, higher-order evidence cases usually go something like this:

Case 1: Suppose we both read some scientific paper and, based on the evidence, you form the belief that *p*. As it turns out, you've responded correctly to the evidence. I then tell you that the evidence doesn't support *p*—in fact, it supports not-*p*. Of course, I'm saying something false. But I say it with enough authority that you give a lot of weight to it.

What is it rational for you to believe? Suppose that the answer is that you're not supposed to believe *p* anymore. The (misleading) higher-order evidence has overpowered your otherwise rational belief that *p*. In such a case, it seems like the evidence (*e*) and the evidence plus the higher-order evidence (*e* + *e'*) support different things. I will refer to this sort of *e* + *e'* as *e + I*: evidence plus higher-order evidence that your doxastic state based upon that evidence is irrational. We might think that *e* and *e* + *I* can rationalize different attitudes towards *p*, as in the case described above. However, my primary concern will be with *e + R*: evidence plus higher-order evidence that your doxastic state based upon that evidence is rational.

There are a few variations of Case 1 above that I think it is important to consider:

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Case 2: We both read some scientific paper and you form the belief that not-*p*. It turns out that you've responded incorrectly to the evidence. I correctly tell you that the evidence does not support not-*p*, and that it instead supports *p*.

Case 3: We both read some scientific paper and you form the belief that not-*p*. It turns out that you've responded incorrectly to the evidence. I incorrectly tell you that the evidence supports not-*p*.

Case 4: We both read some scientific paper and you form the belief that *p*. It turns out that you've responded correctly to the evidence. I correctly tell you that the evidence supports *p*.

In cases (1) and (2), you get *e* + *I*. In case (3) and (4), you get *e* + *R*.

I am concerned with cases of higher-order evidence that meet two conditions:

1) They are cases of getting **e** + **R**: *e* plus higher-order evidence that your doxastic attitude towards *p* is rational given *e*.

2) They are cases in which this *R* is **non-misleading**: your doxastic state concerning whether *p* actually is rational given *e*.

8.3 Relationship Between e + R / e + I distinction and misleading/non-misleading distinction

Table I

Summary of Four Cases in 8.2

	Believe P	~Believe P
e + R	(4) Bp	(3) ~Bp
e + I	(1) ~Bp*	(2) Bp*

Consider the table above, which is meant to be a summary of these four cases in Section 8.2. The boxes in the "e + R" row represent cases that are instances of e + R. The boxes in the "e + I" row represent cases that are instances of e + I. The greyed boxes indicate the cases in which the higher-order evidence is misleading. This table represents a view about these four cases: the starred boxes indicate the cases in which the higher-order evidence warrants a belief revision. Table I therefore represents a view on which getting R does not warrant a change in doxastic state but getting I does. In other words, whenever you get higher-order evidence that supports your doxastic state, you shouldn't change your doxastic state on the basis of that higher-order evidence. This is true whether or not the higher-order evidence is misleading. The view represented by Table I may or may not be right. The important thing to note is that in order to defend White's Claim, I need to defend some view on which the position represented by the yellow (top left) box is true. That is, it needs to be a view on which getting non-misleading higher-order evidence that your doxastic state concerning p is rational doesn't change what your doxastic state concerning p should be. In other words, I will argue that the following principle is true:

Generalized Principle in the Vicinity of White's Claim (GP): $e + R$, where R is (non-misleading) higher-order evidence about what e supports concerning p, supports the same doxastic state as e with respect to p.

Before I present my argument for this principle, I want to make a point about the different distinctions we might make among types of higher-order evidence. When considering a diachronic case—that is, a case in which you first have some evidence and a corresponding doxastic state—and then later get some higher-order evidence, it is helpful to use the **e + I** vs. **e + R** distinction. However, if we are considering a synchronic case—that is, a case in which you get some evidence and the corresponding higher-order evidence all at once, it is more helpful to use the **misleading**

vs. **non-misleading** distinction. This is true because in the latter case you haven't yet formed a doxastic state on the basis of the first-order evidence in question, so there is nothing yet to which the **e + I** vs. **e + R** distinction could apply. In this paper, I will be primarily concerned with the **e + I** vs. **e + R** distinction.

8.4   Honing in on Two Views about Higher-Order Evidence

On each of the two distinctions that I have drawn above, there are four positions about how higher-order evidence affects the justificatory status of first order beliefs. Assume that the first order evidence is held fixed.

Misleading / Non-Misleading Distinction: Four Positions

    A. Higher-order evidence never warrants a change in doxastic state, regardless of whether it's misleading or not.

    B. Higher-order evidence warrants a change in doxastic state only if it is misleading.

    C. Higher-order evidence warrants a change in doxastic state regardless of whether it is misleading or non-misleading.

    D. Higher-order evidence warrants a change in doxastic state only if it is non-misleading.

e + I / e + R Distinction: Four Positions

    W. Higher-order evidence warrants a change in doxastic state only if it is higher-order evidence that your doxastic state is rational.

X. Higher-order evidence never warrants a change in doxastic state regardless of whether it is higher-order evidence that your doxastic state is rational or irrational.

Y. Higher-order evidence warrants a change in your doxastic state only if it is higher-order evidence that your doxastic state is irrational.

Z. Higher-order evidence warrants a change in your doxastic state regardless of whether it is higher-order evidence that your doxastic state is rational or irrational.

Views A, B, X and Y are all compatible with White's Claim and therefore with Premise 1. Views C, W and Z are not. View D is technically compatible with White's Claim, but requires further specification. Because my concern is with cases in which you get higher-order evidence concerning a *rational* doxastic state, View D is incompatible with White's Claim.

To summarize, the following three views are compatible with White's Claim. I have consolidated views A and X into (1) below—the view that you should never be swayed.

   (1) You should never be swayed by higher-order evidence.

   (2) You should be swayed only if the higher-order evidence is misleading.

   (3) You should be swayed only if the higher-order evidence is higher-order evidence that your doxastic state is irrational.

Given that my concern is only with cases in which you get higher-order evidence concerning a *rational* doxastic state, (2) collapses into (3) for my purposes. This is because a case in which you have a rational doxastic state and get misleading higher-order evidence concerning it will be such

that the higher-order evidence is evidence that your doxastic state is irrational. There are therefore

two salient views that are compatible with White's Claim:

View 1: You should never be swayed by higher-order evidence.

View 2: You should be swayed only if the higher-order evidence is higher-order evidence that your doxastic state is irrational.

The General Principle in the Vicinity of White's Claim (GP) follows from View 1 and also from

View 2. White's Claim follows from GP. I will therefore defend (View 1 or View 2) in order to

defend White's Claim.

8.5   What about hypoxia cases?

Consider Miriam Schoenfield's (2016) case[28]:

> HYPOXIA: Aisha is flying her airplane on a bright Monday morning, wondering whether
> she has enough gasoline to fly to Hawaii. Upon looking at the dials, gauges and maps,
> she obtains some first order evidence E, which she knows strongly supports (say to
> degree 0.99) either that she has enough gas (G) or that she does not have enough gas
> (~G). Aisha does some complex calculations and concludes G, which is, in fact, what E
> supports. But she then gains some higher order evidence: she realizes that she is flying at
> an altitude that puts her at great risk for hypoxia, a condition that impairs one's reasoning
> capacities. Aisha knows that pilots who do the kind of reasoning that she just did, and
> who are flying at her current altitude, only reach the correct conclusion 50% of the time.

Although it seems plausible that higher-order evidence ought to make some difference here, the

point that I am making is not about such cases. I am concerned with a different sort of case. The

analogue here would be a case of non-hypoxia where you get higher-order evidence that you're

not hypoxic. Regardless of what you think we should say about cases of hypoxia, what we ought

to say about negative hypoxia cases is a further question.

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[28] This is based on a case from Adam Elga (2008).

This issue hasn't garnered as much attention. The literature primarily focuses on the other cases—that is, cases that are instances of higher-order evidence that you've been irrational, regardless of whether or not this is misleading. Although Schoenfield's HYPOXIA case is an instance of both—that is, an instance of getting misleading higher-order evidence that one has been irrational—we would have similar intuitions if Aisha had in fact been irrational (thus making the higher-order evidence non-misleading).[29] Even if these cases have an upshot for what we should think about higher-order evidence generally, it doesn't follow that $e + R$, where R is not misleading, supports something different than e with respect to p.

9   Defending White's Claim: Support from Higher Order Evidence

The General Principle in the Vicinity of White's Claim (GP) follows from View 1 and also from View 2. White's Claim follows from GP. I will therefore independently motivate (View 1 or View 2) in order to defend White's Claim.

9.1   View 1: Never Be Swayed by Higher-Order Evidence

It's easiest to think about View 1 by focusing on ideally rational agents. Recall that I am working with a picture of rationality on which you don't get slack in virtue of being less than perfect. What you are rationally required to do is the same thing that a perfectly rational agent is required to do in your situation.

View one is probably the simplest view on which White's Claim is true. On View 1, ideal agents are never swayed by higher-order evidence. One should never question evidential relations

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[29] What about if Aisha had been irrational and gotten higher-order evidence that she was rational (making the higher-order evidence misleading, but not an instance of higher-order evidence that you've been irrational)? I discuss cases like this in more detail later on.

based on higher-order evidence. Such a view has a number of supporters, but is nonetheless controversial. Consider, for instance, the following paragraph from Christensen:

> Could HOE affect what such a cognitively perfect agent may rationally believe? It seems to me that it could. After all, even a cognitively perfect agent may well get powerful evidence that she is less than perfect. She might get powerful evidence, for example, that she'd been dosed with a reason-distorting drug that gave its victims the strong illusion of seeing clearly and distinctly the truth of claims that were in fact false. Of course, this evidence would, in the present case, be misleading evidence. But misleading evidence is exactly evidence that leads rational belief away from the truth; cognitively perfect agents will in general respect misleading evidence scrupulously. And I don't see how the mere fact of our agent's cognitive perfection would make it rational for her simply to disregard the misleading evidence in this case. (Christensen 2010)

Christensen raises the following challenge: how could the mere fact of an agent's cognitive perfection make it rational for her to disregard misleading higher-order evidence? In what follows, I will attempt to respond to this challenge. I will explain why an ideal agent won't change her (rational) doxastic state on the basis of misleading higher-order evidence. Insofar as we have such a view, we will also think that an ideal agent won't change her doxastic state on the basis of non-misleading higher-order evidence. My arguments for View 1 will therefore target only the case of misleading-higher order evidence.

9.2   Motivation for View 1

There are some positions that we might hold that would commit us to View 1. For instance, if we think that ideal agents are never mislead about anything knowable a priori, then we will think that ideal agents are never mislead by higher-order evidence. This is true to the extent that we take evidential support relations to be knowable a priori. Christensen rejects this position, and argues that higher-order evidence can lead even ideal agents to be radically mistaken about a priori matters:

"It is information that affects what beliefs an agent (even an ideal agent) is epistemically rational in forming. … respecting it can apparently force an agent to fall short in certain ways, by having beliefs that fail to respect logic or basic inductive support relations."

Why might we reject a position like Christensen's? An agent's cognitive perfection could make it rational for her to disregard misleading higher-order evidence for the following reason: it is plausible that a priori truths seem overwhelmingly obvious to ideal agents. If it is obvious to an ideal agent that some evidential support relation obtains, then she won't come to question it on the basis of misleading evidence.

Christensen rejects this line of response on the grounds that even if this is right, an ideal agent can nonetheless never rule out—beyond the shadow of a doubt—that she is in some skeptical scenario. As a result, she can never rule out the possibility that she is mistaken, and thus will assign some tiny credence to the negation of a priori truths. Suppose it is true that ideal agents can never rationally preclude the negation of a priori truths such as evidential support relations. If you are not completely certain of something, then sufficient evidence can undermine it completely. This means that ideal agents could be swayed by sufficiently strong higher-order evidence. However, it is an implication of Christensen's view that we should never be completely certain even of logical truths as obvious as *everything is self-identical*. I think that this alone gives us reason to reject Christensen's objection.

Insofar as we think that ideal agents can "see" what their evidence supports, then they won't ever find themselves being swayed by misleading higher order evidence. The thought is that whatever sort of clarity we have about the most compelling cases—say, those of simple mathematical truths—ideal agents have this clarity for anything knowable a priori.

9.2.1 Ideal Agents and A Priori Truths

Why think that ideal agents would just see that a priori truths were true? It is hard to make sense of an ideal agent who rationally believes all of the a priori truths without simply seeing that they are true. By "seeing that they are true," I have in mind the same sort of phenomenon that occurs when we—ordinary agents—can see the truth of simple mathematical or logical truths.

The best explanation for why an ideal agent knows all of the a priori truths is that they strike her as obvious. Let's consider some alternatives. We could imagine that an ideal agent knows all of the a priori truths because she has spent a lot of time working them out and has now written them all down in a book. Or, maybe God gave her a book of all the a priori truths. Whenever she needs to know one, she simply consults her book. There seems to be something very fragile about this—that is, it seems like an ideal agent's ideality should not depend on their book not being altered, lost or destroyed. Similarly, it seems like an ideal agent's ideality should not depend on the quality of her memory. In the cases described here, when she goes to look up some truth, she thinks, *this is true, and I know that it's true because it's in my book, which means I worked it out at some point, or God told me,* or something like that. But in this case, something miraculous would have to have happened for there to be zero errors. Ideality alone would be miraculous in a sense—but for it to be based on some unrelated miracle seems to be missing the point.

Of course, we could stipulate that the agent in question has a perfect memory and is resistant to being fooled. But even if we did this, what would explain resistance to being fooled? I think that whichever way we go, we won't be able to avoid invoking the same explanation—that is, that the ideal agent can just see that certain things—a priori truths—are true. There has to be some sort of recognition or "seeing" that these are truths. We would presumably not be satisfied to call a list of all the a priori truths an ideal agent—and not only because a list is not an agent. By

positing an ideal agent, we are trying to get at something that has to do with what we do when we get things right.[30]

9.2.2   More on Ideal Agents and A Priori Truths

Imagine that we have a child who is learning simple math equations, like $1 + 1 = 2$. If you ask her what one plus one equals, she will say "two." At an early enough point in this learning process, it would be easy to get her to say "three" instead. But she obviously lacks something that we have. That is, we see the truth of "$1 + 1 = 2$" in a way that she doesn't. Or, take the case of a very skilled mathematician. She likely "sees" the truth of certain mathematical claims in the way that we see the truth of simple claims. She could tell us some complicated mathematical truth, and we might take her word for it. If someone asked us what the answer was, we would report the answer that she told us. But it wouldn't take much for us to give up our belief. If she later told us that she had been mistaken, we would be quick to revise our belief. But this isn't the case for simple mathematical truths that we see clearly: we would not be quick to revise such beliefs. It seems obvious that rational agents have differing abilities when it comes to seeing a priori truths, and that these differing abilities correspond to being more or less likely to revise one's belief.

Why think that if ideal agents can "see" what their evidence supports in this way, then they won't ever be swayed by misleading higher order evidence? Suppose we accept that ideal agents see a priori truths in this way. Then what? Then I think we can use cases in which *we* see a priori truths with a lot of clarity to get a grip on what to say about ideal rationality. So, for instance, consider a case in which someone we normally trust tells us that one plus one does not equal two,

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[30] Perhaps someone who likes an extremely minimal picture of ideality will be un-swayed by these considerations. That is, if all that someone means by ideal agent is an agent who in fact has beliefs that are perfectly supported by the evidence. I consider such a position—and what might be said in response—in Section 10.

but that it equals three. I don't think that we should decrease our confidence that 1+1=2 (or increase our confidence that 1+1 = 3) even slightly. [31]

9.3   Cases in Support of View 1

Suppose we accept that ideal agents can see what their evidence supports. Then, we can use the following sort of case to draw conclusions about whether ideal agents are ever mislead. These are cases in which we—ordinary agents—both see clearly the truth of some a priori claim and get misleading higher-order evidence that our belief in that a priori truth is irrational. Because *we* should not be swayed by the misleading higher-order evidence in such cases, ideal agents—who clearly see what the evidence supports in all such cases—should never be swayed by misleading higher-order evidence.

Case 1: Math Joke
Let's pretend that you, a renowned mathematician and someone who never plays practical jokes, tell me that 1+1=3. I then crosscheck you: I make phone calls to several of my other mathematician friends, and they all allege that 1+1=3.

In a case like this, I think that I should question whether you even told me what I think you told me before I question that 1+1=2. I will explain why I think this below. First, I will delineate three possible positions that one might hold.

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[31] One concern that someone might have about a position like this is as follows. I'm an ordinary agent—I certainly don't see all the a priori truths—does this mean that the theory of rationality has nothing to say about how I can figure them out? If an ideal agent is so different from me that they can simply "see" a priori truths, does this mean that it's hopeless for me, since I can't see them? It seems like such a view would have to say that there's no way for me to know a priori truths without directly seeing that they are true. I don't think that this is right, however. I concede that ideal agents may well have a lot of evidence that I don't have. That is, they have $e + R$. I argue here that e and $e + R$ support the same relevant doxastic states, so to the extent that those arguments succeed, this poses no problem.

1. Adjust: The first view is that I should decrease my confidence that 1+1 = 2 and increase my confidence that 1+1=3.

2. Skepticism: The second view is that if I am to question this, I should question everything. But I should question it. So, I should now be a radical skeptic.

3. Ignore: The third view is that I should neither question that 1+1=2 nor become a skeptic. Rather, I should just ignore this evidence.

I think that we should prefer the third option. This is because a situation like this gives rise to extreme instability. To the extent that you question that 1+1=2, you should question everything. But if you question everything, then you should question whether you even told me that 1+1=3. Because there is no stable position for you to be questioning that 1+1=2, it seems rationally permissible for you not to question it.

Someone might wonder why I think you should question everything as opposed to, say, just all of arithmetic. There's something special about questioning obvious a priori truths. It seems like once you start doing it, there's no stop to your questioning. The reason is twofold.

First, it seems obviously true to me that $1 + 1 = 2$. But it's not just that it seems obviously true, since we might think that other non-a-priori truths seem obviously true. I have in mind something stronger: it's that I don't even understand what it would mean for it to be false. I can just see that it's true. It doesn't seem true in the way that, say, something I'm very confident in based on testimony might seem true: it is more than that. When I question something that I believe on the basis of some evidence, I can make sense of the questioning: perhaps the evidence I have

supports some false conclusion, or perhaps I've reasoned poorly. It shouldn't make me question things in a radical way, because I can understand what these failures would amount to. But if I take seriously the possibility that $1 + 1 = 2$ is false, then I should also take seriously the possibility that other things that seem obviously true to me are false. One of these things that seems obviously true is that you're standing in front of me telling me that $1 + 1 = 3$. If anything, that seems less obviously true to me than that $1 + 1 = 2$.

Second, given how obviously true $1 + 1 = 2$ seems to me, there are better explanations for why you are telling me that it's false than that it is actually false. In particular, you might be trying to trick me, on drugs, or any number of other things. Or, perhaps I am the one who is on drugs, or dreaming, or hallucinating.

If ideal agents can see the truth of all a priori truths, which includes evidential support relations, in the same sort of way that we can see the truth of $1+1=2$, then ideal agents will never be mislead by misleading higher-order evidence.

Case 2: Murder with Peer Disagreement
Suppose that you walk into a room and see Joe standing over Jim's body with a knife. There is fresh blood all around and knife wounds on the body. It seems to you to be overwhelming evidence that Joe murdered Jim.

There is a lot of possible evidence that should make you discard the belief that Joe murdered Jim. If you see a video recording of Mary committing the murder and then Joe walking in a second later and picking up the knife, you should discard your belief. Alternatively, if you find out that the entire thing was a replica of a murder scene with a very realistic fake body and blood, then you should give up your belief. But even learning that you were mislead by this evidence shouldn't make you question that what you saw was evidence that Joe murdered Jim. Is there any evidence

that should make you question that seeing Joe with a knife, standing over what appears to be Jim's body, with blood all around, is good evidence that Joe murdered Jim?

Suppose that at the scene of the apparent murder, there are many people around who disagree with you. They claim not to believe that Joe committed the murder. You have no reason to think that they are lying to you. At first you think that they must know something that you don't. But, after questioning them extensively, it becomes apparent that their evidence is exactly the same as yours. This seems like higher-order evidence that everything you saw (the knife, the blood, the body, Joe holding the knife, etc.) in fact isn't good evidence that Joe murdered Jim.

I find it plausible to think that you ought to uphold the original evidential relation: you should stick to your belief that Joe committed the murder. Of course, it seems like there is something funny going on since this means that all of the other people have to be irrational, lying, on drugs, or something like that. Or, perhaps you are dreaming, on drugs, or hallucinating the whole scenario. But even if you lend credence to the scenario in which you're dreaming or on drugs, it still doesn't seem obvious that the thing to do is to doubt the fact that the scene in question is strong evidence that Joe murdered Jim. Rather, it seems like reason to doubt that you actually have the evidence that you thought you had. So even if you ought to lower your confidence in the proposition that Joe murdered Jim, this won't be because you doubt the evidential support relation.

One way to accommodate the evidential aspect of this is as follows. When you start questioning whether or not you're dreaming, for example, then your evidence stops being that you see a murder scene and becomes that you merely seem to see one. Because you also believe that things are as they seem to you, your doxastic state remains largely the same.[32]

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[32] See Greco (2017).

Of course, not every evidential support relation will seem as obvious to us as the one

described above. But that's not a problem: the point is to give cases in which things seem obvious

to us in order to get a grip on what we should say about an ideal agent, to whom all of these a priori

truths seem obvious.

9.4   Objection from Christensen

Christensen has opposing intuitions about this sort of case. He considers a case in which you've

been given a reason-distorting drug and told that one percent of the population is immune. Consider

the following paragraph of Christensen's:

> …it seems intuitively that it would be highly irrational for me to be confident in this case
> that I was one of the lucky immune ones. We might imagine that in the videotapes of the
> other subjects that I'm shown, I've seen many susceptible subjects hotly insisting that they
> must be immune to the drug while insisting on the correctness of their drug-addled
> conclusions, which, they claim, they can just see to be correct. Although there's a way in
> which I'd be unlike them if I insisted on the correctness of my conclusion (since my
> conclusion is, in fact, correct), it is intuitively absurd to think that I'd be rational to argue
> confidently in this way in my present context. Thus it seems to me that although I have
> conclusive evidence for the correctness of my answer, I must (at least to some extent)
> bracket the reasons this evidence provides, if I am to react reasonably to the evidence that
> I've been drugged. (Christensen 2010)

I think that Christensen's view pushes us towards skepticism in a way that we would ordinarily

reject. Consider the ordinary phenomenon that when you're dreaming you often can't tell that

you're dreaming. But, when you're awake, you can tell that you're awake. It seems plausible to me

that in the good case, it may very well be clear to you that you haven't been drugged. Of course, if

you had been drugged, you wouldn't be able to tell that you had. Continuing with the dream

analogy, suppose that you recall that sometimes, when you're dreaming, you feel certain that what's

going on is real. I don't think awareness of this fact should lead you to question that you're awake

now. We should take seriously the possibility that the cases Christensen describes work in the same way.

9.5   View 2: Be Swayed Only by Higher-Order Evidence of Irrationality

Suppose that we reject View 1. We think that ideal agents are sometimes swayed by misleading higher-order evidence. For the purposes of defending View 2, let us stipulate that we ought to be swayed by higher-order evidence that our doxastic state is irrational.[33] My aim, then, is to motivate the thought that even if we think that we ought to be swayed by higher-order evidence that our doxastic state is irrational, we should not be swayed by higher-order evidence that our doxastic state is rational.

On View 1, the evidential support relations were like extremely bright lights—so bright than nothing could darken them. On View 2, they are still very bright, but they aren't so bright that nothing can darken them. The question is whether anything could brighten them.

9.6   Motivation for View 2

9.6.1 Coarse-Grained Cases

Below I will consider some coarse-grained cases in order to draw out the intuition behind View 2.

First, consider the follow case of Christensen's:

> I think that this argument should not tempt us. To see why, suppose that I work out my proof of T after having coffee with my friend Jocko. Palms sweaty with the excitement of logical progress, I check my work several times, and decide that the proof is good. But then a trusted colleague walks in and tells me that Jocko has been surreptitiously slipping a reason-distorting drug into people's coffee--a drug whose effects include a strong propensity to reasoning errors in 99% of those who have been dosed (1% of the population happen to be immune). He tells me that those who have been impaired do not notice any difficulties with their own cognition--they just make mistakes; indeed, the only change most of them notice is unusually sweaty palms. Here, my reason for doubting my proof,

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[33] For ideal agents, this will always be misleading higher-order evidence.

and the truth of T, is much stronger. It seems clear that in the presence of these strong reasons for doubt, it would be highly irrational for me to maintain absolute confidence in T. Yet the certainty argument would, if sound, seem to apply equally to such extreme cases. (Christensen 2008)

Because we are now considering View 2, we have stipulated that cases like Christensen's above warrant a change in doxastic state. Consider instead a variant of Christensen's case:

Logic: Once again, you've proven a complicated theorem. I then tell you, credibly, "by the way, I absolutely didn't spike your drink with a reason distorting drug."

It doesn't seem like you should increase your confidence in your proof in response to the news that I didn't spike your drink. You should remain exactly as confident as before. You are already tacitly committed to the position—in virtue of holding your belief—that nothing of this sort has gone wrong. Finding out that everything is as you expected therefore shouldn't warrant any sort of change.

Murder with Peer Agreement: Consider the Murder case above, except this time, everyone around you agrees that Joe is the murderer.

Suppose we concede that you should change your doxastic state in response to the disagreement in the case of Murder with Peer Disagreement. Murder with Peer Agreement is the same case, except this time, everyone agrees that Joe murdered Jim. Just as in the Logic case above, it doesn't seem like you should increase your confidence that e is evidence that Joe murdered Jim. When you form your belief on the basis of the evidence, you are already tacitly committed to e's being evidence that Joe is the murderer.

Below I consider a more fine-grained example. This example will, in turn, help to illuminate what is going on with these more coarse-grained cases.

9.6.2   Fine-Grained Cases

Monty Hall Case

Consider the Monty Hall problem. There are three curtains with a goat behind two of them and a car behind the other one. You don't know which curtain the car is behind. Let's stipulate that you have equal credence among the three curtains, C1, C2 and C3. Monty Hall tells you to pick a curtain. You pick C2. Monty Hall then says that he's going to show you a goat behind one of the curtains. It happens to be C3. He then asks you whether you want to stick with C2 or change to C1.

After he opens C3, your credence that the car is behind C1 ought to change from 1/3 to 2/3, and your credence that it's behind C2 ought to remain 1/3. Let's assume that you participate in this case and you get the right conclusion—that is, a credence of 2/3 that the car is behind C1 and a credence of 1/3 that it's behind C2.

Now, someone credibly tells you that there's some high chance that the following coin flip took place: if the coin landed heads, you were—unbeknownst to you—hypoxic for the last minute or so as you came to your conclusion, but if it landed tails nothing happened. Suppose we agree that upon learning this, it makes sense that you should decrease your confidence that the car is behind C1 closer to ½, and increase your credence that it's behind C2 closer to ½.

Consider the following variant of the case above. Instead of someone telling you that you might be hypoxic, someone tells you that this was an excellent piece of reasoning, or that you're definitely not hypoxic, or something of that nature. Nevertheless, regardless of our supposition

that you should revise your credences in the previous case, you should stick to your credences in this case. It doesn't follow that you should adjust your credences upon receipt of $e + R$ from the fact that you ought to adjust them from receipt of $e + I$.

9.7   A Challenge for View 2

Maybe someone would object to View 2 on the following grounds. Consider a case in which you're flying a plane and have a background awareness that there's a small chance that you're hypoxic. With this taken into account, you have credence 0.8 in p, the proposition that you have enough fuel get to your destination. Later, you get excellent evidence that you're not hypoxic and increase your credence to 0.9.

It seems like such a change in credence *is* warranted. But this appears to be inconsistent with View 2. This is because your original evidence, E, plus the evidence that you're not hypoxic, R, appears to justify an increase in your credence that you can reach your destination. It therefore seems false that getting non-misleading R should never cause you to revise your credence.

But I think that something else is going on here. Your total evidence, E, includes some first order evidence, e, which rationalizes the proposition p (that you have enough fuel to get to your destination) to some degree, let's say 0.9. But because of your background awareness of the possibility of hypoxia, E also includes I, which is misleading higher-order evidence. So, while it is true that $E + R$ rationalizes a different credence in p than does E alone, it is false that $e + R$ rationalizes a different credence than does e alone.

Another way to understand it is as follows. Getting R *is* actually not higher-order evidence that you've been rational with your entire doxastic state (E, which is composed of $e + I$). If it were, then it would be evidence that ($e + I$) supports having a credence of 0.8 in p. But evidence that

you're not hypoxic makes no comment, so to speak, on what is supported by the misleading higher-order evidence, *I*. It therefore makes no comment on the combination of *e* + *I*. Evidence that *e* is evidence for *p* is not evidence that *I* is not evidence that *e* is evidence for *p*. Instead, it concerns only whether *e* is evidence for *p*.

It turns out, then, that this challenge poses no problem for View 2. To see why, consider that strictly speaking, you haven't gotten *R* here. If you had gotten *R*, it would have been evidence that *E*, which is e + *I*, supports a credence of 0.8 in *p*. But this isn't what you got: you got evidence that *e* is evidence for *p*. If we limit the scope of our attention to just *e* (i.e. think about your doxastic state if you had only *e* and what that evidence would rationalize), then we can describe the evidence you've gotten in the case above as *R*. And, in that case, it is true that both *e* and *e* + *R* rationalize the same doxastic response to *p*. It just so happens that in this case, your credence in *p* was not the one supported by *e*. This is because of the influence of *I*, the misleading higher-order evidence. So, although getting "*R*" does warrant a change in your overall doxastic state—and in the degree to which you take *e* to be evidence for *p*—this is only because it isn't a way to get "*R*" for your total doxastic state. It is a way to get *R* only for what your doxastic state would be (if you were being rational) if you had *e* rather than *e* + *I*. And it doesn't warrant a change if we limit the scope to what you ought to have thought in the absence of *I*.

9.8 A Harder Challenge for View 2: Oracle

Suppose that I have some evidence, *e*, and some higher-order evidence, *I*. On the basis of *e* alone, I have a credence of 0.8 in *p*. However, if I take *I* into account, then I have a credence of 0.7 in *p*. I then ask an oracle whether or not my credence of 0.7 in *p* on the basis of *e* + *I* is

rational. This time, the answer, and thus the higher-order evidence, does concern ($e + I$) rather than just e.

Suppose that the oracle tells me 0.7 is the rational credence to have in p on the basis of $e + I$. Now it seems like I really should increase my credence of 0.7 in p to 0.8. Why? This is the case because what she tells me entails that 0.8 is the rational response to evidence e, and so I now ought to disregard I. In finding out that I've rationally accounted for $e + I$, I also find out that I've rationally accounted for e. But if I've rationally accounted for e, then this just means that I am no longer justified in taking I seriously. If it is right that getting this R concerning $e + I$ justifies a change in my doxastic state with respect to p, then View 2 is false.

This is a trickier case. But, once again, I think that understanding the subtleties of this case will make it clear that this does not pose a threat to View 2, the Generalized Principle or White's Claim. The first thing to note is that you are getting strictly more higher-order evidence than just R. By stipulation, R concerns $e + I$. Let us call this third-order evidence. You are also getting higher-order evidence concerning e alone, which I have previously referred to as R'. We can understand this as second-order evidence. In this case, it is the second-order evidence—the R'—that is doing the work. Below, I will explain why this is.

To make my point, let's consider a different case first. Suppose that I am wondering how much oxygen is in the room. I have a bunch of complicated measuring devices that require a high level of care and attention to read properly. I take the readings and get to the conclusion that there's low oxygen. Let's call the proposition that there is low oxygen LO. On the basis of my readings, I have high credence in LO. Then a colleague of mine comes in and tells me that I am likely hypoxic—and that, unbeknownst to me, she has placed a blood oxygen measuring device on me which has been remotely transmitting readings of my blood oxygen levels to her. I should

now increase my credence in LO. But the increase is not warranted because of the higher-order evidence I've received; it's warranted only in virtue of the first-order evidence that I've received. This piece of information—that I'm very likely hypoxic—all at once constitutes higher-order evidence and first-order evidence. We would not want to conclude that on the basis of the higher-order evidential component that I therefore ought to increase my confidence in LO, since this would amount to increasing my confidence in having correctly taken the measurements in question.

Similarly, when the oracle tells you that your credence is rational given $e + I$, you get several different pieces of higher-order evidence. We can understand these as second-order and third-order to parallel the case of hypoxia above. You get higher-order evidence at the second-order level about e and higher-order evidence at the third-order level about $e + I$. My claim is that it is only higher-order evidence at the second-order level—that is, the higher-order evidence concerning e—that is operative in justifying the increase in your credence.

Another way of thinking about this case is as follows. Your rational credence of 0.7 is based on the evidence $e + I$. But when the oracle tells you that it's rational, I is eliminated from your evidence. As such, the evidential basis for your previously rational credence of 0.7 has changed. I am committed to the claim that getting I can change what it is rational for you to believe. It must therefore also be that removing I can change what it is rational for you to believe. But I is, in this case, second-order higher-order evidence. It concerns whether e supports p. As such, since it is the cancelling out of I that makes a rational difference, the thing that justifies its cancellation must also be evidence that concerns whether e supports p. And this means that it must be second-order higher-order evidence.

9.9   Inconsistency with Bayesianism

Perhaps someone will object to View 2 on the grounds that it is inconsistent with Bayesianism. Consider the following case. You ask an oracle whether *e* is evidence for *p*. If the oracle says "no," you should reduce your confidence in *p*. If the oracle says "yes," you should increase your confidence in *p*. This intuition is reflected in a simple tenet of Bayesianism: if *e* is evidence for *h*, then not-*e* is evidence against *h*. However, View 2 and all of the arguments that I have given in favor of it appear to be inconsistent with this principle. View 2 is such that if the oracle says "no," you should reduce confidence in *p,* but if the oracle says "yes," you should remain exactly as confident as before in *p*. So what's going on here?

First of all, it however much we like this Bayesian principle, there does seem to be something defective about increasing your credence above 2/3 in the Monty Hall case upon receipt of *R*. But, arguably, it is acceptable to decrease your credence below 2/3 upon receipt of *I.* There is an intuitive asymmetry. There are some easy cases that follow Section 9.7 in which the challenge can be met and there is no contradiction with Bayesianism. These are cases in which the higher-order evidence that you get is only partial; it's not higher-order evidence about your total doxastic state—e + I—but about e alone. To see what I have in mind, consider the above discussion in Section 9.5 as applied to the Monty Hall Case.

First, to summarize: We are conceding here that you ought to adjust your credences in the Monty Hall case upon learning that you might have been hypoxic. The question is why not think you should adjust them in response to evidence that you were especially rational?

Now, to apply the above reasoning to this case: In having a credence that the car is behind curtain one (C1), you either have some (misleading) higher order evidence that you've been irrational or you don't. If you do, then you have $e + I$. Either $e + I$ supports credence 2/3 in C1 or it doesn't. If it does, then the number 2/3 must already take into account the reduction in confidence that we have agreed learning I should bring. But that means if you hadn't gotten I, your credence in C1 would be greater than 2/3, which is the wrong credence to have. Having rational credence 2/3 therefore precludes having $e + I$. There are two ways that you could fail to be rational: you are either mistaken about to what degree e supports C1, or you have failed to take I into account.

Suppose now that you have $e + I$, and $e + I$ supports a credence other than 2/3 in C1. This is compatible with e (meaning e without I) supporting a credence of 2/3 in C1. However, given that you do have I, you have a credence a tiny bit lower than 2/3, say, $2/3 - 1/100$. We can imagine that in this case, you have a background awareness that there's a tiny chance that you were hypoxic while reasoning through the Monty Hall problem. Getting R in this case would amount to getting some evidence that $e + I$ supports credence $2/3 - 100$. But this is not what is at issue. Rather, what is at issue is what happens when you get something a lot like R—that is, R concerning your credence in C1 conditional on e alone (i.e., without I). Let us call this R'. It is true that getting R' should warrant a revision in your credences. But this revision is simply a lessening or cancelling out of the influence of I. This is because R' is just R relative to e. Since I is also relative to e, R and I are relative to the same e. As a result, they will either cancel each other out or compete with each other (depending on which of them is stronger). So one way for the Bayesian to go is to say that to the extent that an increase in credence is warranted upon getting R', this is because your original credence was slightly lower than 2/3, having already taken I into account.

9.10   The Problem Remains

It seems that there are still other cases in which there is a genuine contradiction with Bayesianism. Suppose instead that you don't have *I*. Your credence in C1 is 2/3 and you have no misleading higher-order evidence. View 2 says that in such a case, getting *I* warrants a reduction in your credence, but getting *R* does not warrant an increase.

Someone who takes these worries about the Monty Hall case very seriously and who doesn't want to give up Bayesianism should do one of two things. She should either adopt View 1—which is not inconsistent with Bayesianism—or use a technical trick that allows for this sort of asymmetry within Bayesianism. For instance, if, before learning *I,* your credence in *I* is zero, then you can get that conditionalizing on *R* doesn't require a change because *R* is probability 1 whereas conditionalizing on *I* requires change because *I* is probability zero.[34]

Regardless, the point is that this is a problem for everyone, so the Bayesian will have to deal with it one way or another. Everyone should agree that your credence should be 2/3 and higher-order evidence that your doxastic state is rational shouldn't increase it.

10   Objections and Replies

10.1   Concerns about my defense of White's Claim

Objector: Your arguments make use of cases that are impermissive. You succeed in showing that non-misleading higher-order evidence about what *e* supports concerning *p* should not change your doxastic attitude towards *p* in impermissive cases. However, your argument fails to show that in permissive cases this sort of higher-order evidence shouldn't change your doxastic attitude towards

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[34] See Hajek (2003) for an argument that you can conditionalize on events with probability zero.

p. It is part of my theory that non-misleading higher-order evidence of the sort you discuss can change what your doxastic state should be in permissive cases.

Response: It is true that my argument does not prove that White's Claim, or the generalized principle from which it follows, is true. However, in order for Unacknowledged Permissivism to be initially plausible, it needs to be committed to the claim that higher-order evidence can radically change your doxastic state. My arguments show that in a wide variety of cases, the requisite sort of higher-order evidence does not change what your doxastic state ought to be. It is true that the Unacknowledged Permissivist can maintain that, although she agrees that this sort of higher-order evidence cannot change the rational response in impermissive cases, it can do so in permissive cases. The problem with holding this position is that it is unmotivated: the burden of proof is on the Unacknowledged Permissivist. That is, if she concedes that everything works as I say in all cases except permissive cases, then she's in a bad spot. It better be that what she says is true in at least some cases other than permissive cases. If she says there is something special about permissive cases, then she has already conceded that she has no positive argument.

10.2   A Different Kind of Ideal Agent

Objector: The argument as written assumes that Ida knows, for every possible body of evidence, what it supports. We can accept the possibility of ideally rational agents, but not of the kind that you stipulate for the purposes of your argument. Ideal agents reason ideally, but do not have extra knowledge or evidence concerning what their evidence rationalizes. In other words, ideal agents have beliefs perfectly in line with their evidence, but need not know what their evidence rationalizes.

Response: Perhaps someone could resist the thought that ideal agents know what their evidence supports by resisting one of its assumptions:

Knowability: What the evidence rationalizes is always knowable in principle.

If what the evidence rationalizes is not always knowable in principle, then even an ideal agent could fail to know what her evidence rationalized in some cases.

It seems to me that there are two ways of resisting. One involves denying Knowability, while the other involves accepting Knowability. The route of denying Knowability is straightforward: an ideal agent will sometimes fail to know what her evidence rationalizes because what the evidence rationalizes is sometimes unknowable in principle. The route that involves accepting Knowability requires further explanation as to why an ideal agent might not know what her evidence rationalizes given that it is knowable in principle. Let us first consider the route that involves denying Knowability.

10.2.1 Denying Knowability

It doesn't seem too far-fetched to suppose that if something a priori is knowable in principle, then an ideal agent will know it. It also seems reasonable to suppose that if something is unknowable in principle, then even an ideal agent will fail to know it.

Does it make sense to suppose that an ideal agent could fail to know what her evidence rationalized? The answer isn't clear. Nonetheless, we can attempt to investigate the matter. In order

to get a grip on what things might be unknowable in principle, we can consider what might stop an ideal agent from knowing what her evidence rationalized.

Before we consider ideal agents in particular, it's worth considering what stops anyone from knowing facts about what's supported by what. We are always asking ourselves what our evidence supports: this is how we draw conclusions. You might think there are various things that block our ability to know what our evidence supports. The literature on higher-order evidence addresses some of these issues.

Some of the things that are unknowable in principle aren't what I have in mind. For instance, propositions like "p but I don't know p," and false things are unknowable in principle. Some people believe that there is irreducible de se knowledge, and if so, it's not knowable in principle by others. There might be some things that you need some empirical evidence to come to know, and there's just no way to gather that evidence. That is, getting that evidence would be impossible.

My concern here is only with a priori truths: if total evidence e rationalizes p, then that's an a priori truth. It is worth considering the following question: if you can't know something a priori in principle, what would be stopping you? There are undoubtedly facts about evidential support relations that we don't know. But it doesn't seem like it would be that difficult for an ideal agent to know these facts. So, if there are cases in which we aren't aware of what our evidence rationalizes, shouldn't we attribute that to our own human limitations? It at least isn't obvious why we should suppose that certain a priori truths are inaccessible to ideal agents. Moreover, if we suppose that some a priori truths—say, certain truths about evidential support relations—are inaccessible to ideal agents, it would be difficult to make a principled distinction between the knowable ones and the unknowable ones. That is, it isn't clear why some would be knowable and

others wouldn't. A way to avoid having to make this distinction is to adopt the position that all truths about evidential support relations are unknowable, but I am not sure what would motivate such a view.

10.2.2 An Argument for Knowability in Principle of Evidential Support Relations

If an agent knows that she's ideally rational, then she should be able to figure out—just by looking at her beliefs—what her evidence rationalizes. So, we could run the whole argument with the following modification: stipulate that the possible ideal agent knows that she's an ideal agent. We could then make the following argument. Suppose that I know that I'm an ideal agent. Suppose further that I feel compelled to believe *p*. I could then reason in the following way: I know that I'm an ideal agent with evidence *e*, and it seems obvious to me that *p* is right. Therefore, evidence *e* must rationalize *p*. This amounts to an argument that what the evidence rationalizes is knowable in principle, provided that it's knowable in principle to an ideal agent that she's ideal. So, if it's knowable in principle that she's ideal, then what the evidence rationalizes is also knowable in principle.

Perhaps the objector will deny that it's knowable in principle to an ideal agent that she's ideal. This is an interesting position that is worth considering. Christensen gives an argument to this effect.

> If an IRA had been around for a long time, and if she had a good memory, she might well have evidence that she possessed an excellent epistemic track record. Unlike most of us, she would never have been corrected for a cognitive error. But it's hard to see how even a very long and distinguished epistemic history could justify the sort of absolute self-confidence at issue here. For it's clearly possible for an agent to think flawlessly up until time t, and then to make a mistake. Clearly, a spotless record up until time t does nothing to tell against this particular possibility. It's also difficult to see how an agent could be introspectively aware of her own cognitive perfection--or, more precisely, it's hard to see how any sort of introspective awareness could justify absolute self-confidence. (Christensen 2008)

On Christensen's view, because an ideal agent can't rule out every miniscule shadow of a doubt in her own ideality, she can never be rationally certain that she is ideal. And, because she can never be rationally certain that she is ideal, she can never be certain of what her evidence supports. This is because, on Christensen's view, rational certainty in our own cognitive perfection is a prerequisite for rational certainty in a priori truths such as evidential support relations. So, on Christensen's view, rational certainty of what one's evidence supports is in principle unattainable. Although I have been here using "knows" rather than "is rationally certain of," this is a point worth taking into consideration.

Christensen does not seem to take issue with the possibility of an ideal agent getting evidence that she is very reliable, or even getting evidence that justifies rational certainty that she is at least 99.999 percent ideal. It is only rational certainty in her own perfection that would be unattainable.

This position seems to require the truth of the following claim: no possible evidence could adequately support rational certainty in ideality. It is therefore not a claim about the impossibility of getting certain evidence. Rather, no matter what evidence we got, it would never be good enough to justify rational certainty. Even if some godlike being tells her that she is ideal and does a lot of things to convince her that what they say is true, such as performing miracles or telling her things about herself that she thought no one besides her knew, or something like that, she still wouldn't be able to have rational certainty.

I don't think that this is an obviously plausible position. Christensen thinks that ideal agents can never be certain in their own ideality for the same reason that he thinks they (and we) can never be rationally certain in logical truths such as *everything is self-identical*. But, as I mentioned

in Section 9.2, it is surely a downside of the view that we cannot be certain that *everything is self-identical*. If we want to avoid this result and are not sufficiently compelled by Christensen's arguments in favor of it, then we will also avoid the conclusion that ideality is unknowable in principle.

10.3 Accepting Knowability

Let's suppose that what the evidence rationalizes is always knowable in principle. Could ideal agents fail to know what their evidence rationalized nonetheless?

Let's revisit the case in which Ida knows that she's an ideal agent but fails to know what her evidence rationalizes. This presupposes that ideality is knowable in principle. As I argued above, she could use her beliefs in conjunction with the fact that she's ideal to figure out what the evidence supports. This is straightforward as long as the case is not permissive. The complexity arises when it comes to permissive cases. The result that I need for my argument is that if the case is permissive, Ida will be able to figure out that e rationalizes *p* and rationalizes not-*p*.

How could she figure it out? The thought is that rather than introspecting and examining her beliefs, she could introspect and examine her dispositions. She could figure out that *e* rationalizes *p* and rationalizes not-*p* by becoming aware of her disposition to go either way (meaning her disposition to hold either belief). She would feel equally strongly pulled in both directions.

Objection 1: An ideal agent need not have a disposition to go either way in such a case, but just to go at least one way. Imagine that we have an ideal agent with a quirky disposition. She is

disposed to believe *p* in a permissive case as opposed to not-*p*. Her beliefs are nonetheless perfectly consistent with the requirements of rationality. If she introspects, she will become aware of her (quirky) disposition to believe *p*. She will therefore not see that the case is permissive.

Response: Imagine that we have an ideal agent with no quirky disposition. This agent can introspect and come to realize that she is pulled no more strongly in one direction than in the other. We can simply run the argument for a non-quirky ideal agent. Moreover, I find it strange that being quirkily disposed could change what it is rational for an ideal agent (or anyone) to believe. Perhaps the only work that the quirky disposition is doing is that of blocking knowledge of what the evidence rationalizes (as opposed to rationalizing one doxastic state over another). But if we accept this, then it seems like we think that the quirkily disposed ideal agent is defective in some way and that there is a more complete story about the evidence that she lacks access to.

Objection 2: In this version of the argument—which is meant to deal with an objection—the ideal agent knows that she's an ideal agent. Although this might resolve the one issue, it raises a further issue with Premise 1. If Ida knows that she's an ideal agent, her evidence is different from the previously stipulated evidence of ideal agents. She therefore never has only $e + R_{Ideal}$, but always $e + R_{Ideal} + A$, where $e + R_{Ideal} + A$ is $e + R_{Ideal}$ plus the fact that she's an ideal agent. This version of the argument makes premise 1 even more contentious: if the ideal agent knows that she's ideal, then her evidence is even more different from our evidence. In order for the argument to work, we'd have to argue that $e + R_{Ideal} + A$ support the same doxastic states as $e + R_{Ideal}$. But this seems wrong.

Response: Finding out that she is an ideal agent is a way of getting higher-order evidence. In this sense, it is not a problem: it is a way of getting $e + R$, and I have already argued extensively that e and $e + R$ support the same first-order doxastic state with respect to p. So, any problem that it poses must be a result of its first-order evidential features. Here is one such problem: $e + R_{Ideal} + A$ supports belief in a first order claim that her original evidence did not support (or did not support to the same degree). Namely, $e + R_{Ideal} + A$ supports the belief that there is at least one ideal agent. This is both problematic in itself and because of further issues that it gives rise to.

It is problematic in itself because according to the way the argument is now written, stipulating that the ideal agent has $e + R_{Ideal} + A$ leaves it open that there are permissive cases with respect to the proposition *there is at least one ideal agent*. This is because it is consistent with the argument that there are evidential situations that rationalize more than one doxastic attitude towards the proposition *there is at least one ideal agent*.

The further issues that it gives rise to are as follows. The spirit of Premise 1 in combination with White's Claim is that it should be possible to have the "ideal agent analogue" of exactly my evidence, for instance, and that these two bodies of evidence should support the same doxastic states. Since we are dealing with a modification of the argument that involves the ideal agent having $e + R_{Ideal} + A$, we need to ask whether it is plausible that this supports the same thing as e. One concern is that finding out that she's ideal—insofar as this is construed as first order evidence—might raise her credence in weird or unexpected happenings. Presumably finding out that you are an ideal agent is strange and unexpected news.[35] This would mean that $e + R_{Ideal}$ and $e + R_{Ideal} + A$ support different doxastic states.

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[35] Perhaps we could stipulate that the first thing she learns is that she's ideal, and then she goes on to get the rest of the evidence. Maybe when I imagine myself learning that I'm ideal and questioning everything, that's just because there's an element of surprise.

But, as Christensen (2010) points out, we can differentiate between the aspects of an ideal agent's doxastic state that constitute ideal rationality and those that are "mere side-effects of the idealization." It seems to me that the belief that there is at least one ideal agent is a side-effect of the idealization. I think that we can discount it and its side-effects for this reason.

We can reformulate the argument to accommodate this. Below is a modified Premise 1, White's Claim (unmodified) and an extra premise.

P1*: For any permissive case (i.e. a body of evidence, e, that is permissive with respect to at least some proposition, p), known or unknown, there is some possible ideal agent who could find herself with $e + R_{Ideal} + A$, which is $e + R_{Ideal}$ plus the fact that she is ideal.

White's Claim: $e + R_{Ideal}$, where R_{Ideal} is conclusive, non-misleading higher-order evidence about what e supports concerning p, supports the same doxastic state as e with respect to p.

Extra Premise (EP): $e + R_{Ideal}$ and $e + R_{Ideal} + A$ rationalize the same relevant doxastic states

To review, the justification for EP is as follows. Anything rationalized by $e + R_{Ideal} + A$ that is not also rationalized by $e + R_{Ideal}$ is a product of either (1) a side-effect of the idealization (such as the belief that there is at least one ideal agent, and the consequences of this) or (2) higher-order evidence. Products of (1) can be dismissed as side-effects of idealization. Products of (2) are unproblematic because, as I argue, e and $e + R_{Ideal}$ rationalize the same doxastic states.

There is a second issue: that one is ideal cannot be known a priori. So, we cannot stipulate a case in which Ida has the same evidence as me or you except that she knows that she's ideal. She must instead have $e + R_{Ideal} + A + B$, where that includes, on top of everything else, evidence B, that would make it rational for her to believe that she's ideal. It is an open question whether there could

be any such *B*. But, if there is, that evidence would likely change what it's rational for her to believe about other things. It would affect her doxastic state concerning first-order matters. Perhaps there is some solution available, but even if there is not, the Permissivist is still limited in her success here. This is for the following reasons. First, suppose that evidence *B* necessarily has far-reaching ramifications for her doxastic state. In that case, it seems that there is no neat correspondence between the rational doxastic state of an ordinary agent with evidence *e* in any given permissive case and an ideal agent with evidence $e + R_{Ideal} + A + B$. There is no particular reason to suppose that *e* supports the same doxastic states—or even the same relevant doxastic states—as $e + R_{Ideal} + A + B$. The argument then fails. However, this is hardly a victory for the Permissivist: it is strange to be committed to the view that whether or not Permissivism is true— or even which cases are permissive—turns on the issue of how the possible evidence for ideality ramifies in one's doxastic state. For, suppose that it turns out that evidence *B* does not ramify widely in one's doxastic state. There will then be many (alleged) permissive cases in which the *relevant* evidence in *e* is identical to that of $e + R_{Ideal} + A + B$. That is, it may be that evidence *B* is simply irrelevant to the question of whether *p* in most cases. The result is that my argument applies here and any such case is not permissive.

I will offer one last speculative thought. For each permissive case, consider every possible set of evidence that would rationalize belief in ideality. Unless there is something else that all of those have in common (i.e. something that they all rationalize—or rationalize to the same degree— besides the proposition in question), then for any given permissive case, there's no set of evidence that necessarily goes along with having a rational belief (or rational certainty) that one is ideal. And, if that's right, then maybe there's a way of thinking about having rational belief in ideality without taking evidence *B* into consideration.

11   Conclusion

We have been on the lookout for a viable version of Permissivism. As I argued in Chapter One, Standards Permissivism already comes with a commitment to Unacknowledged Permissivism—as well as to a whole host of other problems. It looked as though Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism might have been a solution: it was on no worse footing than Standards Permissivism, and avoided the problems that Standards Permissivists face. However, I have argued here that it is not viable, and that Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism is false. This is significant, as Unacknowledged Simple Permissivism appeared to be the better of the two options for avoiding the arbitrariness objection to Permissivism. I have also argued that a general principle about higher-order evidence inspired by White's Claim is true. Although I did this in the service of making the first argument, this second argument has independent import.

Chapter 3: A New Arbitrariness Puzzle for Standards Permissivism

Abstract: Standards Permissivism is a version of Permissivism according to which what it is rational for a subject to believe is determined by her evidence and her epistemic standard. A major desideratum of the view is avoidance of the arbitrariness that other Permissivist views face. In Chapter One I present what I take to be the best available account of the normative force of standards. Here I will argue that even with the best possible rendering, a new sort of arbitrariness worry arises. In particular, this arbitrariness arises when a subject mistakenly forms a belief that is inconsistent with her standard in a permissive case. I argue that the Standards Permissivist lacks the resources to provide a satisfactory solution in such a case. The view therefore faces a new arbitrariness puzzle.

1   Introduction

In this paper, I argue that on the most plausible way of understanding the epistemic standards view, a new arbitrariness puzzle arises. The epistemic standard is supposed to perform a certain epistemological function: bind the subject to a single doxastic response to the evidence. This is the mechanism by which the view manages to avoid the charge of arbitrariness. I argue that in certain cases of incoherence, the standard cannot perform this function. Specifically, in permissive cases such that one forms a belief that p that is inconsistent with one's standard, it will be arbitrary whether one revises the belief that p or revises the standard. The Standards Permissivist is therefore faced with arbitrariness after all.

Before we can get into the details of why this is the case, let us review how the epistemic standards picture is supposed to go. A standard is a function from bodies of evidence to doxastic states. To have a standard is to take it to be truth-conducive. In Chapter One, I argue that having a standard is a matter of believing that it is truth-conducive. This is because the only plausible

103

account of normative force requires the belief account.[36] The belief account also allows for a more straightforward formulation of the new arbitrariness puzzle.

One is rationally required to adhere to one's own standard. To believe in accordance with one's standard is to adopt the doxastic state that one's standard maps one's total evidence to. For instance, if my standard maps total evidence *e* to doxastic state *d*, then if I have total evidence *e,* I am then rationally required to adopt *d*.

It is worth noting that there are further issues concerning the precise form that this might take. For the purposes of stating the new arbitrariness puzzle, I will here assume that the standard is had by having a set of beliefs. [37] The format of the standard would therefore resemble a list of beliefs: (1) *concerning whether* p, the *maximally truth conducive doxastic response to total evidence* e *is believing p*, (2) *concerning whether q, the maximally truth-conducive doxastic response to total evidence* e *is believing* not-q, and so on. In other words, for each body of total evidence, there is a belief concerning the maximally truth-conducive doxastic attitude toward any particular proposition.

2　Breaching the Standard

On the standards picture, conformity to one's standard is a requirement of rationality. As such, failure to adhere to one's standard constitutes a mistake. If I fail to adopt the doxastic state that my

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[36] A version of my puzzle still arises if standards are understood as dispositions. The Standards Permissivist is committed to thinking that somehow or other the standard exerts normative force. Explaining this may prove more difficult on a dispositional account. However, if standards are indeed dispositions, then standards qua dispositions must exert normative force. The possibility of being in a state with conflicting normative directions is therefore still possible. Moreover, any view on which standards exert normative force via coherence requirements will face a similar challenge.

[37] This assumption is made because I need some account to work with for my argument. It doesn't matter for my purposes how we conceptualize the precise format (i.e., whether it is a set of beliefs, one very long belief, etc.). The phenomenon in question concerns belief about the relation between evidence and conclusion, so the new arbitrariness puzzle will be generated regardless of format.

standard maps my total evidence to, then I have made a rational error. Cases in which this sort of mistake results in an incoherence present an interesting challenge for the Standards Permissivist. These are cases such that I retain my standard, but mistakenly adopt a belief that is inconsistent with my standard. To see what I have in mind, consider the following. My standard, *S*, maps total evidence *e* to doxastic state *d*. Doxastic state *d* includes belief that *p*. I have evidence *e*, but I mistakenly adopt doxastic state *d'*, which is exactly like *d* except that instead of including belief that *p*, it includes belief that not-*p*. So, instead of believing *p*, I mistakenly believe not-*p*.

In such a case, there are two corrective options: either change one's belief to conform with one's standard, or change one's standard to conform with one's belief.[38] You might be wondering the following: isn't it obvious that we ought to revise the mistaken belief rather than revise the standard? I claim that Standards Permissivism lacks the resources to secure this result. If there is no principled way for the Standards Permissivist to maintain that we must revise the belief rather than the standard, then the view faces an arbitrariness worry of its own.

3   New Arbitrariness Puzzle

3.1   The Argument

I argue that there are at least some cases in which arbitrariness arises on Standards Permissivism. My argument is as follows:

(1) The requirement to be coherent with one's current perspective normatively binds a subject to her epistemic standard[39]

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[38] In Section 6, I consider what might be said about a third option: revising both the standard and the belief. This amounts to suspension of judgment about both. I don't think this is a promising solution.

[39] This assumes that the standard in question is good. The Standards Permissivist will claim that a subject is not bound to a bad standard.

(2) If (1) is true, then there are at least some cases in which one holds a belief inconsistent with one's standard such that one is not uniquely bound to one's standard (i.e. the normative force of the standard fails in certain cases of incoherence)

(3) If there are cases in which the normative force of the standard fails, then arbitrariness results

(C) Standards Permissivism admits of a new arbitrariness worry

Argument for (1)

Without a way of explaining the rational requirement to adhere to one's standard, the view has no principled way of avoiding arbitrariness. But, the belief-account provides such a way. Moreover, as I argue in Chapter One, the belief-account provides the only viable way. Beliefs, against the background of other rational requirements, are capable of exerting their own rational pressure. The ability of beliefs to exert particular rational requirements has its origin in coherence constraints and the requirement to use one's current perspective. Together, these amount to the requirement to be coherent with one's current perspective. As such, epistemic standards get their normative force over an individual in virtue of their status as beliefs and the requirement to be coherent with one's current perspective. Although all beliefs impose these rational constraints, we are concerned with the class of beliefs whose rational status is not dependent upon the evidence, since standards must be able to vary independently of the evidence.

Argument for (2)

Suppose that there is a subject who has, as part of her epistemic standard, the belief that *concerning whether* p, *the maximally truth conducive doxastic response to total evidence* e *is believing* p. Let us call this belief *S*. Suppose further that she makes an error in reasoning, and as a result, believes

not-p, despite having belief *S* and total evidence *e*. She is now in an incoherent doxastic state. For the sake of simplicity, let us suppose that this is the only incoherence in her doxastic state.

The requirement to be coherent with her current perspective no longer holds with respect to whether *p*. This is because her current perspective on the matter is incoherent. But, she is still rationally required to be coherent, and so in order for her to correct the situation, she must minimally return to a coherent state. Holding the unproblematic portion of her doxastic state fixed, there are two ways to do this: either she could revise the belief that not-*p* (and start believing *p*) or she could revise the belief that *S* (and start believing *S',* where *S'* recommends belief that not-*p*).

Suppose that the incoherence arises concerning a case that is not permissive. That means that any subject with evidence *e* is rationally required to form doxastic state *d* (believing *p*, for example). In this case, the following (*S*) is part of the standard: *concerning whether* p, *the maximally truth conducive doxastic response to total evidence* e *is believing* p. Because this is not a permissive case, any good standard will contain *S*. When the subject becomes incoherent by believing *S* and not-*p*, there are, once again, two salient ways in which the subject can become coherent: abandon belief that not-*p* in favor of believing *p*, or abandon belief that *S* in favor of belief in *S'*. In this case, the Standards Permissivist will say that we should not abandon belief in *S* in favor of *S'*, because doing so would amount to adopting a bad standard.

Consider the analogous permissive case. There is nothing compelling that we can appeal to in order to secure the same result as in the impermissive case. From the point of view outside of any standard, believing *p* is permissible and believing not-*p* is permissible. This is the case because holding the evidence fixed, there is some good standard that rationally requires belief that *p*, and there is some good standard that rationally requires belief that not-*p*.

I claim that the Standards Permissivist is saddled with the conclusion that there are ways of being incoherent such that it is permissible to choose either corrective option. In the case mentioned above, she could either revise the belief that not-*p* (and start believing *p*) or she could revise the belief that *S* (and start believing *S'*). Because the case is permissive, there is a good epistemic standard that is identical to the subject's standard except that instead of *s* it contains the analogue *S'*, which is *concerning whether* p, *the maximally truth conducive doxastic response to total evidence* e *is to believe not*-p.

The reason that Standards Permissivism must regard either corrective option as permissible is that coherence constraints are perfectly symmetrical. If *p* coheres with *q*, then *q* coheres with *p*. Similarly, if *p* is incoherent with *q*, then *q* is incoherent with *p*. The requirement is just to be coherent; there is no further specification as to how to do it. When there are two ways to achieve coherence (such as giving up one of two beliefs), there is no purely coherence-based reason to pick one option over the other. If we accept that coherence constraints combined with the requirement to use one's current perspective are the only thing normatively binding a subject to her standard, then once the current perspective becomes incoherent, each corrective option is equally permissible and there is no reason to pick one over the other.

We can also think about it in this way: from the perspective of the *S*-belief, *p* is false, and so believing *p* is not truth-conducive. The perspective of the *S*-belief therefore recommends that the subject maintain her belief that *S* and abandon her belief that *p* (adopting instead the belief that not-*p*). However, there is another equally weighty perspective: that of the *p*-belief. From the perspective of the *p*-belief, the *S*-belief is wrong and should be replaced with the *S'*-belief. The subject has both of these incompatible perspectives simultaneously, and so neither belief is privileged on the basis of being part of the subject's perspective.

Argument for (3)

If the standards account is to succeed in avoiding arbitrariness as it does in ordinary cases, then we ought to be able to appeal to the fact that *S* is part of the subject's epistemic standard in order to justify a requirement to revise the *p*-belief rather than the *S*-belief. However, because the two belief-perspectives are on a par, we cannot do this. There is a rational requirement to be coherent, and there are two incompatible ways of resolving the incoherence. Since there is no epistemic reason to ultimately favor one option over the other, the choice is arbitrary.

4   How Bad is Arbitrariness?

4.1   Recap

Supposing the above is correct, how bad is this result for the Standards Permissivist? To review, the problem is that the same standard and body of evidence pair sometimes licenses more than one doxastic response. Recall that the standard was posited in order to avoid arbitrariness. The idea was that as long as the evidence was the sole determinant of the rationality of a doxastic state, then the Permissivist would be susceptible to the arbitrariness objection. The Standards Permissivist attempts to avoid the problem by positing epistemic standards as a second factor upon which the rational status of doxastic states depends. As such, a single body of evidence does not—on its own—license more than one rational response. Instead, a body of evidence licenses a rational response only in combination with an epistemic standard. According to the view, if we hold fixed the evidence and the standard, then only a single doxastic response is warranted. Arbitrariness is therefore avoided. However, if my argument is correct, then the envisioned mapping from standard and evidence pairs to unique doxastic states is not achieved. The epistemic standard is therefore

not as powerful as the Standards Permissivist might like, since it falters in certain cases of incoherence.

The case is structurally analogous to White's belief-inducing pill argument. In White's case, you have no reason to expect that looking at the evidence will get you to a true belief. You therefore ought to give up your belief. But this is inconsistent with Permissivism. It seems that the Permissivist must endorse a kind of arbitrariness on which it is acceptable to maintain one's belief despite recognizing that it is no more likely to be true than false. Similarly, in the case I raise, you have no reason to think that *p* is more likely to be true than not-*p* (and the same goes for *s* versus *s*'). So, from your own perspective, you have no reason to follow your standard rather than to modify it in accord with your conflicting belief that *p*. If you have no reason to think that following your standard is more likely to generate a true belief in such cases, then we are back where the original belief-inducing pill argument left us, at least with respect to such cases of incoherence. That is, it seems that you ought to suspend judgment over both the *p*-belief and *s*-belief. But, as I will explain below, this is inconsistent with Standards Permissivism. Since Standards Permissivism was posited to deal with White's arbitrariness objection, if there are cases in which the standard cannot secure a non-arbitrary solution, then the original problem remains partially unsolved.

Moreover, the Permissivist is committed to thinking that there's no way out: in the sort of case that I raise, there's nothing that's the uniquely rational thing to do. Or, at least, the Standards Permissivist has no basis for claiming that any one thing is the thing to do. It therefore looks as though the Permissivist has to say "just do something." But the problem is not merely practical. It exhibits the same kind of arbitrariness as does maintaining belief in the belief-inducing pill case. That is, in such a case, the Permissivist must accept that just picking a belief at random is an

acceptable thing to do. The point, of course, is that there is something wrong with maintaining belief despite knowing perfectly well that it was caused by the belief-inducing pill, and is therefore no more likely to be true than false. The same goes for the case that I raise. The subject in question has no reason to prefer—on the basis of truth-conduciveness—one belief over the other.

One might worry that we could come up with similar situations even if uniqueness is true. For instance, consider cases of rational toxicity and higher order evidence.[40] In such cases, I draw some conclusion rationally. I also have misleading evidence that I've been irrational. How do I accommodate this? If I come to doubt the conclusion because I think I am on drugs, for instance, then I'm not doing justice to the evidence I have which really does support my conclusion. On the other hand, if I just believe what I believe, then I'm not doing justice to the higher-order evidence that I have. This is plausibly an epistemic dilemma: you have these epistemic obligations and you can't meet them all. There is no obvious thing to do here, and there seems to be something defective about choosing either option. Is this an arbitrariness worry? I think not.[41] But even if it were, it wouldn't lessen the upshot of the arbitrariness objection I raise against Standards Permissivism. This is because Standards Permissivism is motivated by the desire to avoid arbitrariness, and my claim is that it doesn't manage to do this. The motivation is therefore undermined. This point holds whether or not there is arbitrariness on other views.

4.2   What Should the Permissivist Say?

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[40] See Christensen (2016).

[41] The worry here is that there doesn't seem to be a right thing to do: you violate some norm either way. Suspending judgement doesn't solve the problem either—you also violate a norm should you do this. Someone might still note that nonetheless, in such cases, you still have to do something, and this choice will be arbitrary because there are competing concerns. That might be true. But in cases of arbitrariness worries, the fact that the options are arbitrary is used to establish that picking either option would be defective. In this case, the defectiveness of the options precedes the fact that either choice would be arbitrary. It is the defectiveness of the options that makes the choice arbitrary rather than vice-versa. The problem therefore doesn't have the same structure, and the potential arbitrariness doesn't seem to be adding anything.

There are three ways for the Standards Permissivst to go here. I will consider what might be said in favor of each one. All three options strike me as unsatisfactory.

Option 1: The only rationally permissible option is to stick with your standard.

Option 2: Neither option is rationally permissible. Suspension of judgement is the uniquely rational option.

Option 3: Both options are rationally permissible. Arbitrariness is just something we accept.

The next three sections will address each objection in turn.

5   You Have to Stick with Your Standard

The Standards Permissivist might respond by maintaining that the only rational option is to stick with your standard. In this section I consider three motivating thoughts for this position.

5.1   Unacknowledged Permissivism

Objector: If the Standards Permissivist view in question is Unacknowledged Standards Permissivism, then there will be no arbitrariness of this sort. The subject will be thoroughly unaware that any other standard is permissible, and so will never have occasion to make a choice between her standard and some other permissible standard, no matter how similar that other standard is to her own. Because her standard is immodest, she doesn't recognize—and, indeed, cannot rationally recognize—any other standard as equally good. She believes that she has the uniquely right standard, so from her own perspective it would appear that any modification to it would leave her epistemically worse off. This is why the Unacknowledged Standards Permissivist avoids such an objection.

Response: It is important to explicitly consider the case of the Unacknowledged Standards Permissivist. I argue in Chapter One that all Standards Permissivists are committed to Unacknowledged Standards Permissivism, so the point is especially salient. However, the arbitrariness problem that I raise here is equally a problem for the Unacknowledged Standards Permissivist. It doesn't matter that the subject cannot rationally believe that any other standard is acceptable. In fact, it was never part of the case that it was believed, rationally or otherwise, that other standards were permissible. The important thing is that there is, in fact, some other nearby permissible standard such as I describe. All of the other work is done by the fact that the subject in question has an incoherent perspective. The way the objector presents the issue doesn't do justice to the idea that the subject actually believes the thing that is inconsistent with her standard. The fact that the subject is unaware of the existence of other rational standards doesn't matter, because in some sense—in virtue of having the conflicting stray belief—she thinks her standard is wrong. Of course, she equally thinks that the belief is wrong. But, the standard is just a set of beliefs. No part of the standard is any more powerful than any other ordinary belief. To the extent that having a set of beliefs (a standard) can provide normative force, having a conflicting belief can destroy that normative force.

5.2   Changing Standards Reduces Overall Coherence

Objector: The tradeoff between belief that *S* and belief that *p* is not symmetrical, because giving up a part of my current standard will make the resultant doxastic state less coherent. There are two reasons for this. First, it will be less coherent because I will have a less coherent standard. This is because my current standard strikes a delicate balance: all of the parts of the standard cohere with each other. Disturbing one part of the standard will affect the integrity of the standard as a whole. Secondly, it will be less coherent since the beliefs that I formed using the old standard will not

cohere quite as well with the revised standard. This is because my current doxastic state, if I am rational, coheres with my standard. However, in this case, my doxastic state is finely calibrated to the old standard. Preservation of overall coherence therefore tells in favor of privileging one's standard.

Response: The objector's claim that the revised standard will be less coherent overall presupposes an implausible view of standards. It has the consequence that the only permissive cases are ones in which the subjects in question have radically different standards from one another: a few tweaks to one could not produce the other. This is counterintuitive because we do not want to rule out the possibility of permissive cases such that two people with the same evidence roughly agree, but rationally differ with respect to a few minor issues. To the extent that there are similar acceptable standards, it makes sense to think that those standards have parts that can be exchanged without affecting the quality of the standard. Since the candidate new standard is just as good by stipulation, it is not the case that revising the standard will produce a less coherent standard. To reject this, we could suppose that all good standards are very different from one another. However, this strikes me as inconsistent with Permissivist intuitions and rather ad hoc.

The objector also claims that the beliefs formed using the old standard will cohere less well with the revised standard. This isn't right, since the cases I have in mind are ones that by stipulation concern only an isolated portion of the standard and corresponding doxastic state (i.e. the belief that *S* versus the belief that *p*).

5.3   Standards are Similar to Values

Objector: Consider cases in which we hold certain values. It seems like the fact that we hold a particular value is sometimes reason to act in a way consistent with that value. Moreover, it seems

like holding a certain value sometimes provides reason not to abandon that value. For instance, I may value particular people. The fact that I value a particular person seems like it gives me at least some reason—other things being equal—to both act in a way consistent with my valuing that person and to continue to value them. Consider another case in which I especially value some virtue, e.g. honesty. It seems like holding this value would give me at least some reason—once again, other things being equal—to act in a way consistent with this value and to continue to hold this value. To fail to do this in either of these cases seems bad. That is, it seems bad to abandon the things that one values without special reason.

The epistemic standard seems like the sort of thing that we ought to regard in a similar way. My standard is an integral part of the way that I see the world. It's not that the standard is one of my values. Rather, much like certain values, the standard constitutes an important feature of me that ought to be respected in a similar way. The same cannot be said for the conflicting belief that *p*. Since it is worse to revise my standard than to revise the belief that *p*, the choice is not arbitrary.

Response: The first thing to note is that someone might have a strong emotional attachment to a certain belief. This in itself might provide reason not to abandon that belief. However, the reason so provided would not be epistemic. Strong commitment in this sense is therefore orthogonal to the issue.

The question, then, is whether there is something analogous in the epistemic realm. Recall that we are working with the belief account of epistemic standards. This objection therefore relies on the thought that certain beliefs, i.e. those that constitute the standard, enjoy a privileged status much in the same way that our values do. To the extent that the objection above is right, it seems like the following is also right: the more deeply that we hold a value—other things being equal—

115

the worse it would be to act in a way inconsistent with that value or to abandon it. Beliefs, on the other hand, do not seem to exhibit the analogous feature. There are, of course, features that make it more or less bad to abandon a belief. But I take it that the standard features—for instance, the degree to which a belief is evidentially supported—are not what the objector has in mind. The objector is positing a further feature that cannot be reduced to familiar reasons for or against maintaining a belief. So, let us see whether we can make sense of this further feature—some sort of closeness to our epistemic hearts.

Some philosophers think that we can understand what it is to hold a desire more or less deeply by appealing to iterative structure. Suppose that I desire x, and desire that I desire x. It seems that x is a more deeply held desire than y, where I desire y but do not desire that I desire y.[42] On certain views of valuing, second-order desires of this sort are values.[43] Perhaps we could apply the iterative strategy to values themselves in order to account for more or less deeply held values. For instance, suppose that I both value x and value valuing x. It seems like x is, at least plausibly, a more deeply held value than y, where I value y, but do not value valuing y.

Can the same iterative strategy be used to produce the sought-after epistemic analogue? It doesn't seem like it. Suppose that you believe p, and you believe that you believe p. It doesn't seem that p is a more deeply held belief than q, where you believe q, but do not believe that you believe q. That is, it does not seem that meeting this condition provides epistemic reason to privilege those beliefs.

Perhaps closeness to our epistemic hearts can be understood in a different way: strength of disposition to believe. There are beliefs that are harder than others to get rid of. We can imagine someone with unreasonably low or unreasonably high self-esteem such that beliefs about whether

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[42] See, e.g., Frankfurt (1971) and Lewis (1989).
[43] See Smith, Lewis, and Johnston (1989).

people like her are not appropriately responsive to the evidence. But this notion also fails to serve the purposes of the objector. For reasons discussed in Chapter One, a disposition to φ often fails to ground a requirement to φ. If this is such a case—as it seems it is—then the strength of the disposition will be of no consequence.

I have not ruled out that there is any such thing as closeness to our epistemic hearts, but the search does not look promising. Let us put this aside and assume that there is some such thing. It might be tempting to think that changing your standard is like changing the rules for yourself in a pervasive way. This need not be the case. You need only change the rules for yourself—assuming that you revise *S* rather than *p*—with respect to proposition *p* and evidence *e*. The details of the change will depend on what the right format is, but this choice will make no functional difference to the extent of the rule change. It would be difficult to maintain that every candidate isolated belief is relevantly analogous to one's values.[44] We typically think of one's values as being more general or broader in scope than something as narrow and isolated as the relation between evidence *e* and proposition *p*. So even if there were an epistemic analogue of the deeply held value, it is not plausible that the matter of *p* versus *S* would be one that was especially close to our epistemic hearts.

6   The Uniquely Rational Option is to Suspend Judgment

Objector: There is no arbitrariness because the uniquely rational response is for the subject to suspend judgment as to whether *p* and as to whether *S*. In realizing that she has two incompatible beliefs and nothing to serve as a tie-breaker, she ought to reduce confidence in both *p* and *S*. It would not be permissible to resolve the conflict by giving up one of the beliefs.

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[44] I say "every" because we only need a single case for my argument to be successful.

Response: There are a couple of things to be said about this proposal. The first thing to say is that many will find this to be an unattractive view for reasons independent of the Permissivism debate. The view has the consequence that whenever you make a mistake—albeit in a specific way—you are rationally required to suspend judgement.

The second thing is that this solution is inconsistent with a major commitment of Standards Permissivism. Suppose that the objector is right that the uniquely correct solution is to suspend judgement as to whether *p* and as to whether *S*. The subject now has an incomplete standard. Presumably, the Standards Permissivist thinks that in the event that you have an incomplete standard, it is permissible to adopt a stronger standard with respect to that incomplete portion. If this is right, then in this case it is permissible to go from suspending judgement as to whether *S* to instead holding the stronger standard, *S*. Option one is therefore inconsistent with the position that it is permissible to adopt a stronger standard in the event that one lacks a standard.

7   Both Options are Rationally Permissible

The third route that the Standards Permissivist might take is to maintain that both options are rationally permissible. I consider two ways that the Standards Permissivist might motivate this position below.

7.1   Rules of Rationality Apply Only in Good Cases

Objector: The rules of rationality concern only transitions from good states to other good states. The rules make few, if any, recommendations if one is in a bad state. It is therefore not a problem for Standards Permissivism if an incoherent doxastic state faces arbitrariness.

Response: Perhaps that is right. Maybe it would be too demanding or too ambitious to expect good answers about what to do in the case I raise. However, it doesn't seem that this is uncontroversial. After all, when it comes to certain kinds of bad epistemic states, there are clear answers about what should be done. Consider the example of a subject who has a bunch of evidence, *e*, but fails to assimilate *e* or update her beliefs accordingly. There seems to be a clear answer concerning what she should do. Namely, she should update her beliefs in response to *e*.

There are many possible irrational states that we regard in a similar way. In fact, we often do not think that simply because someone is in a bad state, the recommendation to enter into any good state whatsoever is all that the rules of rationality can provide. This is not to say that there aren't some cases in which the rules of rationality seem to be of much less help. But it is not a general truth about the rules of rationality that they concern only transitions from good states.

7.2   Arbitrariness of Selecting a Standard

Objector: A subject must acquire an epistemic standard. When it comes to the selection of a standard, the subject has no standard to guide her. In the absence of something like a standard, the choice is arbitrary. There is no unique solution for someone who lacks a standard; the solution would be to acquire some good standard and then adhere to it. Because there are multiple good standards, there are multiple ways in which this can be done. If we are willing to tolerate the arbitrariness of standard selection, then we should not be disturbed by arbitrariness that arises in cases of incoherence. The arbitrariness in cases of incoherence is less extensive than the arbitrariness of standard choice, since there are only two (rather than, presumably, very many) permissible options.

Response: While this point merits consideration, the two cases have significant differences. Suppose that a subject gets hit on the head and wakes up the next morning with a new standard. What does the Standards Permissivist say she ought to do? According to the Standards Permissivist, what it is rational for the subject to believe has changed. This is because what it is rational to believe is determined by what standard a subject has. As a result, the subject is now bound by the new standard, provided that it is good. Some might find this to be an odd feature of Standards Permissivism. Nevertheless, that is the view: your previous standards have no hold over you if you happen to have changed standards.

The puzzle presented by the arbitrariness of standard selection is best understood as a backwards-looking issue. The worry is that I can look back and see that it was arbitrary that I ended up with my particular standard, and recognize that I could have just as easily had a different standard. For instance, I may realize that my standard changed as a result of getting hit on the head. We might have the intuition that we are unjustified now because our standards were arbitrarily acquired. This is a kind of challenge that one might raise to the Standards Permissivist, but it is not the one that I am raising.[45]

The arbitrariness worry that I raise for the Standards Permissivist is different: it concerns only what a subject ought to do at the moment she is facing the problem. It is not backwards-looking. It might be true that the standard was acquired arbitrarily, but whether or not that is a problem for the Standards Permissivist is a separate issue. One could come to terms with the backwards-looking puzzle without having thereby resolved the one that I am raising. Moreover, in the case of the backwards-looking worry, if I ask the Standards Permissivist what I ought to do upon realizing that my standard was acquired arbitrarily, she will take the party line: just keep

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[45] For related discussion, see Elga (2008), White (2010), Schoenfield (2014), Vavova (2018), and Schoenfield (forthcoming).

going with the current standard. In contrast, the Standards Permissivist has nothing obvious to say about what I should do when I find myself in the scenario in which I make a mistake and become incoherent with my standard.[46]

The objector might respond further by saying something like this: that's an awkward spot to be in—being in a position where there's no guidance as to what to do—but that's just the position we're in before we have a standard. Although the worry usually manifests itself as a backwards-looking issue, it's not as though we couldn't ask the question of what to do when one lacks a standard.

I agree—it seems like if we were faced with the problem of picking a standard, the Standards Permissivist would have just as little guidance to offer as in the case of incoherence. However, there are still some differences to point out. The first difference is that before you have a standard, it seems that we can't fault the standards machinery for not providing an answer about what to do. After all, you don't have a standard. That is not to say that we couldn't on that basis consider the whole picture defective. Rather, it is to say that the standard hasn't got up and running yet. In contrast, it seems that the lack of guidance in the case of incoherence is a problem with the standards machinery: the subject already had a standard, but something went wrong and now there is no clear way to fix it. A further asymmetry is that when you have no standard, you have nothing at all to go on. When you're incoherent, you have too much to go on. One case involves not having a perspective from which you can think the matter through, while the other case involves having two perspectives that conflict.

Maybe those who take this response to my worry will just say it might be bothersome that in either case the answer is that there is no particular thing to do here, but that's just the way it is.

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[46] Assuming that the case is permissive.

Maybe they're both equally counterintuitive. But at the very least, the oddness arises in different ways, and it isn't obvious that a solution to the one would also be a solution to the other.

8   Conclusion

All three of these approaches strike me as unsatisfactory. There is no obviously good answer on behalf of the Standards Permissivist. The solution with the most plausibility seems to be no solution at all, but rather a restatement of a phenomenon: that both options are permissible. Perhaps there is something to be said on behalf of tolerating this sort of arbitrariness, but it is arbitrariness nonetheless.

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