REPONSIBLE FOR WHAT'S RATIONAL

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Responsible for What's Rational

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Should you believe that *p*? Many epistemologists think you can answer this question by figuring out the answers to two other questions: what information or evidence do you have bearing on whether *p,* and what's the right way for you to interpret and evaluate that evidence? One problem with this proposal is that it seems there *isn't* always some right way for you to interpret and evaluate your evidence. Or rather, the answer to this last question isn't always a *given* one*,* as opposed to one we give ourselves. I suggest that what we should believe, in the sense of what it's rational for us to believe, depends in part on our own commitments as to good ways of interpreting and evaluating evidence. These commitments, I further suggest, are not simply given. At least some of our precise epistemic commitments are things we make and shape. They are also things for which we are responsible.

I offer support for the idea that we are importantly responsible for what it's rational for us to believe over the course of three chapters. First, I call attention to a phenomenon: epistemic underdetermination. In chapter 2, I argue that this phenomenon spoils standard "permissivist" responses to the arbitrariness objection and hence that would-be permissivists should embrace "epistemic existentialism" – a view that entails we have substantial responsibility for what it's rational for us to believe. Finally, in chapter 3, I deal with a primary objection to epistemic existentialism and subjectivist views of rationality in general. I attempt to motivate principled, objective constraints on the sorts of subjective frameworks that can render attitudes rational.

Acknowledgements

Credit for anything good about this dissertation is due to many people other than myself.

I did not come to Rutgers knowing I wanted to write a dissertation on this topic, or even on rationality generally. I did, however, already have a passionate interest in epistemology, ethics, and action theory, which led me to seek out my fantastic committee members, including my deservedly legendary adviser, Ernie Sosa. My standing interest in disagreement and questions about the relevance of perspective in epistemology led me to the literature on permissivism and uniqueness. Ernie patiently waded through this literature with me, helping me to consider the questions through a subtly different, virtue-epistemological lens that was largely absent in the literature. Early conversations with Ruth Chang sparked the question of whether a "hybrid voluntarism" could be maintained in the epistemic domain and how this would interact with the uniqueness/ permissivism debate. Andy Egan helped me draw on practical work on relativism and subjectivism to conceptualize the distinctive challenges for subjectivist views of epistemic rationality and my own views. Susanna Schellenberg helped me identify and better formulate several of the central ideas and principles on which my arguments rely, as well as pressing me on the relation between my thesis and other debates in epistemology. And finally, Roger White, arguably the foremost defender of uniqueness in the literature and the person most responsible for my fascination with the permissivism/uniqueness debate, kindly offered helpfully devastating objections to earlier drafts of these chapters.

This dissertation has provided the opportunity for me to think through and articulate (the beginnings of) positions on intensely interesting personal and philosophical questions – about what we ought to believe and our own role in determining what we ought to believe; about the normative powers of the "will"; about how to conceptualize what's going on in disagreement cases where subjects seem to have fundamentally different perspectives or starting points; and about the relationship between epistemic and

Dedication

To Ryan

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Introduction

Should you believe that *p*? Many epistemologists think you can answer this question by figuring out the answers to two other questions: what information or evidence do you have bearing on whether *p,* and what's the right way for you to interpret and evaluate that evidence? One problem with this proposal is that it seems there *isn't* always some right way for you to interpret and evaluate your evidence. Or rather, the answer to this last question isn't always a *given* one*,* as opposed to one we give ourselves. I suggest that what we should believe, in the sense of what it's rational for us to believe, depends in part on our own commitments as to good ways of interpreting and evaluating evidence. These commitments, I further suggest, are not simply given. At least some of our precise epistemic commitments are things we make and shape. They are also things for which we are responsible.

The thesis that we are partly responsible for what it's rational for us to believe in this way is distinct from more common claims such as that we are (or aren't) responsible for what we in fact believe, or that what we believe is (or isn't) importantly under our control. I maintain that epistemic responsibility runs deeper than our actual attitudes and that we are responsible for the some of the very normative pressures to which we are subject.

This calls for a new way of thinking about what to believe. Questions about what to believe depend in part on a subject's epistemic commitments and values. Moreover, the precise epistemic commitments and values a subject has is, at least in limited ways

and in a limited range of cases, up to that subject. In this way, questions about what to believe depend in part on questions about who to be.

Overview of the dissertation

I offer support for the idea that we are importantly responsible for what it's rational for us to believe over the course of three chapters. These chapters each have the potential to stand alone (if revised), since they make largely separable arguments. But they also support my overarching thesis in cumulative and complementary ways.

First, in chapter 1, I call attention to a phenomenon: "epistemic underdetermination." A case of epistemic underdetermination is one in which there is not a unique rationally recommended (or best-with-respect-to-what-matters-for-rationality) attitude for some subject to take toward some proposition. The existence of this phenomenon is supported by reflection on (i) practical cases in which there is not a unique best action and the relation between the practical and epistemic domains, (ii) the way attitudes are measured or assessed for rationality, given some body of evidence, and (iii) intuitive cases in which it seems there is not one best, most rational way for a subject to respond to her evidence.

I put the phenomenon of epistemic underdetermination to work in my second chapter, where I argue that this phenomenon spoils standard responses to the arbitrariness objection to permissivism. This, in turn, motivates a more radical, responsibility-entailing form of permissivism ("epistemic existentialism"), which *can* handle the arbitrariness objection.

Permissivism, or roughly the view that a body of evidence doesn't always fix a unique, fully rational attitude to take toward any proposition, is widely acknowledged to be a more intuitive view than its rival, uniqueness. We should all *want* to be permissivists, at least initially. (These positions are very tricky to state precisely. This is why I've devoted an appendix to understanding just how to formulate the disagreement.) However, permissivism is plagued by a few objections – most notably, the arbitrariness objection. The arbitrariness objection charges that, according to the permissivist, it can be implausibly arbitrary which particular attitude I have, when I have a rational attitude. For if, as the permissivist claims, multiple maximally-rationally-recommended attitudes can be no better than each other, given my evidence, then no rational person could be guided to the *particular* attitude she adopts in such a situation by epistemic reasons. But then how could she rationally take up this particular attitude, in full sincerity and commitment?

I take this objection very seriously, and indeed I argue it's even trickier to resolve than commonly supposed, given the phenomenon of epistemic underdetermination I advocate in chapter 1. Standard permissivst responses to this objection simply appeal to the idea that we each have subjective *frameworks* that matter to what is rational for us to believe. Perhaps, these responses suggest, we can avoid licensing subjects' picking attitudes arbitrarily, if each subject's framework points her to a unique attitude (albeit one that may differ from the recommended attitude for other subjects). But if there is genuine epistemic underdetermination, this suggestion is false. A subject may face cases in which her framework recommends multiple attitudes and hence there is not just one rationally recommended attitude *for her*.

I then sketch the epistemic existentialist way out of the arbitrariness objection. The epistemic existentialist also accepts the importance of subjective frameworks, to the determination of rational attitudes. But she moreover maintains that (i) subjects' frameworks change over time, (ii) these changes sometimes must occur in ways for which we are responsible, i.e., via agential commitment or else negligence, and (iii) such commitments themselves affect which framework is best for a subject, in voluntarist fashion. This allows the epistemic existentialist to claim that the rational way out of epistemic underdetermination cases is for subjects – not to arbitrarily pick some attitude, but instead – to first commit to a refinement of their frameworks, such that they subsequently recommend some attitude uniquely.

Now, one of the major objections to epistemic existentialism will be that the view absurdly allows subjects to bootstrap their way into, e.g., rationally committing the gambler's fallacy, or rationally projecting grue instead of green. (Indeed, versions of these objections are problems for subjectivist views of rationality in general, of which epistemic existentialism is a radical species.) Therefore, in my third chapter, I attempt to motivate principled, objective constraints on the kinds of subjective frameworks that can render attitudes rational in the first place. This is a way we might put guardrails on epistemic existentialism – not just *any* epistemic commitments can matter to what's fully rational for us to believe, but rather only commitments that are sufficiently responsive to the actual epistemic values (of believing (interesting) truths, avoiding (nontrivial) error, achieving understanding, etc.).

I proceed by taking up a surprisingly neglected metanormative question about epistemic rationality – what's the source of its normativity? That is, whatever the rational

attitudes are, however they do or don't vary across individuals, etc. – why or in virtue of what are they attitudes we are under pressure to have or adopt?

One might think this normative pressure comes simply from *us,* from our frameworks or epistemic commitments. Or one might argue that the normative pressure is purely objective or external – rational attitudes just are ones we should have. I suggest that ultimately a hybrid, "responsivist" source view is preferable. The normativity of rationality comes from the alignment of subjective frameworks with objective epistemic values. This entails that (and helps explain why) *only* objectively good frameworks – or "salutary" frameworks, to use the terminology of chapter 3 – can render attitudes rational.

Limits of scope

Where do these chapters leave us? I will have suggested that would-be permissivists should be attracted to epistemic existentialism, especially in light of epistemic underdetermination cases. I will have attempted to deal with one of the major objections to epistemic existentialism (and subjectivist views of rationality in general), by motivating principled objective constraints on subjective frameworks. Hence, starting from the intuitive appeal of permissivism, I will have supported specifically responsibility-entailing forms such as epistemic existentialism, and I also will have dealt with one major objection to my responsibility thesis.

But many important objections and questions will remain unaddressed or under-addressed. For example, one might object: even once we place objective constraints on legitimate, rationality-conferring frameworks, shouldn't we still be worried about the "bootstrapping" posited by epistemic existentialists? And one might wonder: what

exactly do these epistemic commitments amount to, psychologically, and is it plausible to think we really host such things as frameworks? Moreover, given that I rely heavily on close parallels between the epistemic and practical domains in various places, just what *is* the relation between these domains? What, if anything, separates them? Separately, I will have focused on cases in which we *precisify* or *extend* existing frameworks to settle cases of underdetermination. But might we also have the capacity to outright alter our frameworks? And what special challenges or objections might claiming this stronger capacity meet?

Applications, too, will be neglected. The thesis that we are partly responsible for what it's rational for us to believe is highly suggestive for debates over rational disagreement. Yet I will not have the space to consider explicitly what the epistemic existentialist should say about the appropriate response to disagreeing peers.

Moreover, I will have only very partially canvassed motivations for thinking we are importantly responsible for what it's rational for us to believe. If this thesis is true, as I believe it is, then there may well be many good ways to argue for it. The three chapters here argue for this thesis in an admittedly circuitous fashion, taking up what seem to be underexplored, fruitful questions along the way.

Which brings me to the final sort of limitation I want to highlight. These three chapters are ambitious, in that they raise several novel or underexplored questions. (E.g.: Should we think of the permissivism/uniqueness debate primarily in a value-theoretic or deontic way? What exactly is the relation between an epistemic subject and her framework? What is the source of normativity for epistemic rationality?) These chapters also touch on a host of thorny issues and diverse bodies of literature, including, e.g.,:

imprecise credences, Existentialism, metaethical attitude dependence vs. independence, the individuation of doxastic attitudes, the nature of reasons and rationality, the fundamentality of propositional vs. doxastic justification, and pluralism vs. monism about (epistemic) values. I will not have the space to follow up on all these threads or to try to settle all the questions that I will have raised, *inter alia.*

My hopes are much more modest. First, I hope these chapters can appeal to diverse sensibilities and address a number of important objections to *begin* to motivate the new way of thinking about what to believe I sketched above. Questions about what to believe do, plausibly anyway, partly depend on questions about who to be. Second, I hope to raise or reframe a number of questions at the intersection of ethics, epistemology, and the theory of rationality that deserve more attention.

Chapter 1: Epistemic Underdetermination

*I begin by motivating the existence of a phenomenon: "epistemic underdetermination".
In a case of epistemic underdetermination, there is not exactly one "best" attitude for a
particular subject to take toward some proposition, given her evidence. "Best" here is
understood with respect to what matters for determining the rationality of doxastic
attitudes.*

*In the next chapter, I will argue that a certain, responsibility-entailing form of
permissivism is attractive in light of this phenomenon.*

1.1 Introduction

Is there always exactly one ideally rational[1] doxastic attitude for a particular subject to
take toward a proposition?

Uniqueness theorists and permissivists tend to think about this question by
thinking about a related question: is there always exactly one doxastic attitude a
particular subject is rationally permitted or required to take toward a proposition?[2] But
notice that whereas permission and requirement are clearly deontic notions, the original
question may be understood in a value-theoretic way: Is there always exactly one ideally
rational doxastic attitude – that is, exactly one doxastic attitude that is best or most

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[1] I will be concerned with *epistemic* rationality in particular, except where I specify otherwise. I discuss
relationships between epistemic and practical rationality in section 1.3.
[2] Intrapersonal permissivists say "no", whereas uniqueness theorists say "yes," and interpersonal
permissivists may also say "yes". For defenses of intrapersonal permissivism, see e.g. Dahlback
(forthcoming); Kopec (2015); Schoenfield (forthcoming). I discuss intrapersonal vs. interpersonal
uniqueness/permissivism at length in chapter 2 and in the appendix.

valuable, with respect to whatever matters for determining the rationality of doxastic attitudes?

Answers to this latter question are in principle compatible with different answers to the deontic question. One might in principle conclude that there is always exactly one ideally rational attitude for a particular subject to take and also that subjects are sometimes permitted to take any of multiple attitudes toward a proposition. This might be, for example, because rational permission is a satisficing, rather than a maximizing, affair.[3] Alternatively, it may be that there is not always exactly one ideally rational attitude for a particular subject to take, and yet subjects are never permitted to simply pick any of multiple attitudes. This might be because there are deontic constraints on subjects adopting attitudes, which build in rules for situations in which no or multiple attitudes are ideally rational. In effect, then, considering whether there's always one *best* attitude allows us to temporarily set aside questions about what subjects should *do.* Instead, we can ask about the kinds of situations that a theory of what subjects may do, must address. Do we even *need* a theory of what attitude(s) – if any – subjects may adopt if there are no or multiple attitudes are ideally rational in the sense of being best from the standpoint of epistemic rationality? I will argue that we do.

Reframing the thesis as value-theoretic in this way stands to provide fresh insight into issues related to Uniqueness and permissivism, despite the fact that my thesis may not have straightforward implications for that debate. In particular, reframing the thesis invites reflection on the way doxastic attitudes might be measured or assessed, to

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[3] *Cf.* Enoch (2010: 957).

determine which is/are ideally rational for a subject to take. I begin with such reflections in section 1.2. Reframing the thesis as value-theoretic also makes striking analogies with the practical domain salient, to which I turn in section 1.3.

Consider the position I'll be rejecting, which is seemingly rather commonly accepted: there is always exactly one ideally rational doxastic attitude for a particular subject to take toward a proposition.[4] Though it may of course be extremely difficult or impossible to *tell* which attitude is ideally rational – and indeed, though we may be *permitted* to take any of a number of other attitudes – surely, there *is* always one, very best attitude for a given subject to take toward a proposition. Doxastic attitudes – unlike bales of hay, for Buridan's ass – cannot tie for ideal rationality, for a particular subject. Moreover, doxastic attitudes – unlike, perhaps, possible worlds[5] – cannot fail to have even one maximally good member.

I will suggest that instead that this is dubious; we have reason to think there are some cases where there is not exactly one ideally rational attitude for a particular subject to take toward a proposition. I will call cases where one's evidence together with the normative framework for interpreting and evaluating that evidence do not suffice to single out a single attitude as ideally rational, "epistemic underdetermination" cases. The burden of section 1.3 is to establish that we should positively *expect* there to be some

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[4] Obvious examples include all Uniqueness theorists (see, e.g., White (2014), Greco and Hedden (2017)) and arguably some interpersonal permissivists (see Schoenfield (2014); see also Kopec and Titelbaum (2016), Kelly (2014) for discussion)). However, the tacit orthodoxy extends more broadly. E.g., Christensen (2010) argues that even the best or ideal rational attitude for a subject to take toward a proposition can violate some rational requirement, where higher-order evidence is involved. Yet it is important, according to Christensen, that this position is strictly compatible with there still being some unique best or ideal rational attitude – a thesis admittedly in some tension with his position.
[5] Literature on whether there is a "best of all possible worlds" is extensive. See, e.g., Swinburne (2004) for an argument that there is not.

such cases. I then turn, in sections 1.4 and 1.5, to considering some of the standard sorts of cases motivating permissivism and suggesting that these are (also, or separately) cases of epistemic underdetermination.

I begin in the next section by considering how rational attitudes toward a proposition are determined in general and defining the phenomenon of epistemic underdetermination.

1.2 Epistemic determination and the "rationality function"

It will be helpful to have a way of talking about how doxastic attitudes are measured or assessed to determine which are ideally rational, given a subject, a body of evidence[6], and a proposition under consideration.

I assume – not very controversially – that evidence (dis)confirms various hypotheses or propositions relative to some set of background expectations, policies, or values, which provide a normative, interpretive and evaluative framework for assessing evidential support. This framework for interpreting and evaluating evidence is what does the work of measuring the qualities of attitudes that make for epistemic rationality and assessing/determining ideally rational attitudes for a subject to take toward some proposition under consideration. We can think of this function as composed of two steps: first, measuring the epistemic value of each possible doxastic attitude the subject might

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[6] One might think that 'evidence' is too narrow a conception of what needs to be held fixed, when we talk about how rational attitudes should be determined. In this dissertation I talk as though rational attitudes are determined on the basis of evidence, but everything I say can be understood in a more ecumenical way. One might replace "evidence" with the more unwieldy phrase, "epistemic circumstances."

take toward the proposition at hand, and then, second, selecting the highest-scoring attitude(s) as "best" or "ideally rational."[7]

Now, there is controversy over various aspects of this normative, interpretive and evaluative framework. In particular, the *objectivist* about epistemic rationality holds that a single interpretive and evaluative framework is normative for all individuals, whereas the *subjectivist* holds that different interpretive and evaluative frameworks are normative for different individuals.[8,9] I will call whatever framework that is normative for a particular individual, the *rationality function* for that individual – rationality "function," since it 'takes in' evidential circumstances and outputs sets of ideal, rationally recommended attitudes to take toward propositions under consideration.[10] Objectivists may ignore the specification, "for that individual," since they hold that the same rationality function will be normative for all individuals. (Indeed, I will largely omit the phrase myself, in later sections.) This terminology also helpfully lacks the subjectivist overtones of talk about "frameworks." I want to talk about whatever it is – subjectivist or objectivist in character – that determines maximally good attitudes for a subject, on the basis of her evidence.

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[7] We can also define other epistemic functions. Consider the true belief function, which outputs {Believe that p} just when p is a true proposition. One might try to articulate a thoroughly objective view of epistemic rationality, according to which this *is* the rationality function. But as a matter of fact, "objectivists" about epistemic rationality have something different in mind. They still think that rational attitudes should reflect the (objective) quality of one's evidence rather than the truth value of the proposition in question.

[8] See, e.g., White (2007); Titelbaum (2010). I discuss subjectivism and quote White's characterization in the appendix, section A.3.

[9] Subjectivists, in my terminology, agree with objectivists that there is an objective fact about what rationality function is relevant for some particular subject. See Boghossian (2006), Goldman (2010) for discussion of more radically subjectivist or relativist views.

[10] On "rationally recommended" attitudes, see also chapter 2. There I say that a rationally recommended attitude is one that *could* or *would* be rational.

In addition to the controversy over subjectivism and objectivism, there is disagreement over how to model what we might call the 'mechanics' of the rationality function. One might think the rationality function is constituted by, for example, a set of priors, a set of (weighted) epistemic values or goals, and/or a list of principles or rules. Some ways of thinking about the rationality function will admittedly be more congenial than others, for my argument. (This will be apparent in the next section). But thankfully I don't need to argue for any very specific view. This is, in part, why I have introduced the term "rationality function" instead of talking about sets of "epistemic standards," as many subjectivists do. I want to make a claim about whatever it is that determines rationally recommended attitudes for an individual on the basis of evidence, whether that be objectivist or subjectivist in nature.[11]

Thus, I define epistemic underdetermination in terms of the rationality function. Where the rationality function for a subject outputs a singleton set – where there is just one, best attitude for that subject to take toward a proposition in question, given her total evidence – this is a case of epistemic determination. All other cases are cases of epistemic underdetermination. So, if there are cases in which the rationality function for a subject outputs the null set, or if there are cases in which said rationality function outputs a set of multiple ideally rational attitudes, these will count as cases of epistemic underdetermination.

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[11] Though the term "rationality function" is, to my knowledge, my own, the idea of a total normative framework or rule for interpreting and evaluating evidence is certainly not. One clear example: Christensen (2010) considers the possibility of an "Uber-rule" that would "specify, for every possible evidential situation in which a subject may find herself, what the appropriate doxastic response is(203)."

Clarifications about the nature of doxastic attitudes are in order, before moving on to my suggestion that there are such cases. Officially I hope to remain neutral on the kinds of doxastic attitudes there are: belief/suspension, credences, fragmented states, imprecise states, etc. This makes my argumentative task harder than it might be and makes it necessary to set some boundaries on how these attitudes should be individuated.

First, the kinds of doxastic attitudes that the rationality function outputs should be thought of as complete specifications of the cognitive mental state that is rationally recommended for a subject, with respect to the proposition in question. Say one thinks that subjects can hold both coarse and fine-grained attitudes, and indeed that they can hold both at the same time. Now suppose there is some case in which the ideally rational attitude for a subject to take toward p would be suspension of judgment and also 0.6 credence that p. This is not a case of epistemic underdetermination. Rather, I would say the single, ideally rationally recommended doxastic attitude or for this subject to take toward p is something like suspension-and-0.6-credence. For a case to count as one of epistemic underdetermination, there must either be no ideal attitude to take, or else multiple *competing* ideal attitudes.

More generally, for the purposes of this dissertation I will think of doxastic attitudes as defined by their normative consequences for theoretical and practical reasoning. A doxastic attitude is a state that makes various other inferences and decisions (ir)rational (or (un)justified, or permitted/required/prohibited, etc.) For there to be no single, ideally rationally recommended doxastic attitude for a subject to take toward a proposition is just for there to be no single set of normative consequences for further

theoretical and practical reasoning that would be ideally (epistemically) rational for her to incur.

1.3 Expecting epistemic underdetermination

I will survey two broad types of reasons we may positively expect to find cases of epistemic underdetermination. First, as our value-theoretic framing helps make clear, there are analogues of epistemic underdetermination in the practical domain. Second, common ways of thinking about the rationality function positively suggest this function will sometimes fail to output a singleton set.

Practical analogues

It is a good-making feature of one's theory of rationality (or value, or normativity, or virtue) if it has application to both the epistemic and the practical domains.

One broad source of support for this claim is theoretical, while another is inductive. On the theoretical side, we have first the general theoretical value of *simplicity*, in one's theory of normativity as elsewhere. A theory on which there is epistemic [justification, reasons, value] and also practical [justification, reasons, value], and these exhibit entirely different structural properties in each domain is less simple than a view of the structural properties of justification, reasons, and values *in general,* that has both epistemic and practical applications. There's also the matter of there simply *being* many jointly applicable claims about the epistemic and practical, such that disanalogies between the domains are anomalous. We certainly use similar language and concepts in similar ways to criticize and exhort in each case (e.g., justification, reasonableness, rationality, praiseworthiness, negligence, virtue, culpability). In each case we assume that

believing or acting subjects are evaluable as such, as are their epistemic or practical

doings. Where there *do* seem to be anomalous asymmetries, (What if anything is the

moral/practical equivalent of "knowledge"? Might there be epistemic supererogation?)

we find these interesting or puzzling, and we try to craft theories according to which the

asymmetries either disappear or are well-motivated.[12] For, as Gibbons (2010) notes, the

similarities between the epistemic and practical domains seem amenable to a natural kind

of explanation: these are normative domains that impinge on subjects like us. In contrast,

differences can pose an explanatory challenge:

> It would be very odd if it turned out that practical and theoretical reasons differed
> from each other at this level of abstraction. Reasons to believe are one way, but
> reasons to act are another. I'm not sure it's impossible for practical and theoretical
> reasons to differ in this way. It's just that similarities between practical and
> theoretical reasons have a built-in explanation: they're both reasons. Purported
> differences between practical and theoretical reasons stand in need of explanation
> in a way that similarities don't. (Gibbons 2010: 335)

There are theoretical considerations, then, telling in favor of a unified theory of

the epistemic and the practical – *if* an extensionally adequate such theory is to be had, of

course. But in addition to these, there is also the inductive track record of fruitful

"borrowing" and mutual inspiration between ethicists and epistemologists, especially

over the last half century. It has been fruitful for epistemologists wrestling with the

Gettier problem to reflect on the structure of virtue theories of ethics. Ethicists reflecting

on the value of acting *for* certain kinds of reasons similarly benefit from epistemological

work on the basing relation.[13] As it happens, ethicists and – more to our present purposes

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[12] On practical analogues for knowledge, see e.g. David Black (ms.). On epistemic supererogation, see e.g.
Hedburg (2014), Li (2018).
[13] See, e.g., Zagzebski (1996), Sosa (2007).

– epistemologists who have propounded theories that support strong symmetries between the epistemic and practical domains have seemed to many to be *on to something*.

Given the desirability of connecting our vision of epistemic rationality with our vision of practical rationality, we should be more willing to accept cases of epistemic underdetermination. All epistemic underdetermination requires is that there be no single best epistemic attitude to take toward a proposition, given some evidence. But in the practical domain, we think situations in which there is no single best course of action, given a set of practical circumstances, are extremely common. There are at least four putative phenomena in the practical domain, such that if they have any analogues in the epistemic domain, these would count as cases of epistemic underdetermination. I have in mind: (1) cases in which multiple courses of action are equally, maximally good ("Buridan's ass" cases); (2) cases in which a set of multiple options that are better than all other alternatives are themselves on a par[14]; (3) cases in which a set of multiple options that are better than all other alternatives are themselves incomparable; and (4) cases in which an infinite number of options are arranged such that for any particular options, some other option is better than it is.

Practical cases of the first sort – ties among best options – are common. But could there really be cases where doxastic attitudes tie, epistemically? One reason for thinking that there can't is that whenever one has equally strong reasons to believe *p* and to disbelieve *p,* one has most reason overall to suspend judgment on *p.* Berker (2018) makes

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[14] On parity, see Chang (2002).

use of the "prohibitive balancing" of epistemic reasons for belief and disbelief to argue for restrictions in the way epistemic and practical reasons might interact.

However, there are at least two problems with extending this observation that a tie between belief and disbelief dissolves into the superiority of suspension, to any general thesis about the impossibility of ties among doxastic attitudes (that is, *general* prohibitive balancing in the epistemic domain). First, this observation has no straightforward bearing on the possibility of ties among credences or other non-traditional attitudes.[15]

Second, even if we focus only on traditional, coarse grained attitudes, it seems we may encounter genuine, non-dissolving ties between suspension and belief. Notably, Berker (2018) does not consider that one might have epistemic reasons to suspend judgment that are not derivative of the balance of one's reasons for belief and disbelief.

For instance, even in a case where one's reasons for believing *p* vastly outweigh one's reasons for disbelieving *p,* one might have even stronger reasons to suspend judgment in virtue of the high value of *avoiding error* on this particular matter. Relatedly, if the balance of one's evidence strongly favors believing *p,* but one's current evidence does not contain much information bearing on whether *p* – such that one could easily acquire new information that would widely swing the balance – one might have strong reason to suspend in virtue of this low *weight* of one's evidence.[16] Or, finally, it seems one might acquire reasons to suspend in virtue of higher-order concerns about one's ability to assess the matter at hand.[17] If one can have such non-derivative reasons for

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[15] One might *argue*, of course, that ties among credences dissolve into the superiority of an imprecise credence, but the issues and possible objections here seem distinct.

[16] On weight and balance, see e.g., Joyce (2005).

[17] Schroeder (2015) claims that "undercutting defeaters" should decrease the weight of reasons supporting belief, rather than increasing the weight of reasons supporting suspension. But if there are situations in

suspension, then plausibly there will be cases in which one's reasons to suspend and reasons to believe are equally strong.

What of practical cases (2), (3), and (4) – parity, incomparability, and infinite better-ability? The existence of such cases in the practical domain is rather more controversial, and I cannot argue for their existence here. (In the next chapter, however, I return to cases of practical parity and briefly rehearse motivations for that possibility.) Still, at least for those who do accept the existence of such cases, considerations of theoretical unity and simplicity across domains will tell in favor of accepting epistemic underdetermination cases. At a minimum, those who accept in the practical domain the existence of any of (1)-(4) but reject epistemic underdetermination owe us a story as to why the two domains are strikingly dissimilar with respect to the guaranteed existence of unique best options.[18]

The rationality function and underdetermination

Moreover, some standard assumptions about the rationality function positively suggest the possibility of epistemic underdetermination. While one *might* have a view on which the rationality function is simply a brute, set-theoretic affair, epistemologists often assume instead that the determination of ideally rationally recommended attitudes is sensitive to some underlying principles or values, or at least a set of credal expectations. Which attitude is *best,* in particular evidential circumstances, isn't a purely particularist affair; rather there are some general things to be said about what makes attitudes

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which it is not one's *belief* that is targeted but rather one's ability appropriately to *either* believe or disbelieve, this would seem an insufficient response.

[18] *Cf.* Greco and Hedden (2017).

valuable, from the perspective of epistemic rationality. The following is not meant to be an exhaustive list of attractive ways of thinking of the rationality function. My aim is simply to show that epistemic underdetermination sits well with some common ways.

For example, if the rationality function operates via a list of principles of good thinking (believe the simpler of two explanations, *ceteris paribus;* trust sources to the extent that they are likely to be reliable; expect the future to weakly resemble the past, etc.), these principles might sometimes be in tension and might also sometimes fail jointly to offer sufficient guidance in particular cases, to yield a recommendation for a particular ideally rational attitude.[19,20]

If, additionally or instead, the rationality function comprises weighted epistemic values, then I suggest again that underdetermination is to be expected.[21] For different doxastic attitudes can plausibly tie (or be maximally good but incomparable, incommensurable, or on a par) with respect to their promoting (or honoring) epistemic values. Certainly, many forms of *pluralism* about epistemic value entail the possibility of ties. (Stronger versions of pluralism entail the possibility of incommensurability, parity, or incomparability.) Suppose that the rationality function works by assessing an attitude's "score" across different epistemic values and adding these up, having taken into account the weight of each value. Then two attitudes could score equally well, by promoting different configurations of epistemic values.

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[19] Law is a nice example of an arena where principles often conflict or are subject to multiple interpretations. See Hart (1958) for a seminal treatment of multiple interpretations of laws.
[20] Goldman (2010) and Christensen (2010) both think of rational attitudes as determined by principles in this way.
[21] On rational attitudes as sensitive to epistemic values or goals, see, e.g., Kelly (2014), Willard-Kyle (2017).

Even some ways of understanding the rationality function as a credence function provide independent motivation for accepting cases of epistemic underdetermination. Some hold that credence functions have particular "resolutions," to use Yalcin's (2011) term. The idea is that a credal state weighs in on certain possibilities and questions, employing certain conceptual distinctions. But it does not weigh in on other kinds of questions, including especially those employing conceptual distinctions it is not equipped to make. For example, I might have a well-defined credence that some particular object is red. But if I lack the concept burgundy, I may not have a well-defined credence that the object is burgundy. (Say you've just told me that burgundy is a type of reddish color, but I've got no idea whether this object is likely to be that particular type of red vs. another, and having just acquired the concept I have no stored memories as to which things have been *that,* burgundy shade in the past.) If this is right, then the rationality function will not contain credences defined on possibilities that are "below" its resolution.[22]

Relatedly, underdetermination may arise when one considers a "new theory." The so-called "problem of new theories" is well-known for Bayesians.[23] Say I test the pH of my garden soil using a test strip I take to be 95% accurate[24], and the test comes back indicating that is alkaline. I conclude that the soil is very probably alkaline (indeed, that this is .95 likely), add acidic material to remedy the situation, and test again. Again, alkaline. Again, I conclude that there's a 95% probability my soil is alkaline. If this

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[22] Although the relevance of resolutions for subjectivist views of the rationality function is more obvious, there is some reason for thinking even objectivists about the rationality function should see it as having a particular, less than perfect resolution. Evidential relations may be ineliminably conceptually and representationally structured, such that there will necessarily be *some* limit to the fineness of resolution of the rationality function.

[23] For a recent "solution" to the problem and discussion of a case related to my pH example, see, e.g., Wenmackers & Romejin (2016); see also Earman (1992).

[24] I.e., if the test reads alkaline/neutral/acidic, there is a .95 chance the soil is alkaline/neutral/acidic.

process repeats enough times, I should start to entertain a new hypothesis: my test strips are *not* 95% accurate, rather they're faulty and insensitive to my soil pH. But if I was previously not entertaining this hypothesis – if I was simply granting that the strips were 95% accurate, and my credence that they were faulty was zero or not defined – what credence should I have in it now? It seems again that the rationality function may underdetermine the attitude it is rational for one to take toward a proposition.

In this section, I've shown how plausible assumptions about the rationality function as well as analogues with practical rationality suggest the possibility of epistemic underdetermination. Particular, putative instances of epistemic underdetermination should therefore be more easily taken at face value.

1.4 Cases of epistemic underdetermination

Plausibly, such instances are familiar, from some of the literature on permissivism.[25] There are two types of such cases I'll consider. First, circumstances of a novel kind for some particular subject may trigger internal conflict in the rationality function relevant for her, such that it outputs a set of multiple attitudes. These are not merely cases in which a subject has evidence both for and against a proposition. The idea instead is that in these cases different, maximally attractive ways of interpreting and evaluating her total evidence would lead her to adopt different, incompatible attitudes. Second, novel

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[25] The *most* common sort case put forward in defense of permissivism is probably rational disagreement. But since it's important to my thesis that there is no best attitude *for a particular subject,* the (putatively) permissivism-supporting cases that best support epistemic underdetermination must be cases that (putatively) support *intrapersonal permissivism*. See fn. 2. Some examples in the literature, however, rely on reversing the direction of fit for attitudes in a way that my examples do not. See, e.g., Dahlback (forthcoming).

circumstances may reveal incompleteness in the rationality function, in that it is unable to output any particular rational attitude at all and instead outputs the null set.

Here are two cases to focus our discussion[26]:

CONFLICT: Aasiya is trying to make up her mind about which of two job offers will result in her living the most flourishing life. She sees strong considerations favoring job A and also different strong considerations favoring job B. Rather unhelpfully, Aasiya's best friend, her partner, and her career mentor too are offering conflicting perspectives. Her best friend thinks job A is a bit more promising, her partner thinks job A is very much more promising, and her career mentor thinks job B is somewhat more promising. Hitherto, Aasiya has (correctly) thought of each of them as trusted personal advisers on overlapping matters. She is not at all clear as to whose voice should be loudest in her head on this question, or how much louder it should be. Which attitude is ideally rational for Aasiya to take toward the proposition, "Job A will result in my living the most flourishing life"?

COVERAGE: A stranger approaches Bella on the street and starts pulling out objects from a bag. The first three objects he pulls out are a regular-sized tube of toothpaste, a live jellyfish, and a travel-sized tube of toothpaste. Now Bella doesn't have any theory of "what insane people on the street are likely to carry in

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[26] COVERAGE is minimally adapted from a case of Adam Elga's (2010), which he offers in a different spirit. Elga takes this to be a case motivating the positing of imprecise credences for rational subjects. However, he argues in the rest of the paper, since we have no adequate decision rules for employing imprecise credences, the intuitions this case generates about the need to posit imprecise credences must be spurious. His arguments in the rest of the paper do not challenge the suggestion I wish to draw from the case, which is that no particular attitude – imprecise or precise – is uniquely ideal.

their bags," nor are there any particularly relevant, established statistics about this. Which attitude is ideally rational for Bella to take toward the proposition, "the next object he pulls out will be another tube of toothpaste?"

One quick clarificatory comment: Aasiya's task, in CONFLICT, is not strictly speaking to decide which job offer to take; rather, it's to decide what to believe about which job offer will (likely) lead to the most flourishing life. We can assume that her advisers too are not merely trying to influence her decision but rather offering their own judgments about the preferable job offer. Both cases are strictly concerned with epistemic rationality.

And it seems to me there are very strong temptations, in response to the questions at the end of each of these cases, to say there is *no* ideal, rationally recommended attitude for Aasiya or Bella to take toward the relevant propositions, and/or that *multiple, incompatible* attitudes are ideal. At any rate, no *single, particular* attitude is ideal.

More specifically, I am tempted to say there is no unique, best way for Aasiya or Bella's doxastic attitudes to evolve going forward – no unique way for these to enter into further reasoning and decision-making. Consider two possible worlds: one in which Aasiya takes up a .7 credence and suspension of judgment over the question whether Job A will result in the most flourishing life, and one in which Aasiya takes up .8 credence and tentative belief in the proposition that Job A will result in the most flourishing life. It seems possible – depending on fine details of the case – that in neither world will Aasiya be less epistemically rational than in the other world, and indeed there may be no other possible world in which she is *more* epistemically rational than in either of the two we are considering. Similarly, for Bella, the world in which she suspends judgment and has, say, an imprecise credence of [.01-.7] in the proposition that toothpaste will be next, may be

no worse than any other possible world, including a world in which she suspends

judgment but has an imprecise credence of [.05-.2].

Thus, the intuitive thing to say about these cases is that there is not exactly one

ideally rationally recommended attitude for Aasiya to take toward the proposition, "Job A

will result in my living the most flourishing life," and the same seems true, *mutatis*

mutandis, for Bella. These are cases in which the rationality function(s) relevant for each

of Aasiya and Bella does not output a singleton set.

I will consider objections, to the effect that Aasiya and Bella should simply

suspend judgment or else adopt an imprecise credence, in the following section.[27]

1.5 Deflationary objections

One might think I've mischaracterized the cases above, perhaps by focusing tacitly on

rather opinionated doxastic attitudes. Perhaps it's not that *no* single attitude is ideally

rational in each case; rather, it's just that some very non-opinionated, non-committal

attitude is the ideally rational one to have – so the objection would go.

Indeed, this objection is particularly important because it is connected with what

we might see as a deep *disanalogy* between the epistemic and practical domains. (Recall:

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[27] Admittedly, this intuition is perhaps more intuitive for the subjectivist than the objectivist. For the subjectivist, considerations such as the following should seem compelling: Aasiya *herself* is not committed to any particular ranking of the trustworthiness of her advisers on the question at hand in Conflict, nor is she herself able to settle what to think about which job offer will lead to the more flourishing life definitively on the basis of other, non-testimonial information. Similarly, in Bella's case the subjectivist should be moved by the fact that Bella does not *herself* have relevant theories or believe relevant statistics about toothpaste-toting strangers. If Aasiya and Bella don't themselves have commitments that fix uniquely the ideally rationally recommended attitudes to take, then the subjectivist ought to accept that there are no unique ideally rational attitudes for each to take.

    The objectivist, however, should also feel the pull of these cases. First, the claim that there is no single attitude that is ideal for either Aasiya or Bella is pre-theoretically appealing. Even if we lack *subjectivist* reasons for thinking these are the correct verdicts on these cases, we should want to accommodate the verdicts nonetheless.

I appealed to analogy with the practical domain to support the probable existence of epistemic underdetermination in section 1.3; identifying a principled disanalogy would seem also to undermine some of that motivation for expecting underdetermination.) Whereas the practical domain forces subjects to make decisions among actions, the epistemic domain seems to afford the luxury of more *neutrality*, of which it is often good to avail oneself.

In this section I will consider two versions of this deflationary objection to my cases, according to which these are "merely": (1) cases calling for suspension of judgment, or (2) cases calling for an imprecise credence. I will identify issues that arise for attempted assimilations of CONFLICT and COVERAGE to each category. I will also identify further issues for assimilating other seeming cases of epistemic underdetermination. Even if assimilating my particular cases were relatively unproblematic, a general assimilation of the phenomenon would not be.

Suspending judgment

One might think there is no mystery about which unique attitude it is ideally rational for either of Aasiya or Bella to adopt. The rationality function for each of them will clearly output the singleton set: {suspension of judgment}.[28]

I grant that it is plausible that each of Aasiya and Bella should suspend judgment in the cases as described. But, first, even if this is the case, there may be a further question about the structure of the *total* doxastic attitude(s) it is ideally rational for these subjects to have. Recall that Aasiya has considered her job offers and is herself on the

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[28] Thanks especially to Ernest Sosa for pressing me on this point.

fence as to whether job A or B will lead to the more flourishing life; she is now

evaluating testimonies to the effect that job A is much more promising, job A is a little

more promising, and job B is somewhat more promising. One thing it is probably *not*

rational for her to be open to, at this point, is that job B is very much more promising.

Moreover, going forward in her reasoning, as she acquires new evidence, it will be

rational for her to incorporate some bias toward job A's superiority. So, although it may

be appropriate for her to suspend judgment on the question which job offer will lead to

the more flourishing life, it would seem any ideally rational attitude for her might have to

incorporate structure registering the more specific bearing of Aasiya's evidence. Similar

remarks apply to Bella's case. Even with the paltry, strange evidence available to her, it is

rational for Bella, e.g., to be more confident that toothpaste will be next than that a pink

beagle will be next. Once this has been granted, we face again the possibility that –

despite its (arguably) being the case that it is rational for both Aasiya and Bella to

suspend judgment on the questions at hand – there are either no or multiple more specific,

structured doxastic attitudes it is ideally rational for them to take.

Secondly, we can generate variants on these CONFLICT and COVERAGE cases

where it is not as plausible that suspension is (uniquely) ideally rational, even just

considering coarse-grained options. For instance, Aasiya might have instead received just

two reliable testimonies, to the effect that job A is much more promising and that job A is

somewhat more promising. Now, although she may still be torn as to how confident to be

in job A's superiority, the traditional attitude of belief in job A's superiority may be

ideally rational (either uniquely, or alongside suspension). Similarly, Bella might be in a

situation where the first three items out of the strangers' bag were a live lobster, a live

jellyfish, and another live lobster. Perhaps in such a case she would still be torn or at-a-loss as to exactly how unconfident to be that toothpaste will be next, but disbelief might clearly be the ideally rational coarse-grained attitude for her.

These two comments are sides of the same coin. It cannot be that suspension is always ideally rationally recommended in cases where it seems there is not just one ideally rational attitude to take. This is, essentially, because even if there *were* a single, ideally rational attitude in all such cases, it could not be the *same* one. Rather, the particular attitudes the rationality function is unable to decide among should matter to the question which attitude(s) is/are ideal. And – although here I theorize beyond the cases I've actually presented – I see little reason to think that there are *any* in-principle limitations on the kinds of attitudes the rationality function might be hung or unable to decide between. The rationality function might output {0.9 credence, 0.6 credence}, or {0.001 credence, 0.01 credence}, or {belief, suspension}, etc.[29] It seems implausible that in all such cases there can be no puzzle about which unique attitude it is ideally rational to take, since in all such cases the rationality function ultimately 'really' simply outputs suspending judgment.

Now, one might suggest at this point that what *is* true in all such cases, is that it is ideally rational to suspend judgment on a higher-order question about which attitude is in fact rational. This might be right. But this would not in any way establish that there is a unique attitude it is ideally rational to take at the first-order level.

Imprecise credences

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[29] Indeed, I think it can even output {belief, disbelief}, but motivating this last possibility would take us too far afield.

Alternatively, one might think that there is no mystery about the unique attitude each of Aasiya and Bella ought to take, because there is some *imprecise credence* that is ideally rationally recommended for each. An imprecise credence, the thought would go, could incorporate all the more precise credal attitudes among which Aasiya and Bella are torn.

Whether we 'have' or can be modeled as having imprecise credences – also, whether these can be rational – are controversial issues. But even granting that imprecise credences are sometimes rational, this objection still struggles, it seems to me, to offer a satisfying deflation of putative cases of underdetermination. Depending on the details of one's account of imprecise credences, the suggestion that the ideally rational attitude for subjects in putative cases of epistemic underdetermination is some imprecise credence is either (i) not deflationary, vis-à-vis genuine epistemic underdetermination, or else (ii) implausible.

Let's begin by recalling a clarification from section 1.2. There I noted that I am thinking of doxastic attitudes as defined by their normative consequences for theoretical and practical reasoning. Importantly, there is currently a great deal of controversy over the way that imprecise credences should enter into (at least practical) reasoning and decision-making.[30] On some ways of understanding imprecise credences, they do not suffice – even together with an subject's utilities and risk preferences – to determine normative implications for decision-making. Which actions are rationally permitted or required for a subject depends not only on the subject's imprecise credal state (as well as her relevant utilities), but also some other aspect of her cognitive state. Moss (2015)

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[30] See Elga (2010) and White (2010) for recent discussion.

claims that rational actions depend not only on one's imprecise credal state but also on which precise credal function a subject "identifies with," at a given time.[31] According to such views, one might know the imprecise credal state that is rational for a subject, as well as her utilities, values, and preferences, and yet still lack sufficient information to judge what she may or may not rationally *do.* For one lacks knowledge of which precise credal state is identified with and hence *operative,* in her cognitive life. Call such views "normative underdetermination" views of imprecise credences.

Others understand imprecise credences such that they enter into rational decision-making more univocally. While imprecise credences may differ from precise credences in having more permissive normative implications, they have their normative consequences regardless of further questions, e.g., about whether a subject identifies with any particular representor. Good (1952) seems to suggest that any action that would be rational according to *some* precise state included in one's imprecise credal state is thereby rationally permissible.[32] Rinard (2015) argues that we should consider actions (im)permissible or indeterminately permissible, depending on whether they are (forbidden) recommended by all or only some of the more precise states included in one's imprecise state. Call such views "normative determination" views of imprecise credences.

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[31] Rinard (2015) characterizes Moss's view differently, as implying that any action that would be rational according to *some* precise state included in one's imprecise credal state is thereby rationally permissible. But Moss does think that rational permissibility depends on a subject's state of identification. She writes:

> In a decision situation, an agent must act to maximize expected value according to the precise mental state she identifies with. But there is no rule of rationality saying that an agent cannot change which mental state she identifies with. (673)

[32] See Levi (1974: 411) for discussion.

I suggest that epistemic underdetermination cases are only plausibly seen as calling for an imprecise credence if one accepts a normative underdetermination view of imprecise credences.[33] For it seems to me there is no unique, best way for Aasiya or Bella's doxastic state to enter into further reasoning and decision-making – not even a highly latitudinarian way. Depending on how Aasiya *in fact* weights the testimony of her various advisers, it may be incumbent on her (given her utility function) to take Job A, *or* she may be permitted to take Job B. For Bella, there are some possible worlds where a bet on toothpaste (at some particular odds) is rational, and some worlds on which the same bet is not, depending on how she in fact reasons about the likelihood of toothpaste being next out of the bag.

Of course, some with normative *underdetermination* views of imprecise credences could accept this and still claim some imprecise credence is ideally rational for each of Aasiya and Bella. However, notice that on such ways of thinking about imprecise credences, these arguably should not count as modelling a doxastic attitude at all. Rather, imprecise credences represent precisely being torn or hung among multiple, more specific attitudes that *could* have normative consequences for one's reasoning, depending on further decisions or conditions. On such a view, imprecise credences might be a way of

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[33] Indeed, I suspect one would need a normative underdetermination view on which even rational *inferences* and reasoning – in addition to rational actions – are underdetermined.

modelling epistemic underdetermination, but they in no way deflate the phenomenon. For they do not represent a unique doxastic attitude that the subject should have.[34],[35]

1.6 Conclusion

We should doubt that there's always exactly one ideally rationally recommended attitude for a subject to take toward a proposition, given her evidence. I suggest we take genuine epistemic underdetermination seriously, since (i) plausible background commitments in the theory of rationality positively suggest there will be such cases, (ii) there seem to be such cases, and (iii) these are not easily and unproblematically assimilated to deflationary understandings. In the next chapter, I will take up the project of connecting this thesis about epistemic underdetermination with questions about what subjects facing cases of epistemic underdetermination may and must *do* – are they *permitted* to take up any member of an outputted set? Are they doomed to irrationality if they take up any attitude at all (especially since picking one of a set of multiple rationally recommended attitudes may seem objectionably arbitrary)? But in order to answer these questions well we must

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[34] Still, one might worry that if imprecise credences (on some normative underdetermination view) can model the position of a subject facing a case of epistemic underdetermination, then my suggestion that there are cases of epistemic underdetermination is less interesting than I have let on.

      The first thing to say in response, is that my aim is to cast doubt on the idea that there is always some, unique, ideally rational attitude to take toward any proposition. This idea apparently persists despite the attention currently devoted to imprecise credences. So, calling attention to the fact that those with a normative underdetermination view of imprecise credences may already be tacitly committed to rejecting that idea, is helpful in achieving my aim. Moreover, the observations of this chapter may be interesting for theorizing about the proper interpretation of that machinery – not necessarily in highlighting a hitherto unnoticed problem, but in suggesting new ways of thinking about constraints and motivations for potential solutions.

[35] A deflationary objection appealing to *vagueness,* or *indeterminacy,* may also seem promising, although I lack space here to consider it properly. (Cf. Greco and Hedden (2017).) Again, however, a plausible version of such an objection would seem non-deflationary. If it turns out that putative cases of epistemic underdetermination are really cases of "epistemic indeterminacy", these cases will still constitute an important and under-theorized phenomenon. And the central question of what it is rational for subjects facing these cases to *do*, epistemically and practically, would seem to remain distinctively puzzling.

ask them. Rejecting the specter of a guaranteed, single ideally rational attitude in every

case is a start.

Chapter 2: Permissivism, Arbitrariness, and Epistemic Existentialism

Here I connect the phenomenon from the previous chapter – epistemic

underdetermination – to the uniqueness/permissivism debate, in order to motivate a novel

form of permissivism: "epistemic existentialism". I argue that standard forms of

permissivism in the literature cannot satisfactorily answer the arbitrariness objection,

especially given that epistemic underdetermination cases clearly thwart standard

permissivist attempts to respond to that objection. However, more radical, epistemic

existentialist forms of permissivism seem to have a promising answer. Those tempted to

permissivism should consider epistemic existentialism.

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2.1 Introduction

We turn now to the heart of the permissivism/uniqueness debate. Are there cases in

which, fixing the evidence or broader epistemic circumstances, any of multiple attitudes

could be *rational*? In the previous chapter I argued that there are cases in which multiple

attitudes (or no attitude at all) are *best,* with respect to what matters for determining the

rationality of attitudes. But the further question remains of what subjects facing such

cases may or must *do*. Are subjects rationally permitted to take up any attitude from

among the set outputted by the rationality function? Or is there instead a general

disqualification from rationality in such circumstances? After all, randomly picking some

attitude from within the set would seem awfully *arbitrary,* in a way perhaps not consonant with being fully rational in one's beliefs.

Here I will present and motivate a novel view, which I call epistemic existentialism. The epistemic existentialist can claim that the way for a subject to be rational in a case of epistemic underdetermination is to, first, *change the rationality function that is relevant for them* so that it recommends some attitude uniquely*,* and, second, adopt the subsequently recommended attitude.

Epistemic existentialism is committed, first, to a broad subjectivism about rationality, according to which what's rational for a subject to believe depends in part on her subjective "framework" for interpreting and evaluating evidence. (Hence, for this chapter, I'll shift away from ecumenical talk about the "rationality function," which was useful in the previous chapter, to talk about subjects' frameworks. For the subjectivist, the rationality function relevant for a subject is constituted by her framework.) In addition to this basic subjectivism, epistemic existentialists maintain that (i) subjects' frameworks change over time, (ii) these changes sometimes must occur in ways for which we are responsible, and (iii) such commitments themselves affect which framework is best for a subject, in voluntarist fashion.

The epistemic existentialist recommendation I just sketched, for what subjects should do in cases of epistemic underdetermination, has interesting affinities with uniqueness about epistemic rationality. The epistemic existentialist can accept the importance of the rationality function's recommending an attitude uniquely. Indeed, the epistemic existentialist can accept the following normative principle, which motivates the influential *arbitrariness objection* to permissivism:

RATIONAL PREFERABILITY (RP) – If a subject holds a rational attitude toward a

proposition, then that attitude is rationally preferable to or better than all other

attitudes toward that proposition, given her evidence.

However, epistemic existentialism is fundamentally a version of permissivism,

since the epistemic existentialist maintains there is no single, right way for a subject's

rationality function to change in response to epistemic underdetermination cases.

Indeed, my attempt here to motivate epistemic existentialism will start with the

intuitive pull of permissivism in general. Many of us *want* to be permissivists, in the

absence of conclusive objections to that view. However, we may be troubled by the

influential arbitrariness objection to permissivism (to be explained further below).

Indeed, one aim of this chapter is to argue that this objection is even stronger than

commonly realized. Once we reflect on epistemic underdetermination, it is clear that

standard permissivist responses to that objection are inadequate. Epistemic existentialism,

then, stands out as a particularly attractive form of permissivism. For I claim it can

address even this strengthened version of the arbitrariness objection for permissivism,

and I also briefly review a few independent motivations for this somewhat radical

position.

2.2 Permissivism and its intuitive appeal

Permissivism and uniqueness are difficult to state precisely, as there is a high degree of

variation across proponents' presentations and also a high degree of ambiguity in many

such presentations. I discuss the formulation of uniqueness and permissivism at length in

the appendix. For current purposes, thankfully, we just need a rough gloss on the two

positions in order to see the intuitive appeal of permissivism and, in the next section, the

challenge posed by the arbitrariness objection.

In offering his initial, influential arguments for uniqueness, White (2005) presents

it as follows:[1]

Uniqueness (2005): Given one's total evidence,[2] there is a unique rational

doxastic attitude that one can take to any proposition (White 2005: 445).

Permissivism is defined as the denial of uniqueness. Permissivists think that, at least

sometimes, given *some* bodies of evidence and *some* propositions under consideration, a

body of evidence does not determine a unique, rationally recommended attitude.[3]

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[1] White claims to be following Feldman's (2007) formulation, which officially cast uniqueness as: "…the idea that a body of evidence justifies at most one proposition out of a competing set of propositions (e.g., one theory out of a bunch of exclusive alternatives) and it justifies at most one attitude toward any particular proposition (205)." Interestingly, White seems to move away from Feldman's thought that a body of evidence fixes *at most* one rational/justified attitude, and instead claim that a body of evidences fixes *exactly* one attitude. This seems perhaps an unnecessary and potentially problematic strengthening of Feldman's thought, so in what follows I will consider uniqueness as committed only to the thought that evidence fixes at most one attitude. White himself essentially moves to an "at-most" formulation in his (2014) paper. See also Matheson (2011: 361).

[2] White is concerned with the way that *evidence* renders attitudes rational. Most authors in the uniqueness/permissivism literature have followed him in this focus. However, as e.g., Ballantyne and Coffman (2011) have noted, such formulations of Uniqueness commit uniqueness theorists to evidentialism, or, roughly, the thesis that the rationality of creedal/doxastic attitudes supervenes on the evidence one has. Evidentialism is not uncontroversial in epistemology, so ceteris paribus it would seem better for the uniqueness theorist not to be wedded to it. Moreover, note that the debate over evidentialism seems largely orthogonal to debates over whether "reasonable people can disagree," or whether epistemic circumstances always fix a single rational response. (Evidentialists might be permissivists, e.g., if they think that multiple doxastic responses would "fit" some bodies of evidence; non-evidentialists can be uniqueness theorists if they think that whatever does fix rational responses fixes them in a unique fashion.)

It seems then that the central question of the uniqueness/permissivism debate concerns the way a subject's informational or epistemic circumstances – whether those include more than evidence or not – fix the responses that would be rational for her. However, for the sake of clarity of engagement with current literature (and because "informational or epistemic circumstances" is an ungainly phrase), I will sometimes also characterize the debate as over the possibility of "evidence" fixing multiple rational attitudes.

[3] Permissivism and Uniqueness, then, are squarely debates about how we may rationally respond to propositions *under consideration.* It is a highly interesting question – and one sadly outside current scope – whether there are also rational constraints/requirements on the propositions or questions one *ought* to consider. I am inclined to think that frameworks, in incorporating a subject's epistemic values, should weigh in to some extent on appropriate questions. For subjects do (and should!) value having specifically

I want us to notice three things about this central, permissivist claim. First, as several recent authors have noted,[4] it can be interpreted in either in stronger, intrapersonal forms (sometimes there is not a unique rational attitude *for some subject S* to take toward a proposition, given a body of evidence) or in weaker, intrapersonal forms (sometimes there is not a unique rational attitude *for any subject x* to take to toward a proposition, given a body of evidence). Following other recent attempts to clarify this issue, I will call the thesis that more than one attitude toward some proposition can be rationally recommended *for a particular subject,* given a set of epistemic circumstances or evidence, "intrapersonal permissivism", and I will call the thesis that more than one attitude toward some proposition can be rationally recommended *for all subjects*, given a set of epistemic circumstances or evidence, "interpersonal permissivism."

Second, note my deliberate introduction of the phrase "rationally recommended" in the previous sentence. Many parties to this literature tend to slide between talking about attitudes/subjects that *are* rational and attitudes/subjects that *would* or *could* be rational. As we'll see below in formulating the arbitrariness objection, this is a distinction that may matter. Uniqueness theorists and permissivists pretty clearly mean to be disagreeing about how many attitudes would or could be rational, or how many are potentially rational. Notice that permissivists are certainly not committed to thinking that some subjects actually, rationally hold multiple attitudes toward a single proposition at a given time. Holding two different attitudes toward a proposition would seem to be impossible (fragmentation aside[5]). So I will understand permissivism as a theses about

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interesting or *fruitful* true beliefs. Cf. Hartry Field's Romanell Lecture, Eastern APA 2019 (printed version forthcoming).
[4] See, e.g., Douven (2009), Kelly (2014).
[5] On fragmentation, see e.g. Egan (2008).

"rationally recommended" attitudes rather than simply "rational attitudes," where a rationally recommended attitude is one that is potentially rational, if adopted under the right conditions or in the right way.

Finally, notice just how strong both forms of uniqueness are, relative to permissivism. Formalizing uniqueness would require several universal quantifiers. (For all subjects, for all propositions, for all bodies of evidence…) Permissivism on the other hand is just officially committed to there being *some* evidential situation, where at least two attitudes – no matter how minimally different from each other (e.g., 0.689 credence vs. 0.688 credence) – would or could be rational. Now, in fact, permissivists tend to think that situations in which evidence is "permissive" are rather commonplace. They also tend to think that there are appreciable, meaningful differences among potentially rational attitudes. But these are further commitments not generally baked into official formulations of the view (or defenses of it, or challenges to it).

The first and probably most important reason to like permissivism is that it's intuitive. We certainly do talk as though there are cases in which people with access to similar information bearing on a proposition *p* can rationally land on different attitudes toward it. Plausibly, *reasonable people can disagree* about some matters (and surely being reasonable is closely related to being rational.[6])[7] To take just one example – think about two seasoned birdwatchers, each with her own slightly distinct, but equally reliable

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[6] See, e.g., the discussion of degrees of rationality as gradable according to its "consonance with reason" or "reasonableness" in Audi (2013). Moreover, while most authors in this literature focus on rationality, many treat reasonableness and even justification as interchangeable. See, e.g., Kelly (2014).

[7] See, e.g., Brueckner and Bundy (2012), Decker (2012), Horowitz (2014: 46-48), Levinstein (2015: 1-2), Rosen (2001: 71), and Schoenfield (2014: 196-197) on the intuitiveness of seeing some sets of epistemic circumstances as permitting multiple rational responses, for the reason that 'reasonable people can disagree (Rosen 2001: 71)'.

set of heuristics and visual competences for identifying birds of a range of species. Both see a yellow-rumped warbler, from the same distance and in the same lighting conditions. One adopts credence 0.8, whereas the other adopts credence 0.7. All permissivism says is that it's *possible* both are fully rational; this is a weak and highly intuitive claim.

We can find additional motivation for permissivism in arguments for subjectivist views of epistemic rationality[8]. Subjectivism, as we've said, is the view that the rationality function relevant for a subject varies with her subjective "epistemic standards" or "framework" for interpreting and evaluating evidence.[9] The central subjectivist idea is that, in a post-Carnap-ian era, we shouldn't think of evidence as supporting certain propositions objectively, or *ex nihilo.* Rather, evidence supports propositions relative to a subjective framework of interpretations or expectations, and evidence supports attitudes relative to some framework of intellectual policies or values that a subject has.

Subjectivism has been, to my mind, convincingly defended on formal grounds in Titelbaum (2010). I also defend epistemic subjectivism, *inter alia*, in chapter 3. But here I will largely assume the plausibility of this thesis. Once one has accepted subjectivism, (interpersonal) permissivism is a natural further commitment. For – though even permissivists may want to say there are *some* limitations on the frameworks that might issue rational recommendation, it would seem implausible for just *one* precise set of

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[8] On epistemic subjectivism, see especially White (2007); see also Foley (1987: 130-145) on more and less subjective construals of rationality. On the related position of epistemic relativism, see e.g. Boghossian (2006), Rosen (2007), Neta (2007), and Pritchard (2009).

[9] See, e.g., Douven (2009), Schoenfield (2014), Kelly (2014), Peels and Booth (2014), Willard-Kyle (2016). I will primarily use "framework," but I will assume that this also captures what others have meant by "set of epistemic standards."

subjective expectations and policies for forming attitudes in response to evidence to be legitimate.[10]

It may be helpful to look briefly at more concrete descriptions of these frameworks, to see why subjectivism is plausible and to see how it motivates interpersonal permissivism. (I'll return to this question of what frameworks are briefly in chapter 3 as well.) Douven (2009) notes that different Bayesian agents could have different "degrees-of-belief-functions (p. 348)" – i.e., conditional and/or prior probability functions – which would lead them to evaluate new information differently. He also notes that different subjects may harbor different methods for performing inferences to the best explanation, stemming perhaps from varying interpretations of the theoretical virtues as well as varying weightings of these virtues against each other (349-250).[11] For Douven, the possibility of such variations in priors or in procedures for performing inference to the best explanation supports the idea that different subjects may come to different rational conclusions when placed in the same epistemic circumstances. In a similar spirit, Kelly (2014) echoes the "James-ian" thought that subjects may differ in the relative weights they assign to having true beliefs vs. avoiding false beliefs, or in the relative weights they assign to the theoretical virtues in general.[12]

In general, then, permissivists have invoked various incarnations of frameworks in calling attention to the way that certain subjective, perspectival features of individuals

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[10] See, e.g., Decker (2012: 777-782), Douven (2009), and Kelly (2014) for arguments to this effect. I also take up the plausibility of this transition from subjectivism to permissivism in the appendix.

[11] See also Willard-Kyle (2016) on the possibility of subjects' assigning different weights to theoretical virtues.

[12] Kelly cites an argument in Rachiele (unpublished) supporting that rejecters of coarse-grained attitudes face a similar challenge. Individuals might differ in their relative weighting of the importance of low gradational inaccuracy of credences vs. low *variance* in gradational inaccuracy.

– which can seemingly vary from person to person in more or less innocent ways – play a critical role in determining which doxastic or credal attitudes are rationally recommended for those individuals, in any given set of evidential circumstances.

Crucially, permissivist appeals to standards or frameworks, as e.g., Douven (2009), Kelly (2014), Kopec and Titalbaum (2016), and Meacham (2014) acknowledge, take as their foil specifically *interpersonal* uniqueness. The idea is that different individuals could take differing rational responses to the same evidence because of their varying frameworks and hence that interpersonal permissivism, at least, must be true. But the idea that a *single* individual might have multiple, rationally recommended options when facing a body of evidence is less often defended in the course of defenses of permissivism.[13] And the question whether an intrapersonal permissivist could also exploit the idea of frameworks, in arguing against the (merely) interpersonal permissivist, has gone undiscussed.

Perhaps the relative lack of discussion of intrapersonal permissivism stems in part from the persistent controversy over even interpersonal permissivism and the fact that defending *intra*personal permissivism, a strictly stronger thesis, would seem a tougher row to hoe. They also probably stem in part from many authors' focus on the possibility of rational disagreement. However, in this chapter I will argue that a particular version of

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[13] Kopec (2015) does present a "counterexample" to Uniqueness that would, if successful, entail intrapersonal permissivism. See similar cases in Dahlback (forthcoming). And Schoenfield (forthcoming: 5) does seem to advocate for some indeterminacy in even what an individual's standards might countenance. Similarly, although she is largely responding to different interlocutors, Moss (2015) argues for the rationality of selecting a precise credal function from within one's imprecise state (or set of functions.) Kvanvig (2014) advocates what he calls "Optionalism," on the grounds that evidence only partially constrains rational updating (he seems to assume that we have some *choice* in the matter of what we make of evidence, although this is not entirely clear). I will return to the comments of some of these authors below.

intrapersonal permissivism – epistemic existentialism – can actually better meet what is perhaps the most significant challenge to permissivism in general. I now turn to laying out that challenge.

2.3 The arbitrariness objection, first pass

It is widely acknowledged that permissivism, in its interpersonal form at any rate, is more intuitive than uniqueness. It does seem as though reasonable people can disagree. And the (partial) subjectivity of epistemic support or confirmation that permissivists canvas in defense of their view is independently plausible. Why, then, would anyone take up (interpersonal) uniqueness?

Uniqueness theorists by and large admit that permissivism is intuitively attractive. But they have identified various worries for the view. Some have charged that it is unclear why we would *value* rationality the way we do, if permissivism is true.[14] Others claim that permissivism has unacceptable implications for debates over the appropriate response to discovered peer disagreement.[15] The epistemic existentialist will have some natural responses to these objections, although I will not have space to explain these responses in detail. Here I will focus primarily on just one type of complaint about permissivism. "The arbitrariness objection," as Simpson (2016) terms this influential family of worries, is roughly the charge that permissivists must see rational doxastic or credal attitudes as (implausibly) arbitrarily selected.

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[14] See, e.g., Horowitz (2014), Dogramaci and Horowitz (2016), Greco and Hedden (2016), and Levinstein (2017).

[15] See, e.g., Feldman (2007), Christensen (2007), White (2013). See Christensen (2016) for a considered evaluation of the possibilities for permissivist conciliationism.

Somewhat less roughly: the permissivist is committed to thinking that some epistemic circumstances or total sets of evidence admit of multiple, maximally-good-from-the-standpoint-of-rationality, responses. But she presumably also thinks that subjects can pick particular responses, or take up particular attitudes, and be fully committed to those. According to the permissivist, then, subjects can really, sincerely 'be' 0.6 on some proposition, or really believe it, *despite* recognizing that this attitude is no better supported than, say, being 0.4 or suspending judgment. Such picking and committing to one among equally good options must be entirely 'arbitrary,' or at least guided by non-epistemic reasons. For if multiple attitudes are equally recommended on the basis of epistemic considerations, then our having any particular rational attitude rather than another must depend on arbitrary (epistemically arational) features of our assessment of the evidence. But it is implausible – the thought goes – that epistemically rational responses could be so arbitrary or influenced by non-epistemic reasons. We oughtn't, from the standpoint of epistemic rationality, fully inhabit particular attitudes we ourselves acknowledge to be rationally no better than other alternatives.

More precisely, this objection incorporates three premises, which seem jointly inconsistent.

Arbitrariness Triad #1

P1 There are some sets of total evidence and some propositions such that multiple attitudes toward those propositions are rationally recommended given that evidence.

P2 If a subject adopts any particular rationally recommended attitude (with the appropriate basing relation), she thereby comes to hold a rational attitude.

P3 If a subject holds a rational attitude toward a proposition, then that attitude is

rationally preferable to or better than all other attitudes toward that

proposition, given her evidence. (RATIONAL PREFERABILITY)

P1 and P2 apparently entail that subjects can "pick" any particular rationally

recommended attitude from among a set of such attitudes, though it is no better than

alternatives in that set, and thereby come to hold a rational attitude. But P3 claims that a

rational attitude cannot be merely *as good as* alternatives. It must be strictly better.

How should a permissivist respond? My own response involves rejecting P2. But

motivating this will take some doing over the course of the coming sections. Here I

acknowledge that P2 may seem to be the least objectionable of these premises.

A perhaps initially much more attractive route would be to give up P3. After all,

RATIONAL PREFERABILITY is a quite a strong, normative claim about the nature of

epistemic reasons, and it also sounds potentially question-begging against the

permissivist. RP says that – although perhaps rationally *recommended* attitudes may be

merely maximally good with respect to whatever properties conduce to rationality – an

actual rational attitude must have a maximum of such properties. This is not only a strong

claim but also perhaps a strange one. Why should we think that epistemically rational

attitudes must be better than alternatives, while practically rational actions clearly needn't

be? Clearly, Buridan's ass can rationally eat from either bale of hay.[16]

Interestingly, however, RATIONAL PREFERABILITY seems to be an important point

of agreement between uniqueness theorists and many permissivists. It's obvious that

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[16] *Pace*. Aristotle (1939: II 13, 295b34): 'the man who is violently but equally hungry and thirsty, and stands at an equal distance from food and drink ... must remain where he is.'

permissivists could simply reject P3 (RP), claiming instead that epistemically rational

attitudes need be no better than other available attitudes. But permissivists by and large

have not done this, and it seems to me they are wise not to do so. For it *is* plausible that

we oughtn't hold particular attitudes rationally no better than other alternatives. How

could any particular attitude be genuinely rational for us to hold, if others would be

equally so? In such a case, wouldn't the truly rational attitude incorporate some sort of

compromise or suspension among the recommended attitudes? Support for P3 would

seem to run deep. It is precisely here, because of P3, that epistemic rationality is often

thought to *differ* from practical rationality, in disallowing picking either 'bale of hay.'[17]

Permissivists have avoided denying RATIONAL PREFERABILITY (i.e., P3) in the

face of the arbitrariness objection by insisting on a modification of P1 instead. For

although P1 may be mistaken for a definitional tenet of permissivism, it is obviously

ambiguous between the formulations of intra- and inter- personal permissivism reviewed

above. Consider:

> P1 Interpersonal There are some sets of total evidence, some propositions, and some
>
> subjects such that multiple attitudes toward those propositions are rationally
>
> recommended for **different** subjects, given shared evidence.

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[17] In framing this discussion as one about *epistemic* rationality and accepting some disanalogies with practical rationality, I have already parted ways with some recent pragmatist thought. See, e.g., Rinard (2015). Epistemic existentialism is probably best understood as requiring a middle or compromise position in the debate over pragmatism and "evidentialism." Note that kind of evidentialism opposed to pragmatism is different from that discussed in fn. 2. The crucial claim of pragmatism-opposed evidentialism is that there only *epistemic* reasons matter to what it's rational to believe, and not also practical reasons.

P1 Intrapersonal There are some sets of total evidence, some propositions, and at least

one subject such that multiple attitudes toward those propositions are rationally

recommended for **that** subject, given fixed evidence.

P1 Intrapersonal, together with P2, does apparently entail that at least some subject can

"pick" any particular rationally recommended attitude from among a set of such attitudes,

though it is no better than alternatives in that set, and thereby come to hold a rational

attitude. But P1 Interpersonal clearly does *not* have this implication. If we assume that a

permissivist is committed only to interpersonal permissivism (as indeed, is the seemingly

more popular position), then she needn't license any individual's picking among

multiple, maximally good attitudes. Subjects can simply "pick" the attitude that's

uniquely rationally recommended *for them* and thereby come to hold a rational attitude.

Interpersonal permissivists, then, seem to have a straightforward way to wriggle out of

this first and simplest version of the arbitrariness objection.

2.4 The arbitrariness objection, lingering problems

However, two problems linger even for the merely interpersonal permissivist. The first is

that the merely interpersonal permissivist seems only to have pushed the worry "back a

step" (Feldman 2007: 206). Whose framework is *better,* from the standpoint of

rationality? If there is no good answer to this question, as permissivists claim there is not,

then the very frameworks with which we find ourselves might seem problematically

arbitrary. White (2005: 452) seems to have something similar in mind:

> How have I come to hold the epistemic standards which lead me from my
> evidence to conclude that P? According to this permissivist it was not by virtue of
> being rational, since it is consistent with my being rational that I adhere to rather
> different standards that would have me believe not-P instead. But then it seems

that my applying the correct standards and hence arriving at the right conclusion is just a matter of dumb luck, much like popping a pill.

We might formalize this higher-order worry in a parallel structure, with three seemingly jointly inconsistent theses.

Arbitrariness Triad #2

> P4 Permissivists believe that there are some legitimate (i.e., rational recommendation-conferring) frameworks that are no better than other legitimate frameworks.
>
> P5 Permissivists themselves, as epistemic subjects, may have particular, legitimate frameworks from among the frameworks described in P4.
>
> P6 If a subject has a particular, legitimate framework, she is committed to its being preferable to or better than all other frameworks.

How might the permissivist respond? First, notice that, whereas the original arbitrariness worry (Arbitrariness Triad #1) relied on the impossibility of having a rational attitude no better than alternatives (P3), this version relies on the supposed impossibility of having rationality-conferring frameworks one *acknowledges* to be no better than alternatives (P6). In part because of this feature, P6 may seem less plausible than P3 (i.e., RATIONAL PREFERABILITY). Do we really think that one must take one's framework to be best? After all, the permissivist may at this point wish to appeal to the *inevitability* of relying on one's own framework, regardless of how arbitrary we may admit it to be on reflection.[18] Perhaps, contrary to P6, we can employ our frameworks simply because we're stuck with them, while acknowledging that there's no reason for preferring our own to others.

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[18] See, e.g., Schoenfield (2014).

But even if we grant the permissivist the relevant sort of inevitability – even if we grant that we are "stuck" with our frameworks, this seems to me less than fully satisfactory; necessity is cold comfort. Must we admit it is really purely arbitrary which standards I have (or which I'm stuck with having), when I have legitimate, rationality-conferring standards? Concerns linger.

A different response, one given in Simpson (2016), again relies on disambiguating between intra- and inter- personal forms of a kind of permissivism – this time, a higher-order permissivism about frameworks. Simpson argues that a subject may see her framework as best *for her,* given her cognitive abilities, while acknowledging that different frameworks may be better for others, given their different cognitive abilities. So, on this view, P4 is only true in a qualified, interpersonal sense:

P4_{Interpersonal} Permissivists believe that there are some legitimate (i.e., rational recommendation-conferring) frameworks that are no better **for some subjects** than other legitimate frameworks are **for other subjects**.

Given this version of P4, Simpson could reinterpret P6 intrapersonally and avoid tension:

P6_{Intrapersonal} If a subject has a particular, legitimate framework, she is committed to its being preferable to or better than all other frameworks, **for her**.

Sure, the thought would go, other people's frameworks might be just as good *for them* as mine is *for me,* but mine really is best for me, given my cognitive abilities. This is an interesting proposal, and it does seem to fit the bill of explaining the non-arbitrariness of a subject's framework. Simpson can say that a subject has (or perhaps should have) the

particular framework she has, because that is the framework best suited to her cognitive abilities.

However, notice first that the form of permissivism required to offer this solution is rather a defanged, relatively *impermissive* one. According to Simpson, it never happens that someone who has a rational attitude could have had a different rational attitude, as long as we hold fixed their cognitive abilities and evidence. It would seem somewhat misleading, then, to claim there is any "slack" in rationality, as some have characterized the core of the permissivist view.[19]

Moreover – and this is a deeper worry for Simpson's view – why should we think that a subject with certain cognitive abilities will always be best served by one, unique framework? It seems plausible that for at least some subjects, multiple frameworks would do maximally well with respect to promoting or respecting epistemic values, even once we hold fixed their cognitive abilities.

I have already advocated for a related claim in the previous chapter: namely, that subjects face situations in which their existing frameworks do not pick out a unique attitude as rationally recommended. Perhaps this occurs, at least sometimes, because subjects' existing frameworks are indeterminate among multiple precisifications. Whereas Simpson suggests that a subject's framework is the one that is best for her, given her cognitive abilities, I think this process of selecting "best" frameworks will likely assign *multiple* precise frameworks to any particular subject.

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[19] See, e.g., Kelly (2014).

Here I will simply help myself to the plausibility of the thesis I defended in the previous chapter. Even if subjects have subjective frameworks that standardly pick out rationally recommended attitudes, there will be *some* evidential situations – cases of epistemic underdetermination – where either the evidence is so novel and bizarre that one lacks pre-existing ideas about what it should support, or else one's policies and commitments recommend opposing and incompatible attitudes. If this is so, then notice that even the standard permissivist response to the original arbitrariness objection (Arbitrariness Triad #1) is inadequate. This is because P1$_{Intrapersonal}$, and not merely P1$_{Interpersonal}$, is true. Sometimes, a subject's framework may recommend more than one attitude to take toward a proposition. So, as long as we hang on to P2 and P3 (RP), the permissivist seems again also to have a problem at the level of the original arbitrariness objection.

To summarize: permissivists have a standard answer to the arbitrariness objection (Abritrariness Triad #1) appealing to subjective frameworks, but that standard response is inadequate if we accept epistemic underdetermination. Moreover, even without citing epistemic underdetermination, we may worry that the standard response just pushes the problem back a step (Arbitrariness Triad #2). Truly attractive versions of permissivism would not only retain RP and satisfactorily answer the first-order arbitrariness objection but also somehow make it no arbitrary matter which framework an individual has.

The permissivist, as an epistemic subjectivist[20], needs a theory about the relationship between a subject and her framework – and preferably, as I've suggested

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[20] Strictly speaking, permissivists needn't be subjectivists. In this chapter I'm largely assuming that they are because I'm concerned with standard or commonly defended versions of permissivism in recent literature.

here, a theory characterizing this relationship as non-arbitrary. Simpson's proposal is one version of permissivism that attempts to meet this demand, although his proposal does not deal with epistemic underdetermination and faces other challenges. The epistemic existentialist permissivist, I will argue in the remainder of this chapter, achieves all these desiderata.

2.5 An epistemic existentialist response to the arbitrariness objection

Let us revisit the premises of the original arbitrariness objection, this time using P1 Intrapersonal explicitly since we are accepting epistemic underdetermination:

> P1 Intrapersonal There are some sets of total evidence, some propositions, and at least one subject such that multiple attitudes toward those propositions are rationally recommended for **that** subject, given fixed evidence.
>
> P2 Subjects can pick particular rationally recommended attitudes, and thereby come to hold rational attitudes.
>
> P3 If a subject holds a rational attitude toward a proposition, then that attitude is rationally preferable to or better than all other attitudes toward that proposition, given her evidence.

The typical permissivist response, i.e. disambiguating the original P1 and committing only to the interpersonal version of permissivism, is no longer available. Let's consider the responses that remain. First, we might reconsider P3, or RATIONAL PREFERABILITY. If RP is true, then subjects in epistemic underdetermination cases cannot hold rational attitudes simply by taking up some particular rationally recommended attitude. For RATIONAL PREFERABILITY requires that the rational attitudes subjects hold

be *preferable* to all other attitudes. And subjects in epistemic underdetermination cases face only attitudes that are no better than some alternatives.

Now, one might decide to reject RATIONAL PREFERABILITY on this basis. One could argue that, since (i) subjects in epistemic underdetermination cases can presumably come to hold rational attitudes, and (ii) (arbitrarily) picking among attitudes unpreferenced by reason would seem to be the *only* way that a subject could arrive at a particular attitude in an underdetermination case, such picking must not prohibit rationality. RATIONAL PREFERABILITY must be too strong.[21,22]

There are two important points to make about this argument. First, accepting its conclusion should be considered a major cost. Remember that the appeal of RATIONAL PREFERABILITY seems to be a crucial point of *agreement* between uniqueness theorists and permissivists. The standard permissivist way of avoiding the arbitrariness objection isn't to deny that it even matters whether rational attitudes are strictly better than alternatives. Rather, as we saw above, permissivists often simply try to distance themselves from P1$_{\text{Intrapersonal}}$ as opposed to P1$_{\text{Interpersonal}}$. Rejecting RP seems to amount to

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[21] Miriam Schoenfield has suggested this response, in conversation.

[22] Moss (2015) also advocates an interesting proposal that seems to commit her to a rejection of RATIONAL PREFERABILITY. Moss claims that subjects with imprecise credence functions may choose (arbitrarily) to operate with various precise representors. She further claims that these subjects retain the flexibility to flip to a different representor within that set. I don't mean to suggest that being in an imprecise credal state is the same as being in a situation where one's epistemic standards recommend multiple doxastic/credal attitudes. But, given the way Moss is thinking about imprecise states as leaving open multiple rationally adoptable credences, there are interesting similarities to the way I'm thinking about epistemic underdetermination cases. Accepting the parallel, Moss would seem to take the route of championing an subject's prerogative to choose 'randomly' among recommended attitudes (and the additional prerogative to change her mind for no particular reason). I object to the arbitrariness of this picture, and I attempt in the rest of this chapter to champion an subject's prerogative for choice while also casting that choice as non-arbitrary.

My proposal expressly requires diachronic commitment to an underlying principle and rules out the flipping back and forth Moss wants to license. However, I do in theory wish to be open to rather odd diachronic commitments. One might *commit* to *oscillation* of some kind. (Kierkegaard's Don Juan in *Either/Or* (1971) is "authentically" chameleon-like.)

accepting a deep arbitrariness about the particular attitudes we hold, even when we are rational.

Second – as I shall argue in the remainder of this section – (ii) is false. Arbitrary picking isn't the only possible response to epistemic underdetermination. I suggest the following, alternative possibility: subjects in epistemic underdetermination cases may commit to extensions or refinements of their frameworks, rendering their subsequent frameworks sufficiently complete/determinate to recommend a particular attitude and resolve epistemic underdetermination.

Frameworks are, after all, just the guiding epistemic principles, values, or expectations to which we are committed. Such commitments seem to be the kind of thing we could extend or refine, things we can shape over time. I will say a bit more in the next subsections about why we might positively expect to be able to alter our frameworks, but first I want to lay out the alternative resolution of the arbitrariness worry that this possibility enables.

We can hold on to RATIONAL PREFERABILITY (P3) and intrapersonal permissivism $P1_{Intrapersonal}$ only by driving a wedge between rational recommendation and actually holding a rational attitude. On the one hand, we want to allow that multiple attitudes can be rationally recommended for an individual ($P1_{Intrapersonal}$). On the other, we also want to require that, if one is to transition from rational recommendation to actually holding a rational attitude, the particular attitude one comes to hold must be strictly preferable to alternatives (P3, or RP). We accomplish both desiderata if we require subjects to take up particular attitudes *only* once they have first extended/refined their frameworks in such a

way as to whittle down rationally recommended attitudes to a unique rational recommendation.

So, I claim, P2 is false. It is not the case that if a subject simply adopts any particular rationally recommended attitude (with the appropriate basing relation), she thereby comes to hold a rational attitude. Rather, subjects may only take up a rationally recommended attitude and come to hold a rational attitude *if* (or, we might say, *once*) the attitude is uniquely rationally recommended.

This solution is compatible with permissivism because subjects really do face situations in which multiple attitudes are rationally recommended. However, the solution relies on there being an important distinction between cases in which some attitude is recommended alongside other attitudes, and cases in which that attitude is uniquely recommended. Only in the latter case, I claim, can a subject actually rationally adopt the attitude in question. This appeal to the importance of unique recommendation allows my solution to the arbitrariness objection to also accept deep intuitions underlying uniqueness. In this way, the solution may have broad appeal.

Yet it also entails a highly unorthodox view of frameworks. One thesis to which this resolution is already obviously committed:

ALTERATION IN UNDERDETERMINATION – a subject's framework can change in the face of epistemic underdetermination cases, to render a unique attitude subsequently rationally recommended.

Now, in principle one might accept ALTERATION IN UNDERDETERMINATION, together with any of a number of stories about how exactly such changes in frameworks occur. Perhaps

in epistemic underdetermination cases, our frameworks spontaneously morph to make unique recommendations in ways that have nothing to do with agency, commitment, or choice.[23] However, in part for the reasons I will canvas in the following sections and in part for the sake of a better resolution to the full scope of the arbitrariness objection (including Arbitrariness Triad #2), I claim that the advocate of this alternative resolution to the arbitrariness objection should also accept two further, controversial theses:

> AGENCY IN ALTERATION – Subjects are responsible for changing their frameworks in epistemic underdetermination cases.

> FRAMEWORK VOLUNTARISM[24] – Choosing or committing to a particular, legitimate framework gives a subject more reason to employ that framework than she would have had otherwise.

ALTERATION IN UNDERDETERMINATION, AGENCY IN ALTERATION, and FRAMEWORK VOLUNTARISM are the three definitive claims of epistemic existentialism, as a form of epistemic subjectivism.

Whereas ALTERATION IN UNDERDETERMATION is motivated, I have argued, by the permissivist's need to resolve the first-level arbitrariness objection without giving up RATIONAL PREFERABILITY, the other epistemic existentialist theses are motivated by the need to resolve the iterated version of the arbitrariness objection (Arbritrariness Triad #2).

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[23] Miriam Schoenfield has suggested such a view, in conversation.
[24] FRAMEWORK VOLUNTARISM is wholly independent of "doxastic voluntarism." I in no way take a stand on whether one may believe 'at will,' in this dissertation.

In Arbitrariness Triad #2, it seemed the permissivist – despite being officially signed up to the thesis that there are multiple legitimate frameworks no better than each other – could not coherently think there are multiple legitimate frameworks no worse than *her own*. Notice that epistemic underdetermination cases may even exacerbate this problem. The permissivist who accepts the existence of such cases is committed to thinking not only that there are multiple legitimate frameworks different individuals might hold, but also that there are multiple legitimate frameworks she herself might come to hold – i.e., multiple refinements or precisifications of her somewhat indeterminate framework – each of which is no better than alternatives.

Via AGENCY IN ALTERATION, the epistemic existentialist claims that the framework alteration that enables an individual to be rational in the face of epistemic underdetermination cases can be due to the subject – her choice or commitment. My framework doesn't just morph spontaneously to recommend an attitude uniquely in such a case. Rather, I myself can *come down* on how best to interpret and evaluate this tricky or novel evidence. I can decide to place a bit more weight on this person's testimony rather than that person's. I can decide that on some particular kind of question avoiding error matters more to me than believing truly, or maintaining systematic understanding is not worth a some particular sacrifice of expected accuracy. These words: "come down," "choose," and "decide" are all admittedly psychologically unrealistic exaggerations. These choices needn't rise to the level of consciousness. But they may be attributable doings nonetheless – doings that show up immediately in the particular judgment at hand and subsequently in our enacting these epistemic policies going forward.[25] Moreover, the

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[25] On subconscious "doings," see especially Sosa (2007, 2015).

fact that I *can* come down or choose in this way, makes my actually doing so *or* failing to do so a matter for which I am responsible. I choose – or else abnegate my ability to choose – a more specific epistemic policy or way of valuing the epistemic values.

This triggers the important consequence claimed in FRAMEWORK VOLUNTARISM. FRAMEWORK VOLUNTARISM claims that such choices or commitments extending one's framework actually generate voluntarist reason to prefer the particular framework chosen. Thus the epistemic existentialist permissivist can reject the idea that she must think of multiple frameworks as no worse than her own (P4). Although multiple frameworks may be no worse than her own when considering only *given* reasons (to be discussed briefly below), the epistemic existentialist maintains that she does have most overall reason to prefer the framework to which she is currently committed.[26] And this is because she has (partially) *chosen* that framework. This is not simply the framework with which she happens to find herself, or even the framework that happens to be suited to her abilities. Rather, this is the framework she has helped to shape, over time, and affirms via continued use.

Similarly, a partner to whom one is committed may be acknowledged, from a *certain* perspective, to be no better than other possible mates. Yet one does (and arguably should) feel a special attachment to and special responsibilities toward them.[27] The epistemic existentialist claims that particular, legitimate frameworks can be preferred over others on the grounds of having been chosen.

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[26] David Black has suggested perhaps there are other, non-voluntarist ways one could acquire more reason to employ a particular extension/precisification of one's framework. This may be, but I am drawn to AGENCY IN ALTERATION and FRAMEWORK VOLUNTARISM because of the response to Arbitrariness Triad #2 they provide.
[27] Here I am heavily influenced by Chang, e.g. (2013b).

Now, I know some will object that I too have merely pushed the arbitrariness worry for permissivism "back a step." If we choose among frameworks (or extensions of our existing frameworks) that are no better than alternatives, then how can we help but to choose arbitrarily? Here again, perhaps, it will be urged that concerns linger. In the following sections, I will draw two connections which perhaps help to suggest the response I want to give: first, to voluntarist reasons in the practical domain and, second, to existentialism. But here let me sketch in a nutshell my reply to this concern.[28]

There are two levels of arbitrariness to be avoided – Arbitrariness Triad #1 concerns arbitrariness in the particular attitudes we hold, when we hold epistemically rational attitudes, and Arbitrariness Triad #2 concerns arbitrariness in the particular frameworks we have, when we have legitimate frameworks. I have accepted that the only attractive ways out of Arbitrariness Triad #1 will retain RATIONAL PREFERABILITY. Evidence together with a legitimate framework must fully determine a particular rationally recommended attitude, if a subject is to adopt it and count as rational. But there is no plausible analogue of RATIONAL PREFERABILITY at the level of Arbitrariness Triad #2. We might *like* the epistemic values to fix the particular framework we have, when we have a legitimate framework. But, as is apparent in our experience and as reflection on the seeming-plurality and generality of epistemic values supports, this seems just not to be the case. Rather, just as there seem to be lots of permissible sets of practical values

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[28] Ernest Sosa has suggested a different reply: perhaps we manifest a special kind of competence in choosing extensions of our frameworks. Perhaps we manifest a trust of our deep self, or something like this. I accept that we can choose well or poorly in extending our frameworks, and so perhaps in choosing well we do manifest a competence. But I am wary of admitting this, for it's important to me that choosing "well" *not* be understood in terms of choosing a better extension. Rather, choosing well is choosing in a good style – deliberately, with seriousness and care, open-mindedness and courage.

and preferences, there seem to be a number of permissible ways of being committed to interpreting evidence.

So what is the real arbitrariness to be avoided in one's framework, in Arbitrariness Triad #2? It can't be merely the arbitrariness of not being fully determined by the epistemic values. I think rather the claim to be avoided is this: there is no reason at all a subject has the particular framework she has; she just happens to have it. The epistemic existentialist does avoid this kind of arbitrariness, by stressing that subjects have the frameworks they have because of the choices they've made about who to be, about the values, methods, and expectations they shall employ as inquirers. Such choices about who-to-be are in general difficult to understand and to model, for they are choices that have the potential to generate the very preferences and values that – in neat, tidy decision-making scenarios – *guide* decision.[29] And yet, somehow, we often take such choices seriously. We can make them deliberately, and not by tossing coins. Thus, as reluctant as we may be to do so, carving out space for importantly "non-arbitrary" choice among options unpreferred by given reasons seems to be a necessary condition on carving out space for beings like us. Picking from among rationally recommended attitudes may be worryingly arbitrary, but becoming the sort of person I am should not be doomed to that same category.

Epistemic existentialism is a package of three rather radical theses about frameworks, which go beyond the (already contentious) commitment to epistemic

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[29] See Chang (2015) for discussion of choices that are "transformative" in that they re-shape our reasons in the face of choices between options on a par. As Chang notes (rightly, it seems to me), we needn't see all such choices as somehow momentous, or as impacting the "deep self." The existentialist might allow that we can be authentic in small ways too, by actively taking up a reflective, deliberate stance toward our less important properties in ways that shape our reasons.

subjectivism. These theses are attractive because together they allow a permissivist to resolve the arbitrariness objection, even in the light of underdetermination cases and even, I've suggested, in the form of Arbitrariness Triad #2. But in addition I wish to suggest that this collection of theses is perhaps more independently attractive and intuitive than their novelty in the literature would suggest. In the next subsections I will briefly turn to the just-mentioned connections to practical voluntarism and existentialism, canvassing a few potential motivations for epistemic existentialism independent of the arbitrariness objection.

2.6 Hybrid voluntarism in the practical domain

If one is attracted to any kind of voluntarism in the practical domain – especially the hybrid voluntarism defended by Ruth Chang (see, e.g., 2013a) – one will have a more integrated theory reasons and rationality overall by espousing AGENCY IN ALTERATION and FRAMEWORK VOLUNTARISM[30] in epistemology.

The central claim of hybrid voluntarism is that we have both *given* and *voluntarist* reasons for action.[31] Given reasons may entirely objectively grounded. Perhaps I have a reason to be fair or just that does not derive from anyone's desires or dispositions. Given reasons may also be subjectively grounded. Because I prefer chocolate to strawberry, I have more reason to pick chocolate when ordering ice cream. What unites these as given reasons is that we are ultimately, passively *subject* to them, as opposed to being actively involved in giving them to ourselves. I didn't have any say in my reason to act fairly. Nor

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[30] Indeed, Framework Voluntarism might itself be best considered a form of "hybrid" voluntarism in epistemology. Consider responsivism, the position I develop and defend in chapter 3.

[31] Chang's hybrid voluntarism is additionally committed to a view about how these relate and combine. I'll briefly mention below that voluntarist reasons are only meant to affect what we have most reason to do in cases where given reasons "run out."

did I have any interesting say in my preferring chocolate. Given reasons include most of the practical reasons that philosophers have argued we have. In many cases in which agents face decisions, whatever given reasons there are determine some definite ranking among courses of action under consideration, including the identification of a best course.

Voluntarist reasons, on the other hand, are ones we give ourselves through commitment or choice. Because I have committed to my partner, I have many reasons I would not otherwise have – to care deeply about his welfare, to try to make him laugh, to put up with him when he does frustrating things, to be vulnerable and open with him, etc. Of course, I also have given reasons to do some of these things, to some extent. It is morally good to care about the welfare of others in general. But it seems my committing to my partner gives me extra reason to care.[32]

According to Chang (e.g., 2013a), these voluntarist reasons only "show up," or make a difference to what we in fact have most reason to do, in choice scenarios where given reasons fail to settle that question. To use one of her recurring examples, consider: should one pursue a career as a lawyer, or perhaps as a philosopher? We can imagine individuals trying to make this decision for whom the answer is clear; given reasons stemming from their preferences, aptitudes, and opportunities settle the matter. On the other hand, we can also imagine individuals for whom both options are simply highly appealing for very different reasons. Standing preferences and dispositions may not fix what they have most reason to choose.

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[32] See especially Chang (2013b).

The practical hybrid voluntarist maintains that in such cases, one may enhance or generate extra weight for certain relevant considerations – extra voluntarist reason – speaking in favor of one option, sufficient to make it the case that one really does have most reason to choose that option. One can decide to "go for" the security and practical usefulness that is involved in studying law, to be a person who cares more about those things. Or one can instead go for the more erudite but elusive attraction of academic philosophy. Voluntarist reasons, Chang claims, are precisely what allow us to complete and tidy up the rankings of our alternatives in cases where given reasons leave comparative questions unsettled – where given reasons 'run out.' They are also what allow us then to proceed rationally (following the preponderance of reason) in such cases. One may in effect make oneself into a person who faces a different and more helpfully decisive overall set of reasons.

Now, if we are convinced that there are voluntarist reasons in the practical domain – indeed, specifically that there are score-settling voluntarist reasons that allow us to make determinate rankings in these kinds of practical underdetermination cases – we should need some reason *not* to expect voluntarist reasons in play in the epistemic domain and in epistemic underdetermination cases in particular.

This is not to say that we should expect to find specifically voluntarist *epistemic* reasons – in the sense of reasons for adopting particular attitudes toward propositions. I accept that there are important disanalogies between the practical and epistemic domains (e.g., RATIONAL PREFERABILITY), and I also accept that we may not be able to believe 'at will.' But FRAMEWORK VOLUNTARISM is a thesis about reasons for having particular *frameworks.* And just as we can decide to "go for" being a lawyer instead of a

philosopher (by putting more weight on, say, financial considerations, or the concrete furthering of justice), it would seem possible to "go for" being a person who trusts certain sources more than others, or who cares more believing the truth vs. avoiding error on some question. These seem simply like further choices that need not be settled by our "given" reasons – by our current frameworks, perhaps together with any objective constraints on those frameworks. To sum up: those attracted to practical hybrid voluntarism may already be committed to theses that make epistemic existentialism attractive.

2.7 The Existentialist connection

Moreover, plausible strains of existentialist thought favor AGENCY IN ALTERATION and FRAMEWORK VOLUNTARISM. Now, I want to stress: *my goal in this section is not to offer any particularly faithful or insightful exegesis of existentialist authors*. Rather, I mean simply to review a few simple ideas from that tradition which, alongside consideration of practical hard choices, serve further to motivate my proposal for what we can and should do in cases of epistemic underdetermination.

One crux of existentialist thought is that "existence precedes essence."[33] Our "essences" – which include our important properties and projects – are not simply forced on us, to be enacted. Or, at least, *we* cannot think of them that way, first-personally. Rather, from the first-personal stance, we are constrained to take some, potentially critical, perspective on who we are and who we want to be. And in taking that perspective, we begin to take on an active, participatory role in shaping aspects of our

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[33] Sartre (1945/2007).

identities. Even reflectively taking the perspective constitutes taking on a minimal shaping role – we adopt an attitude toward our properties that joins and qualifies those very properties. (She's a *reluctant* creative; he's an *enthusiastic* athlete.) But moreover, in taking this perspective we may identify aspects of ourselves we wish to influence and change. We make choices about how to be, or who to be.[34]

Of course, such choices are highly constrained. I cannot simply choose to be athletic or creative and thereby make it so; even sustained effort may be ineffective if I am constitutionally unsuited to sports or artistic endeavors. And this is no idiosyncratic fact about talent-properties; I might not be able to choose to worry less or to be more patient either. So characteristics of myself I did not choose heavily constrain my choices about who to be; existentialists sometimes refer to this as the "facticity" of my existence. What existentialists claim is crucial, however, is my ability to "transcend" such facticity.[35] By taking a perspective on myself and making choices within the limits of my facticity, I can inhabit myself in a valuable way – I can be "*authentic.*" Authenticity, in existentialist thought, is precisely the quality of inhabiting myself in self-awareness as one who shapes myself, through choice. Now, authenticity is meant to have a creative value.[36] For existentialists claim that we do not make such choices merely by 'reading off' our existing commitments and identities. To stretch the metaphor, we do not make them even by squinting at the fine print. This is the "anxiety" of human agency – that we

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[34] I do not mean that we make such choices in an intellectual, conscious fashion. We may commit and choose in implicit ways. See also Chang (2015: fn. 46).

[35] See Crowell (2016) for a helpful overview of "facticity" and "transcendence."

[36] This suggests the beginnings of a response to the charge that permissivists don't have a good story to tell about why we should value rationality as we apparently do, which I mentioned briefly in section 2.3.

must sometimes give to ourselves our instructions about who to be. We cannot derive these wholly from our facticity.

I claim that one's epistemic framework is an aspect of oneself on which one can take a perspective. One can take a perspective on the epistemic methods, expectations, and values one employs in forming and revising opinions about the world. And once one sees this framework as an aspect of one's self, amenable to such reflection, one also sees it as amenable to influence and "transcendence," in the existentialist sense. One can reflect on oneself as an inquirer with such a framework; one can also (and thereby!) influence the kind of inquirer one is. The scope of such influence may be highly constrained, here as with other aspects of the self. After all, one must always be working with *some* framework, which presumably one just finds oneself having, initially. And perhaps our capacity to take a perspective on our framework typically only "shows up" – i.e., only impacts what is rational for us to believe – in epistemic underdetermination cases. But given that we *can* take a reflective perspective on our framework as partly self-determining agents, and that there *are* epistemic underdetermination cases, we should expect that we do have the capacity to impact what is rational to believe *there.* Indeed, recalling one of the cases of epistemic underdetermination from the previous chapter – Aasiya in CONFLICT – it is plausible to cast this as an opportunity for subtle self-alteration. In choosing how to weight the conflicting testimonies of a friend, partner, and mentor, Aasiya is also in a small way choosing who to be.[37]

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[37] It may be helpful to some readers to think of this "existentialist" connection as a James-ian connection. James's "The Will to Believe" in particular is largely devoted to the choices we must make without any obvious guide, which greatly impact our overall intellectual lives as well as our particular doxastic/credal attitudes in certain tricky sets of epistemic circumstances.

2.8 Review and conclusion

We have covered a lot of ground. It may be helpful, by way of summary, to contrast some 'toy' instructions for acquiring rational attitudes suggested by epistemic existentialism with the instructions implicitly suggested by the uniqueness theorists and other permissivists we considered in earlier sections. (Of course, these theorists needn't and probably oughtn't see themselves as giving good, followable *instructions* for rationality, rather than a characterization of structural possibilities for rational attitudes. But the illustration is helpful.)

The uniqueness theorist charged with giving instructions for being maximally epistemically rational might say:

"Adopt the attitude recommended by the one true set of epistemic standards!"

These instructions are problematic both because they rule out rational disagreement and because they ignore the importance of intellectual integrity, or following one's own lights, in being rational. The interpersonal permissivist *cum* intrapersonal uniqueness theorist suggests, instead:

"Adopt the attitude recommended by your own framework!"

This suggestion has left the permissivist open to lingering, iterated worries about the arbitrariness of the particular standards one has (Arbitrariness Triad #2). A further problem with this suggestion, I claimed, is that one's framework can fail to recommend a unique attitude. Both of these problems, I submit, stem from an implausible implicit assumption about the relationship between a subject and her framework. Permissivists often seem to assume that we are simply 'born with' – or at any rate, we simply have –

whatever framework we in fact have. But this characterization leaves us wanting when we ask why we should care about following our particular framework and what we should do when it fails to settle what we should believe.

On an epistemic existentialist view, we do simply find ourselves with some loose framework (and it may be that – if our attitudes are going to end up counting as rational – that framework had better be pretty objectively accuracy-conducive[38]). However, the epistemic existentialist thinks, this can only be a partial story about why each of us has the standards we do. In large part, mature adults have the standards they do because of non-arbitrary choices they have made, in making up their minds in novel situations.[39] The epistemic existentialist instructions for being maximally rational run as follows:

> "If your own framework recommends a unique attitude, then, ceteris paribus,
> adopt it![40] If not – if your framework could be refined or extended in various
> ways to recommend any of multiple attitudes – then first commit to some
> particular refinement/extension and then adopt the subsequently recommended
> attitude!"

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[38] For all I've said here, epistemic existentialism is neutral on the issue whether permissivism should be "moderate" vs. "extreme." However, in chapter 3 I advocate objective constraints on legitimate (or "salutary") frameworks. See Horowitz (2014) for criticism of (initially attractive) moderate versions of permissivism.

[39] Mature adults' continuing use and endorsement and those standards may constitute another volition-involving ground of the standards those subjects have.

[40] With my ceteris paribus clause, I want officially to leave room for exceptions, wherein one may revise epistemic standards even when they yield a determinate verdict, in response to certain kinds of situations in which all else is not equal. I have in mind what we might call "epistemic revolutions," which involve something analogous to scientific revolutions or paradigm shifts in the sciences. As long as these epistemic revolutions are generally few and far between, the above remains a good epistemic existentialist heuristic for being maximally rational.

For example, if one is weighing conflicting testimony from trusted sources, one may need to first commit to a ranking of their trustworthiness on certain issues and *then* form one's own opinion. (Recall CONFLICT.)[41]

In this chapter, I have largely been concerned with demonstrating the consequences of this view for the debate over uniqueness and permissivism, and for resolving the arbitrariness objection in particular. I argued that this view of epistemic reasons/rationality can satisfactorily resolve the arbitrariness objection for permissivism while honoring RATIONAL PREFERABILITY – the attractive principle underlying that objection. To recap that resolution: the epistemic existentialist can readily admit that legitimate frameworks may recommend multiple attitudes for an individual in certain sets of epistemic circumstances, since she also claims that said individual can commit to a refinement of her framework that recommends a unique attitude. We needn't see such commitments as worryingly arbitrary, since they are choices about who to be that can be made deliberately and with seriousness. And in general, *whenever* a subject comes to hold any attitude recommended by her framework, she can think of that framework as hers in a deeper sense than merely being the framework she happens to hold or the framework associated with her. One's framework at any point in time is partly a function of one's choices. So, when one's framework does uniquely recommend an attitude, one can adopt that attitude not merely as 'happening to be rationally recommended for me' but as 'best-recommended by the lights of the framework I have shaped.'

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[41] Indeed, even in the less-evaluatively-charged scenario (COVERAGE) where one needs to take a position on toothpaste being next out of the bag – one may need to first commit to some estimations of the unpredictability of such a person's behavior and/or a principle about how tentative to be in such a bizarre scenario – and *then* adopt some (presumably highly imprecise) credence.

I also, although briefly, suggested a few independent reasons we may be attracted to epistemic existentialism, based on connections with voluntarist or existentialist theses in the practical domain. Of course, numerous objections and open questions remain. I shall mention just a few in closing.

First, one might worry about AGENCY IN ALTERATION, with respect to what exactly is involved psychologically in committing to a refinement or extension of one's existing framework, and whether such commitments are really in our power. For my purposes, what matters is that we can make commitments to frameworks that will constitute (subtle) self-alteration, in which one makes oneself into a person with slightly more definitive or extensive epistemic values or opinions. These commitments should have diachronic, self-binding implications. Defense of our having the required capacity for such commitments is outside of current scope; here I note only that the plausibility of this capacity does not depend on the plausibility of "doxastic voluntarism," or any capacity to pick one's doxastic/credal attitudes by willing. I claim that we can will ourselves to have subtly different epistemic *frameworks,* not different doxastic attitudes.

The broader epistemological and social epistemological implications of this view will likely also seem worrisome to some readers. With respect to the question of rational disagreement, can epistemic existentialism honor and legitimize 'conciliationist' intuitions? Moreover, if we have the capacity as subjects to precisify or extend our frameworks, do we also have the capacity to outright alter them? More generally, in what ways might our capacity for shaping epistemic reasons be constrained – can the epistemic existentialist avoid licensing intuitively crazy inferences as rational and prohibit problematic bootstrapping? Finally, I have here leaned heavily on parallels and also

disanalogies between the epistemic and practical domains – what exactly is the relationship between epistemic and practical reasons, or rationality?

I take up these last two questions, or at least aspects of them, in the next chapter. The current chapter is intended as an initial proposal, a sketch of how a certain quite radical view of epistemic rationality is in fact motivated by the joint plausibility of epistemic underdetermination cases, permissivism, and RATIONAL PREFERABILITY.

Chapter 3: Sourcing the Normativity of Epistemic Rationality – Responsivism

Together, the previous two chapters support a somewhat radical, subjectivist view of epistemic rationality (epistemic existentialism), which in turn entails that we're responsible for what it's rational for us to believe on the basis of our evidence. The primary objection to subjectivist views in general is that they entail even intuitively crazy beliefs might, in principle, be rational for subjects with wacky frameworks. Of course, the thought goes, we could stipulate *that only objectively "reasonable" or accuracy-conducive frameworks are rationality-conferring. But isn't this sort of restriction doomed to be rather unprincipled, for the subjectivist?*

Here I take up the project of motivating principled constraints on the kinds of frameworks that are rationality-conferring, by reflecting on the source of normativity for epistemic rationality. This question about the source of normativity for epistemic rationality also seems independently interesting and under-explored. Here I use parallels with the meta-normative source question in the practical domain to understand the challenges of different views in the epistemic domain. I argue for a hybrid, "responsivist" view of the source of normativity for epistemic rationality, which can explain why only certain, "salutary" frameworks are legitimate.

3.1 Introduction

There are, so it seems, some rational theists and rational atheists, rational progressives and rational conservatives, rational consequentialists and rational deontologists. One

tempting way of explaining the existence of such rational disagreements is to say that what's rational for a person to believe on the basis of evidence depends, in part, on *her*. In particular, what's rational for a person to believe depends on the ways of interpreting and evaluating evidence that she is committed to as epistemically good. For example, theists may be committed to subtly different approaches to identifying and trusting authorities than are nontheists, or they may be moved to a greater degree by the desideratum of explanatory power when it comes to certain cosmological questions, or they may simply place a higher relative weight on believing the truth vs. avoiding error, which makes them more willing to believe theism on the basis of inconclusive evidence.[1]

Throughout this dissertation, I've been calling views according to which what's rational for a person to believe depends in part on her epistemic commitments, "subjectivist" views of rationality. Many epistemologists endorse subjectivist views (even if they do not yet endorse the epistemic existentialist version of subjectivism defended in the previous chapter).[2] And notice that although subjectivist views are sometimes associated with a lax, "anything goes" approach to thinking about epistemic rationality, subjectivist views are the only views according to which it makes sense to hold each other *responsible* for what it's rational for us to believe. Only if what it's rational for me to believe depends in part on *me* – my standards, my framework, my commitments as to

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[1] James suggests this final conjunct in "The Will to Believe."

[2] Such epistemologists arguably include subjective Bayesians, as well as those who think what it's rational for us to believe can vary with our "standards" or "frameworks." On standards, see e.g. Schoenfield (2014), Kelly (2013), and Willard-Kyle (2015). On frameworks, see, e.g., Boghossian (2006), Rosen (2007), Neta (2007), and Pritchard (2009).

good ways of interpreting/evaluating evidence – might I possibly be responsible for what it's rational for me to believe.[3]

Yet there are standard criticisms of subjectivist views. If we are to say that certain people's epistemic commitments can make theism (or political progressivism, or consequentialism) rational, must we also admit that others' epistemic commitments might rationalize belief in the Flying Spaghetti Monster[4]? Or Nazism? Or the theory that moral goodness consists in maximizing the beauty of ducks[5]?

A very natural thing to want to say, instead, is that there must be some variation or freedom *within constraints* when it comes to epistemic rationality.[6] Individual subjects' commitments as to good ways of interpreting and evaluating evidence must matter in some way sufficient to account for certain cases of rational disagreement. What's rational for me must be able to differ from what's rational for you, in some way that depends on our individual perspectives, values, or 'starting points.' And yet there must be some way of drawing the line. Individual subjects' commitments can't be the *only* thing that matters.

A primary issue for epistemologists who want to say this very natural thing about variation within constraints is that it can seem unprincipled. The present chapter attempts to make progress on these questions in what may be a surprising way. I raise an under-

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[3] Responsibility for one's rationality-affecting commitments certainly doesn't *follow* from one's simply having rationality-affecting commitments. But the latter is a necessary condition for the former. I am not responsible for what in no way depends on me. Now, one might reject subject-sensitive views and yet think that we're responsible for what's rational for us to believe in the sense that we're responsible for the *evidence* we get. But I'm considering the stronger claim that we're responsible for what's rational for us to believe *on the basis of whatever evidence we have.* A subject-sensitive view is then required.

[4] Henderson (2005) invented this character.

[5] Example from Arpaly and Schroeder (2014: 185).

[6] I cite philosophers explicitly committed to this below.

discussed *meta-normative* question, which is the epistemic analogue of a much-discussed

meta-ethical question about the ground of practical reasons' normativity.[7] Why or in

virtue of what are rational attitudes, attitudes I ought (epistemically[8]) to have?[9]

Alternatively, where does the normative pressure to have or adopt these attitudes come

from?[10] I will suggest that there is an attractive sort of answer to these questions –

"responsivism" – which stands to help explain in a principled way why epistemically

rational attitudes would vary within constraints, across individuals.

The responsivist takes very seriously what I will call the dual nature of rationality.

The dual nature of rationality is pre-theoretic. On the one hand, rationality seems

perspectival or addressed to a subject. To be rational is to do well by one's own lights, to

have beliefs that make sense to oneself. On the other hand, what's rational seems in some

way *correct,* and what can be rational seems to be constrained by this correctness

condition. To be rational is to have beliefs that make sense objectively, or to others. This

intuitive dual nature is an explanandum, for epistemologists. The responsivist explains it

by claiming that the fundamental ground of rationality's normativity mirrors and explains

this duality. She claims epistemically rational attitudes are normative precisely in virtue

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[7] In this paper, I am concerned with epistemic *rationality.* Discussing the relationship to epistemic reasons is outside current scope. There seems to be particular cause to focus on rationality rather than reasons in the epistemic domain, since it is not common (or advisable) to think of epistemically rational attitudes as supervening on individual epistemic reasons. See especially Titelbaum (forthcoming).

[8] I assume there is a distinctively *epistemic* sort of normative pressure, to adopt epistemically rational attitudes. Some disagree – see, e.g., Rinard (2017). It may be that a modified form of the positive, responsivist view I will present can be understand as a view of normativity more generally, but I cannot consider this here.

[9] This is related to Kolodny's (2005) influential question, "Why be rational?" But here I am not exactly asking after *reason(s)* to be rational (if there be such); rather I'm asking after the *ground* of rationality's normativity. See also fn 7; I am not concerned here with the relationship between reasons and rationality.

[10] One might think the only normative pressure here is negative: *don't*, say, *disbelieve* that there's a laptop in front of you. Relatedly, one might say there is no normative "pressure" at all but rather just normative permission. When I talk about there being normative pressure to have or adopt rational attitudes, I just mean that there are some normative constraints forbidding irrational attitudes and/or requiring or permitting rational ones. Strictly, I am neutral on the nature and strength of normativity involved.

of *both* subjects' own reflective epistemic commitments with respect to interpreting and evaluating evidence, *and also* the objective epistemic goodness or rightness of those commitments. Susan Wolf famously sloganized a popular thought about well-being or meaning in life, claiming, "Meaning arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness." (1997: 211)[11] Something terribly special seems to happen when we want good things and get what we want. The responsivist proposal is that epistemic rationality is similar, in a sense. Attitudes are rational for us precisely when and because we are able to countenance for ourselves that which it would be epistemically good (in an objective, external sense) for us to believe.

Responsivism is a view about the general structure of the ground of epistemic rationality's normativity. Just as theorists of well-being who agree that it arises from a meeting of subjective attraction and objective attractiveness may disagree about what this "meeting" amounts to and about what is objectively attractive, responsivists can disagree with each other about what it takes for epistemic commitments to be good and capable of authority. Hence, responsivists can disagree with each other about the scope of rational disagreement and why exactly, for example, a particular subject's position does or doesn't! count as rational. This is one important way in which my project here is limited; I will not have space to argue for some particular version of responsivism that pronounces verdicts on particular cases. My project is rather to suggest that the right answer to the question what makes attitudes rationally normative will take a certain, oddly neglected *form*, citing both subjects' epistemic commitments and the objective

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[11] For structurally similar recent claims about the nature of well-being, see also, e.g.: Adams (1999), Kagan (2009), and Parfit (1984: 501-2). The idea may also have an ancient pedigree. Cooper (2012: pp. 33-34) claims that Socrates' character in the *Apology* and related dialogues held a similar view.

goodness of those commitments. If views of this form are quite generally motivated and principled, this clears away a major objection to various more specific views of epistemic rationality that would posit intersubjective variation within constraints.

A second, more general way in which my project is limited: because many of the questions and positions I will discuss are under-discussed or only obliquely discussed elsewhere, my project must be largely exploratory. I do not try to argue conclusively for responsivism. Rather, by sketching the view, explaining some of the work it can do, and discussing its advantages over possible alternative views very schematically, I hope to motivate further work, both on the normative ground question for epistemology in general and on responsivist views in particular. For example, it is an interesting further question whether responsivist views about *practical* rationality and/or reasons are attractive – one I will discuss briefly in section 3.6.

I will present responsivism in greater detail in section 3.3, having first clarified in section 3.2 the meta-normative question for epistemic rationality it purports to answer and some important alternative answers: 'framework-dependence' and 'framework-independence'. In sections 3.4 & 3.5, I outline major motivations for, on the one hand, either framework-dependence or responsivism, and, on the other hand, either framework-independence or responsivism. Since there are reasonably weighty considerations on both sides, we seem to have a prima facie case for responsivism (which complements the independent considerations favoring responsivism offered in section 3.3). I consider some important objections to responsivism in section 3.6.

3.2 The meta-normative source question for epistemic rationality

I am interested in what it is in virtue of which epistemically (ir)rational doxastic attitudes – i.e., *ex ante* (ir)rational attitudes, or perhaps "rationally recommended (non-recommended)" attitudes[12] – are attitudes that subjects are under normative pressure (not) to have or adopt.

This is a meta-normative question about epistemically rational attitudes, answers to which may be strictly neutral on many other questions epistemologists ask. We are asking for the normative source or ground of epistemic rationality: whatever the rational attitudes are, whatever principles govern them, however they do or don't vary across individuals and their "standards" or "frameworks" – why are they attitudes we epistemically ought to have or adopt? As I describe above, our question importantly *bears* on these other issues, but recognizing the distinct nature of the questions is essential for clarity.

Our question is illuminated by its potential answers. In the next section, I'll develop my own responsivist sort of answer. But first I want to consider two answers that are perhaps more natural or which come to mind more immediately. I'll call these 'framework-dependence' and 'framework-independence,' echoing their practical analogues, attitude-dependence and attitude-independence, in meta-ethics. Let us call a framework-dependent theorist about epistemic rationality anyone who thinks that rational attitudes are ultimately, fundamentally normative in virtue of epistemic subjects' frameworks (on which more below), and let us call a framework-independent theorist

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[12] The rational/rationally recommended distinction is not important to the argument of the present chapter. Those who agree with me that this *is* an important distinction (as I've argued over the previous two chapters), may wish to understand talk of "rational attitudes" in this chapter as elliptical for talk of "rationally recommended attitudes."

about epistemic rationality anyone who thinks that rational attitudes are ultimately, fundamentally normative in virtue of something – epistemic values, or norms governing good thinking, or perhaps brute facts about rational attitudes – that is external to an epistemic subject.

In order to understand these positions, we clearly need to understand what frameworks are supposed to be. We have seen these before, in the previous chapter (section 2.2). But they bear review in this context. Frameworks are broadly understood to be something like subjects' deepest commitments as to good ways of interpreting and evaluating evidence. They are meant to capture perspectival facts about what attitudes are epistemically good from a subject's point of view, given her evidence.[13,14] Beyond this rough characterization, though, there's a good deal of disagreement as to what exactly constitutes these things, how they 'work', and how they might be realized, psychologically.

Some philosophers write as though to have a framework may be to have certain (weighted) epistemic *desires*: for truth, avoidance of error, simple explanations, etc.[15] And/or: to have a framework may be simply to have the *disposition* to form doxastic attitudes in certain ways, when one is in epistemically ideal circumstances or when one is

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[13] See White (2005, 2007) and Boghossian (2006) for influential arguments against such normatively significant frameworks/sets of standards; Titelbaum (2010) – also discussed below – dissents. Much recent work on relativism, subjectivism, or permissivism also considers whether rational attitudes vary with subjects' "epistemic standards" or "frameworks." See also references in fn. 2.

[14] Nothing I say hangs on evidentialism. Though I sometimes say rational attitudes are determined according to subjects' evidence, I could instead more ecumenically (but also more clumsily) say rational attitudes are determined on the basis of subjects' epistemic circumstances.

[15] See Willard-Kyle (2016), Kelly (2013).

deeply reflective.[16,17] Alternatively, frameworks may be sets of imperatives that are in one's plans (Given evidence E, adopt attitude A!)[18]; sets of beliefs one has about the right way to form beliefs[19]; or just credence functions that particular individuals have – however those should be interpreted.[20] For my purposes, it is not necessary to identify the most plausible characterization of frameworks. I will think of framework-dependence as the thesis that subjects' frameworks are the ground of epistemic rationality's normativity, leaving open whether this means ultimately grounding the normativity of epistemic rationality in desires, dispositions, beliefs, or commitments.[21] So, according to the framework-dependence theorist, I should *believe* there's a laptop in front of me because my own framework – which may amount to, e.g., my own endorsed plans as to how interpret/evaluate evidence – permits or requires this attitude.

In contrast, the framework-independence theorist about epistemic rationality might say, e.g., that rational attitudes ground their own normativity, or that the normativity of rational attitudes is grounded in facts about epistemic values (like truth or accuracy), or objective epistemic norms/rules. A framework-independence theorist might say I should *believe* there's a laptop in front of me because this hypothesis is objectively

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[16] See Foley (1987); in a metaethical context, see Wedgwood (2007). Thinking of frameworks as dispositions also sits well with a virtue epistemological approach to rationality, where a "salutary" framework (to be explained later in the paper) would just be a set of competences or virtues.

[17] The rest of this list of alternative ways of thinking of frameworks parallels Schoenfield's (2014: 199) quick recap of ways of thinking about epistemic standards.

[18] See Rosen (2007) for discussion, especially in relation to metaethics.

[19] Elga (ms.)

[20] See, e.g., Meacham (2014).

[21] I do not mean to suggest these distinctions are unimportant. One respect in which they might matter is in determining whether a particular form of framework-dependence is *voluntarist.* See Chang (2013) for careful distinction between "internalist" and "voluntarist" practical meta-normative views.

likely on my evidence, or because the objective rules of rationality license such a belief, etc.

Now, some framework-independence theorists may think the fundamental, grounding external values or norms *include* some value or norm of attitudes' being in keeping with a subject's framework. Some framework-independence theorists may thus be *subjectivist* framework-independence theorists.[22] But the subjectivist framework-independence theorist must ultimately give a certain answer to any "Euthyphro problem" about the significance of subjects' frameworks.[23] Are normative, rational attitudes always in keeping with subjects' frameworks because the external rules of rationality require this? Or are normative, rational attitudes always in keeping with certain external rules of rationality because subjects' frameworks enjoin their having such attitudes? The subjectivist framework-independence theorist would affirm the former, whereas the framework-dependence theorist would affirm the latter.[24]

It bears repeating: epistemic framework-dependence (framework-independence) is not the mere attribution (denial) of frameworks to subjects – nor is it merely the extensional claim (denial) that all and only attitudes in keeping with these frameworks

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[22] On terminology: I use "sensitivity" to mark co-variation, whereas "dependence" signifies normative grounding. I might instead have used "framework-sensitive," rather than "subject-sensitive," here. But this would result in cumbersome and confusing repetitions of the term "framework," in describing subject-sensitive framework-independent theorists.

[23] Thanks to Ruth Chang, Jimmy Goodrich, and Will Fleisher for pressing me on the distinction between framework-dependence and subject-sensitive framework-independence.

[24] Here the contrast with Beddor's (2015) question of what grounds facts about justification is particularly clear. Beddor is one of few other epistemologists considering applications of grounding for epistemology. But he is concerned with what might metaphysically explain or ground an attitude's being justified (which may or may not amount also to being rational). Both the framework-dependence theorist and the subject-sensitive framework-independence theorist think that rationality facts are metaphysically grounded in framework facts. They still disagree about the *normative* fundamentality of those framework facts, and hence about our central meta-normative question.

are rational. Moreover, I should note explicitly that framework-dependence (framework-independence) is orthogonal to permissivism (uniqueness) about rationality. One could be a framework-dependence theorist with a highly idealized view of subjects' frameworks and think we all have the same framework, such that rational attitudes never vary among individuals with the same evidence. Or one could be a framework-independence theorist and also think either (i) that objective facts/rules dictate the normative significance of subjects' frameworks (subjectivist framework-independence), or (ii) that the framework-independent rules of rationality simply sometimes make any of multiple attitudes rational in response to evidence (slack rules framework-independence).

Framework-dependence (framework-independence) is also orthogonal to internalism (externalism) about justification. For one thing, rationality is arguably distinct from justification. Justification – a motley concept, as Alston (2005) has argued – seems centrally tied to questions about what it takes for true belief to count as knowledge. Rationality, on the other hand, has clearer analogues in the practical domain and is often theorized separately in epistemology. Moreover, again, internalism and externalism are positions stating the sorts of conditions under which beliefs can count as justified, not claims about what grounds the normativity of justified beliefs. An internalist about justification might think we should have justified beliefs because the *external, objective rules of good thinking* require that we have beliefs that seem good by our own lights. An externalist might think we should have justified beliefs because, *by our own lights*, it is epistemically good to have beliefs that are reliably formed.

In this section I've attempted to clarify our meta-normative question about the ground of epistemic rationality's normativity, largely by characterizing two important

sorts of answers to that question. In the next section, I'll characterize my own, third sort

of answer to our meta-normative question. I will return to further discussion of

framework-dependence and framework-independence in sections 3.4 and 3.5, where I

suggest that responsivism can capture much of the motivation for these alternative views.

3.3 Responsivism

The framework-dependence theorist thinks rational attitudes must be keeping with a

subject's framework, for this grounds their normativity. The framework-independence

theorist thinks rational attitudes must stand in some objectively good relation to one's

evidence, for this grounds their normativity. My basic, responsivist proposal is that

rational attitudes must be in keeping with one's framework, *and* one's framework must

also be (objectively, externally) a good one; for both conditions together ground the

normativity of epistemic rationality. The responsivist claims: rational attitudes have

normative standing for a subject because (i) they are in keeping with the subject's

framework; and also (ii) the subject's framework is itself objectively epistemically

salutary.

We can thus distinguish responsivism from framework dependence and

framework independence as follows:

Epistemically rational attitudes are attitudes we are under normative pressure to

have/adopt fundamentally in virtue of ...

- *Framework-dependence*: our frameworks. (and nothing else)

- *Framework-independence*: X. (where X does not include our frameworks – X might plausibly be fundamental epistemic values or fundamental epistemic norms.)

- *Responsivism*: both our frameworks and the salutariness of our frameworks.

When I say a framework is objectively epistemically salutary (salutary for short), I mean that it stands in a salutary relation to the objective epistemic values or norms.[25] Responsivism in general is neutral on the nature of that salutary relation and those values/norms. There may be one or many fundamental epistemic values/norms. If there are many fundamental values, these may or may not have determinate, commensurable weights. The required, salutary relation that a subject's framework must bear to these values/norms may be a consequentialist promoting relation, or perhaps instead a telic relation or a respect relation. This relation may or may not be sensitive to the social community in which the subject is inquiring. (E.g., the bar for salutariness for a doctor's commitments with respect to medical knowledge might be sensitive to her role in society.) Separately, the required relation may be maximal (maximal promotion, respect, etc.) or instead merely satisficing. Different ways of understanding the salutary relation and the values/norms involved will make for importantly different versions of responsivism – versions with important consequences for debates over rational disagreement and permissivism. But officially, responsivism is like framework-dependence or framework-independence – a broad, structural *sort* of answer to our meta-normative question, which admits of wide variation amongst its proponents.

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[25] Salutariness may well come in degrees, but here I will simply talk about salutary and unsalutary frameworks. As Sosa (2007) notes, justification similarly comes in degrees, and yet it is appropriate to categorize beliefs as simply justified or unjustified.

Importantly, the responsivist posits external requirements not directly on rational attitudes, but on subjects' frameworks. If attitudes are going to be rational for a subject, she must somehow be committed to somewhat broad or general ways of forming beliefs that respect or conduce to the epistemic values. Placing external restrictions on frameworks rather than simply on attitudes is important to avoid attributing normative significance to attitudes whenever there is a mere coincidence between subjects' frameworks and externally good ways of forming attitudes. It is *not* a consequence of the responsivist's position that attitudes recommended by an otherwise terrible framework will be rational whenever these happen to coincide with the recommendations of externally good rules.[26]

Now some responsivists may also require that a subject's having a salutary framework be responsive to its salutariness: she must have a salutary framework not by happenstance but *because* it's salutary. But discussing the relationship between a subject and her framework would take us too far afield here; see related discussion in chapter 2.

Responsivism immediately entails two important claims. The first bears on the extension of rational attitudes. Namely, it's harder for an attitude to be epistemically rational – it takes more for it to be the case that an attitude is rational for a subject – than either framework-dependence theorists or framework-independence theorists might have thought. Attitudes that framework-dependence theorists would count as rationally

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[26] Epistemologists, gun-shy after Gettier, tend to be wary of analyzing any phenomenon via a conjunction. I admit that if instead the responsivist were positing the conditions of an attitude's being in keeping with a subject's framework and its being in keeping with external rules, one might reasonably demand that there be some further connection between the two conditions. But there is no further connection to be demanded between the conjunctive conditions the responsivist actually posits: an attitude's being in keeping with a framework and that framework's being salutary.

normative (because they are in keeping with a subject's framework) and attitudes that framework-independence theorists would count as rationally normative (because they are in keeping with, e.g., objective rules for interpreting/evaluating evidence) may both fail the responsivist's standards. According to the responsivist, there are possible cases in which no attitude at all would be epistemically rational for a subject to adopt/have – at least, this is so if it is possible for a subject to lack an epistemically salutary framework. I will address whether this constitutes a problem or an advantage for the responsivist below, in section 3.6.

Second, the responsivist holds that the normativity of epistemic rationality arises specifically out of the interaction of framework-dependent and external elements. The responsivist is not a subjectivist framework-independence theorist. She does not think external facts grounding the normativity of epistemic rationality simply license taking into account a subject's perspective. The responsivist is also not exactly a framework-dependence theorist positing external constraints on frameworks. She does not think subjects' frameworks ground the normativity of epistemic rationality, so long as certain external constraints are not violated. Rather, the responsivist says *both* a subject's framework *and* the external salutariness of that framework ground the normativity of epistemic rationality.

Perhaps these will seem to be unimportant distinctions. I maintain that they are crucial. For in claiming that both frameworks and the salutariness of those frameworks fundamentally ground the normativity of epistemic rationality, the responsivist is able to locate the source of rationality's normativity right where we should have expected to find it: at the intersection of an attitude's seeming good and its being good – or, more

precisely, at the intersection of an attitude's seeming good by one's own lights and one's being in a position to assess such things, or having decent lights to go by.

We noted in the introduction that rationality intuitively has this dual nature, involving both accessibility and correctness. In epistemology, it is uncontroversial that rational attitudes vary *in some way* with a subject's particular situation – at the very least, they vary according to the evidence she has. At least in this way, epistemic rationality has to be importantly *for* subjects, or addressed to them. More generally, rationality is thought to be centrally connected to our desires or ends. But rationality also seems to be constrained, and this is perhaps especially clear within epistemology. It is in general difficult to maintain that desires for wholly undesirable activities – counting blades of grass, committing genocide – make such activities rational. In epistemology, it can seem downright obvious that not just any sort of inference or attitude can be rational, even if one honestly takes it to be. (Think of the gambler's fallacy, or the Tortoise in Lewis Carroll's famous story.)

The responsivist stands to provide a relatively simple story as to why rationality would have both of these features it pre-theoretically seems to have. Rationality is perspectival or accessible because subjects' frameworks are in the fundamental ground of epistemic rationality's normativity. Rationality is constrained by correctness because the salutariness of subjects' frameworks is also in the fundamental ground of epistemic rationality's normativity. For the responsivist's distinctive claim is that the combination and interaction of these perspectival (desire-like) and non-perspectival (desirability) elements is what essentially gives rise to the normativity of epistemic rationality. The responsivist thinks we acquire rational options precisely when and because we are able to

appreciate or (at least in some idealized sense) countenance for ourselves that which it would be good (in an external sense) for us to believe.

Responsivism is in some ways novel. "Responsivism" is my own term, and it is explicitly a position on the normative ground of epistemic rationality. But responsivism seems clearly to have natural allies in epistemology, with precisely the kinds of views we mentioned in the introduction, which posit intersubjective variation among epistemically rational attitudes within constraints. Consider Zagzebski (2014: 31), writing about "epistemic reasons": "What I mean by an epistemic reason to believe *p* is something on the basis of which a reasonable person can settle for herself whether *p.*" Here we see the framework-dependence theorist's insistence on what a subject can appreciate or "settle" for herself, as well as the responsivist's external constraint on the sort of subject we must be talking about: a "reasonable person." Zagzebski states these as conditions on what it is to be a reason; such a view pairs naturally with the thought that these also ground the normativity of rationality.

Consider also certain forms of permissivism. Schoenfield (2014) defends a form of permissivism on which "what one ought to believe depends, in part, on what epistemic standards one has. (p. 199)," and she also claims in a footnote that the most plausible form of permissivism will posit substantive rational requirements on a set of epistemic standards (fn. 16). Since epistemic standards are just frameworks in the terminology we've been using, it seems as though Schoenfield thinks rational attitudes are always in keeping with one's framework, where that framework meets substantive external constraints. These conditions on rational attitudes certainly do not entail, but they do

suggest, that both the fit with a subject's framework and the goodness of her framework

may be important in *grounding the normativity* of a rational attitude.

Similarly, the subjective Bayesian is typically happy to admit that rational

attitudes co-vary with individual subjects' prior credence functions. But those credence

functions must satisfy the probability axioms, and rational attitudes are determined on the

basis of those functions via a rigid, subject-insensitive procedure: conditionalization. In

other words, we see again both the relevance of an individual subject's perspective and

the relevance of constraints on that perspective or its bearing that are not perspective-

dependent.

Finally, consider the role of competences in Sosa's virtue reliabilism (2007,

2015). For Sosa, a subject's SSS competence will determine what attitude (if any) is

justified for her on the basis of her evidence. These competences are ultimately reliable-

enough epistemic dispositions. (If a subject's epistemic dispositions to pronounce on

some question are *not* reliable enough, given her shape and situation, then this makes

suspension of judgment the only justified attitude, of the three traditional options,

according to Sosa.) So, again, we see it maintained that justified (rational) attitudes are

determined by (i) our own belief-forming dispositions, constrained by (ii) the external

reliability of those dispositions. I don't claim that any other epistemologists (besides me)

actually are committed responsivists. But it seems to me that some of us might be, tacitly.

Or rather, perhaps we *should* be. One important motivation for responsivism is

precisely that it captures and stands to help explain what I've called the dual quality of

rationality. Another is that it helps explain why rational attitudes would exhibit the sort of

variation within limits that many epistemologists already endorse. In addition, as I'll now

suggest over the next two sections, responsivists seems able to capture much of what's attractive about each of framework-dependence and framework-independence.

3.4 Responsivism and framework-dependence

Framework-dependence, again, is the thesis that rational attitudes are normative simply and directly in virtue of being in keeping with subjects' frameworks. There seem to be two main motivations for preferring framework-dependence over framework-independence. I will argue that both of these are also – if not *quite* equally – motivations for preferring responsivism over framework-independence.

The first motivation for framework-dependence /responsivism in turn has two parts. We might become convinced both that rational attitudes are sensitive to subjects' frameworks, and also that framework-dependence/responsivism better explains this sensitivity than does subjectivist framework-independence. Separately, framework-dependence and responsivism can seem less metaphysically and motivationally "mysterious" than framework-independence.

Subject sensitivity: confirmation theory and enkrasia

To say that rationality is subjectivist is to say that whether an attitude is rational for a subject varies not only with her evidence, but also with her framework for interpreting/evaluating evidence. The framework-dependence theorist, the responsivist, as well as the subjectivist framework-independence theorist thinks this; the subject-insensitive framework-independence theorist does not.[27]

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[27] The responsivist accepts that an attitude's being in keeping with a subject's framework is necessary, though not sufficient, for its epistemic rationality. The framework-dependence theorist in contrast seems to

Why should we adopt such a subjectivist view (either framework-dependent, responsivist, or framework-independent)? First, subjectivist views of rationality have an easier time making sense of confirmation theory. It is uncontroversial among epistemologists that evidence confirms/disconfirms hypotheses relative to some background set of expectations – generally modelled by a credence function. It was once hoped – most notably, by Carnap – that we could think of *rational* confirmation as proceeding according to some particular credence function, which would be itself explicable as reflecting purely "logical" probabilities.[28] But Carnap's project of explaining how logical probabilities could determine such a credence function is widely thought to have failed.[29] And in the wake of this failure, it is simply not clear where sufficient guidance for rational attitudes might come from, if not from subjective frameworks in the form of starting "priors."[30]

Separately, subjectivist views of rationality can vindicate a connection between epistemic rationality and *enkrasia,* or thinking well by one's own lights. Epistemologists clearly motivated by this connection include, for example, Foley (1987:103):

> What it is rational for a person *S* to believe from an epistemic point of view… is a function of *S*'s own perspective and epistemic standards. It is a function of what he believes and the confidence with which he believes it and the arguments he, on reflection, would find persuasive.

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be committed to thinking that an attitude's being in keeping with a subject's framework is both necessary and sufficient for its rationality, since this would be sufficient to ground its rational normativity.

[28] Carnap (1950).

[29] On the putative failure of the Carnapian project and its relation to "epistemic standards" or permissivism, see Schoenfield (2014), Kelly (2013), Douven (2009).

[30] Titelbaum (2010) presses Goodman's 'grue' example forcefully as an objection to any subject-insensitive view of confirmation theory.

Or consider Schoenfield (forthcoming), who suggests that subjects regard "certain ways of forming beliefs as more truth conducive than others," and that for a subject to judge an attitude (ir)rational is essentially just for her to judge that forming said attitude would be (in)consistent with those better ways of forming beliefs. The subjectivist – whether framework-dependent, responsivist, or framework-independent – stands to vindicate the seemingly deep, intuitive connection between enkrasia and rationality by requiring that all rational attitudes are in keeping with subjects' frameworks.

Clarifications are in order. First, my use of this term "enkrasia" differs from other recent uses in the literature. Often "enkratic requirements" are treated as prohibitions specifically on *believing* both "*p*" *and* "I shouldn't believe that *p,"* and these are somewhat controversial.[31] But subjectivists needn't be committed to any particular restrictions on rational higher-order beliefs about the epistemic status of one's beliefs; they are just committed to the idea that whenever one's attitudes are epistemically rational (on the first order or any order), those attitudes must be in keeping with one's *framework.* This might amount to being in accordance with one's general beliefs about good ways of adopting attitudes, ideal epistemic dispositions, adopted imperatives, or epistemic desires or values. But it needn't involve being accompanied by a specific belief that this particular attitude was adopted permissibly – or even not being accompanied by a contrary specific belief.

This allows subjectivists to avoid the worry that in some cases it will be improbable on one's evidence that an attitude which really is in keeping with one's

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[31] See, e.g., Titelbaum (2015), Greco (2014), Silva (forthcoming).

framework, is so.[32] The worry here would be that in such cases even if we were "doing well" – adopting attitudes that are in keeping with our frameworks – we would not be in a position to *believe* or *recognize* that we were doing well and hence would not be doing well "by our own lights."[33] The subjectivist can say that there's a different sense in which always do well by our own lights when we adopt attitudes that are in keeping with our frameworks. For our frameworks themselves represent our best lights as to how to interpret and evaluate evidence. Believing in accordance with one's deepest commitments as to good ways of interpreting and evaluating evidence does not necessarily require believing on a higher order that one is doing so.

Second, and relatedly, I don't mean to suggest that the subjectivist is committed to the luminosity of enkratic attitudes.[34] Subjects' frameworks arguably do not consist of all ways of forming beliefs that immediately strike the subject as good. Plausibly, we must do some idealization to arrive at a subject's framework. As Foley says, we imagine what the subject *on reflection* would find persuasive. Or we consider the epistemic plans, values, or beliefs to which a subject is 'really,' deep-down committed. Once we idealize in this way, it is clear that what subjects can recognize as being in keeping with their frameworks may come apart from what really is in keeping with their frameworks.

Now one might worry that such idealization threatens the subjectivist's ability to vindicate a meaningful connection between rationality and thinking well by one's own lights. But the subjectivist retains distinct advantages over the subject-insensitive theorist

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[32] See Williamson (2014).

[33] Indeed, if we did assess our attitudes on a higher order, we would do well to suspect they were irrational.

[34] Williamson (2000) famously argues that no non-trivial mental states are luminous. The subject-sensitive theorist needn't disagree.

in this regard. First, it is not clear that doing well by one's own lights requires constant or general recognizability, as opposed to a more sporadic and executive ability to endorse one's rationality. Perhaps in the midst of trying to do 20 push-ups, I cannot see any reason at all for doing what I am doing. I can hardly think, but insofar as I can, what I'm doing seems utterly stupid and painful. Still, my attempt may be rational and good by my own lights if doing the push-ups furthers my goals and/or if I embarked on the set deliberately.

Second, subjectivists can say that rational attitudes are always *more* accessible or recognizable than the subject-insensitive framework-independence theorist admits they might be. According to the subjectivist, identifying which attitudes are in keeping with our own frameworks gives us purchase on identifying (ir)rational attitudes. The subject-insensitive framework-independence theorist, in contrast, thinks rational attitudes might seem totally crazy to us no matter how clear-eyed and accurate we are about our own deepest commitments and what they entail for a particular situation.

From subject sensitivity to framework-dependence/responsivism

In the previous sub-section, I reviewed a few motivations for being a subjectivist about rationality. But subjectivists include framework-independence theorists as well as framework-dependence theorists and responsivists. The reason to list these motivations in a section on considerations favoring framework-dependence/responsivism, specifically, is primarily that these views seem to have a better *explanation* of subject-sensitivity than framework-independence has.[35]

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[35] A different way one might move from reflections on confirmation theory and enkrasia to framework-dependence/responsivism: one might simply make slightly stronger claims about the former, such that the

This line of argument connecting subject-sensitivity with framework-dependence and responsivism closely parallels certain meta-ethical arguments, namely those pressed by Blackburn (1971, 1988) and Schroeder (2007, 2014). Consider: any subjectivist posits a *necessary connection* between attitudes that are in keeping with subjects' frameworks and attitudes that are normative as epistemically rational. But "necessities require explanation" (Schroeder 2014). And the framework-dependence theorist and the responsivist seem to have a better explanation of this supervenience than does the subjectivist framework-independence theorist. For the framework-dependence theorist can say that epistemically rational attitudes are normative directly in virtue of being in keeping with subjects' frameworks. The responsivist can say that epistemically rational attitudes are normative in virtue of this, together with the salutariness of those very frameworks. In contrast, the framework-independence theorist must posit some additional necessary rule or value dictating the coincidence between framework-recommended attitudes and rational, normative attitudes. But that necessary rule itself then calls out for explanation, and here the subjectivist framework-independence theorist seems committed to an unsavory bruteness.[36] For, according to her, what really generates normative pressure to have rational attitudes is some set of rules or values, which include rules or values that enjoin subjects to have attitudes in keeping with their own frameworks. But,

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framework-dependence theorist/responsivist and not the subject-sensitive framework-independence theorist could vindicate them. Perhaps, e.g., we should have claimed not merely that there is a deeply intuitive connection between rational attitudes and enkratic attitudes, but that there is a deeply intuitive connection between the normativity of rationality and the normativity of enkrasia – such that rational attitudes must be normative (partly) in virtue of the normativity of enkrasia. I rather like this strategy, but I do not wish to suggest the framework-dependence theorist or the responsivist must lean heavily on it. It would be better for them not to build quite so much into their "intuitive" premises.

[36] Of course, the framework-independence theorist might retort that the responsivist herself is committed to the bruteness of the "salutariness" of a framework. I address a related charge very briefly below. But on this specific point of explaining the normative significance of frameworks, I take it the responsivist can do better than the framework-independence theorist.

again according to her, there is no deeper explanation why there are such rules or values. This seems unsatisfying – or, at a minimum, less satisfying than the framework-dependence/responsivist answers.

"Mysteriousness"

More generally, any framework-independence theorist is committed to values and norms that live 'outside' of subjects and yet generate normative pressure for subjects to adopt/not adopt various attitudes. The framework-dependence/responsivist idea that subjects' frameworks directly (at least partly) ground normativity is arguably less mysterious, in multiple respects. A caveat, however: mysteriousness objections to stance-independent views in the practical domain are various and notoriously difficult to state precisely. Here I will simply gesture at two respects in which framework-dependence theorists and responsivists in epistemology *seem* able to make a case for their view being less mysterious than framework-independence.

First, we might think the framework-dependence theorist and the responsivist have better stories about why we would or should *care* about adopting epistemically rational attitudes – at least, they seem to have better stories than the subject-insensitive framework independence theorist.[37] Just as framework-independence theorists in the practical domain classically have a more difficult task in answering the question, "why be rational?", framework-independence theorists in the epistemic domain may be less able to explain why rational attitudes have attitude-guiding, normative oomph. For while the

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[37] In the practical domain, much ink has been spilled over whether reasons are the sorts of things that must be able to motivate or explain or justify one's behavior. For affirmative arguments, see especially Davidson (1963), Velleman (2000), and Williams (1981).

framework-dependence theorist and the responsivist think that rational attitudes always ones we ourselves are committed to as epistemically good, the subject-insensitive framework-independence theorist thinks these attitudes might in principle seem totally epistemically off-base to particular agents, even according to their deepest epistemic commitments.

The second dimension of this consideration favoring framework-dependence/responsivism is metaphysical rather than motivational. Many have independent reasons for thinking there are such things as beliefs (or plans, idealized dispositions, or desires), and that these can have some sort of normative significance for the subjects who have them. But wholly external, possibly attitude-independent or mind-independent "ought" facts about epistemology may be mysterious in the ways practical "ought" facts worried, e.g., Hume or Mackie. It is worth noticing here, that although it is fairly uncontroversial that there are some attitude-independent epistemic *values*, there is arguably space between recognizing epistemic mind-independent epistemic values and thinking these 'automatically' generate normative rationality or prescriptive ought facts for individuals, regardless of whether they recognize those values. It is one thing to think some things have, e.g., objective aesthetic value. It is another to think that subjects who were totally blind to that value would still necessarily be under normative pressure to respect or promote it.

One might worry that responsivists do not avoid this "mysteriousness" that seems a challenge for framework-independence. The responsivist after all accepts that there are external or attitude-independent facts about which frameworks are epistemically salutary, which also partly ground the normativity of rationality. Here the details of the

mysteriousness objection matter, and unfortunately detailed consideration would take more space than I have. But I do wish to suggest that the responsivist has resources that will allow her to improve on framework-independent responses in general.

Notice that, like the framework-dependence theorist, the responsivist denies that facts about objective relations to epistemic values/norms *alone* are ever sufficient to generate rational, normative pressure to adopt some attitude. According to the responsivist, attitude-independent facts about epistemic salutariness are only sufficient to ground the normativity of rationality in conjunction with subjects' actually having salutary frameworks. And external facts about which frameworks are salutary – facts about which things can generate rational normativity *when we care about them or are committed to them*– seem far less motivationally and metaphysically mysterious than the independent or intrinsic normativity of external, attitude-independent facts.

Now, the rejoinder may come: external facts about which frameworks are salutary seem to give subjects reasons *to have such frameworks,* despite not being sufficient on their own to make attitudes epistemically rational. So it may seem the responsivist is still committed to brute, external ought facts.

I'll suggest two responses on behalf of the responsivist, the first more concessive than the second. First, the responsivist could admit that there are external facts about the frameworks we ought to have. But, she might emphasize, these are ought facts of quite a different and potentially less worrisome kind. They would not be facts about the beliefs we really (epistemically) ought rationally to have. *Those* ought facts of rationality – with its tight connection to enkrasia – require a subjective framework to be in place. Rather, the responsivist might say, there "just are" facts about which commitments (or perhaps

dispositions, or desires) we ought to have, when it comes to interpreting/evaluating evidence. As I argued in the previous chapter, it is fruitful to separate questions about what attitudes we should have from questions about what framework we should have, and answers to these questions are plausibly constrained by different guiding intuitions. Perhaps it is not *as* worrisome if there are purely external ought facts about the sort of commitments we should have, as subjects.

There is also, however, a less concessive response available to the responsivist. She might deny that subjects 'automatically' have reasons to have (or "ought" to have) salutary frameworks, in the absence of their caring about epistemic rationality. Rather, this may simply *seem* to be automatic, because we quite generally do care about being epistemically rational. For all I say here about objective epistemic *values*, it may be that these only give us *reasons* – even to have a salutary framework – if we care about them.

In summary, framework-dependence and responsivism seem to do a better job than framework-independence, accounting for confirmation theory and the intuitive connection between being epistemically rational and believing well, by one's own lights. Moreover, while framework-dependence theorists perhaps avoid the charge of positing "mysterious," external normative facts more cleanly, responsivists also seem able to avoid the most unpalatable of mysterious claims. These are reasons to be either a framework-dependence theorist or a responsivist, as opposed to a framework-independence theorist. Yet there are also, I shall argue in the next section, reasons to be either a framework-independence theorist or a responsivist, as opposed to a framework-dependence theorist.

3.5 Responsivism and framework-independence

There seem to be two main considerations favoring (certain forms of) framework-independence or responsivism over framework-dependence. The first is distinctive of the epistemic domain, whereas the second has clear parallels in debates about the normative ground of practical reasons.

Veridic fundamentality

It is common ground, in most epistemological debates, that some propositions are true (or false), regardless of what truth value we take them to have. (My laptop really is in front of me, regardless of whether I believe it is.) Moreover, it is common ground that it's (in one respect) epistemically *good* to believe the true things and disbelieve the false things. (In the practical domain, parallel claims about actions or states of affairs with attitude-independent or stance-independent practical value are much more controversial.) Indeed, some epistemologists think accuracy or true belief constitutes the fundamental epistemic value.[38] For this reason, we might need to see epistemic rationality as normative in virtue of some connection to accuracy. In a similar vein, Horowitz (2014) has argued that if we cannot see rationality as connected to accuracy, it is difficult to see why we do (or should) value epistemic rationality as we seem in fact to do.

The framework-independence theorist about rationality can see the normativity of epistemic rationality as arising from accuracy, in a way that the framework-dependence theorist cannot.[39] For the framework-independence theorist can say epistemically rational attitudes are normative in virtue of being expectedly accurate on the basis of a subject's

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[38] For helpful discussion of "truth monism," see Pritchard (2010).

[39] It has been suggested to me that the framework-dependence theorist might recover a certain kind of veridic fundamentality, if she thought that it was in the very nature of a framework to attempt to represent the world truly, or – stronger – to be genuinely sensitive to alethic features of evidence. See also fn. 44.

evidence – or something like this. In contrast, the framework-dependence theorist thinks being in keeping with one's framework is what grounds the normativity of rational attitudes, and *not* a relation to accuracy. Especially if we think accuracy or truth has fundamental epistemic significance, this seems like a major point in favor of (some forms of) framework-independence.

Which forms are those? Forms that say all the rules or other values dictating which attitudes are rational for subjects are instrumental to the value or norm of accuracy. Call such framework-independence theorists, veridic fundamentality framework-independence theorists. Now, this is an orthogonal distinction to the subjectivist/subject-insensitive distinction we have already discussed within framework-independence. It may be that some veridic fundamentality framework-independence theorists can also be subjectivist framework-independence theorists, if they can argue that forming attitudes in accordance with one's framework conduces to accuracy. The point here is that veridic fundamentality is an independently attractive commitment in epistemology, and it is one that *no* framework-dependence position can accommodate.

Responsivists admittedly must disagree with the veridic fundamentality framework-independence theorist, about whether truth or accuracy *alone* fundamentally grounds the normativity of rational attitudes.[40] But responsivists are nonetheless free to think there is indeed a connection between being rational and having accurate attitudes. For, according to the responsivist, whenever an attitude is rational this is (partly) because it is in keeping with a framework that objectively promotes (or respects, or aims at)

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[40] There are arguably independent issues, however, with veridic fundamentality framework-independence, stemming from the need to explain the uncontroversial fact that rational attitudes can come apart from accurate attitudes.

epistemic values or norms. Responsivists are certainly free to think that truth or accuracy

features fundamentally among those epistemic values or norms. So, again, unlike the

framework-dependence theorist, the responsivist can say that a relation to accuracy

fundamentally grounds the normativity of rational attitudes, *alongside* a subject's

framework. And this allows the responsivist arguably to capture what's important about

veridic fundamentality: the essential connection between the normativity of rationality

and the normativity of objective accuracy.

Excluding plainly irrational attitudes

Second, not only does the framework-dependence theorist not make accuracy

fundamental in *grounding* the normativity of epistemically rational attitudes; it is also not

clear that the framework-dependence theorist can say that the epistemically rational

attitudes *are* reasonably accurate (or reasonably expectedly accurate). For there is no

obvious necessary connection between an attitude's being in keeping with one's

framework and its being accurate. Odd frameworks might result in odd attitudes (e.g.,

high confidence in "Grass is grue," or low confidence that my laptop is in front of me).

White (2007: 124) presses this same objection forcefully, against the

"subjectivist":

> Is it irrational to commit the gambler's fallacy? Can one be justified in concluding
>
> that P on the basis of a fallacious inference like affirming the consequent? On the
>
> subjectivist view, it all depends on how things stand from the perspective of the
>
> individual subject.

The idea that it could be rational to commit the gambler's fallacy strikes many as an obvious falsehood. Insofar as we know anything about what rationality is, we know that people who reason like *that* are not being rational. But if these people really have certain wacky frameworks, then the framework-dependence theorist seems committed to thinking that attitudes' being in keeping with those frameworks would ground their normativity – would make these rational attitudes one ought to have. To put the criticism bluntly and succinctly, framework-dependence seems to entail obvious falsehoods about which attitudes could be rational for subjects to take in particular cases.[41]

Framework-dependence theorists might respond by insisting that no actual person's framework makes the gambler's fallacy rational. Perhaps once we appreciate the idealized nature of subjects' frameworks, we will see that subjects who commit the gambler's fallacy are violating their own commitments.[42] Or perhaps there are necessary truths about frameworks, which will impose substantive constraints on their recommendations sufficient to exclude the gambler's fallacy.[43] I cannot here do justice to these potential responses, except to note that the challenges for such claims are familiar from the practical domain. In part, an extremely idealized view of frameworks strains the framework-dependence theorist's ability to say that attitudes are always good by a subject's own lights. Moreover, if parallels with the practical domain are informative, then arguing that unsalutary frameworks are strictly *impossible* would seem a tough row

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[41] This criticism of framework-dependence about epistemic rationality closely parallels the classic criticism of internalist or stance-dependent views of practical reasons. Consider Parfit's (1984) case of future Tuesday indifference.

[42] Perhaps like Street (2009), we should insist that anyone who *really* had a framework licensing the gambler's fallacy would have to be an "alien visitor," not a human being like us who simply often fails to live us to his own framework.

[43] Thanks especially to Ram Neta for bringing this response to my attention.

to hoe.[44] (Really? Is it in the very nature of being an epistemic subject that I am committed to projecting green rather than grue, to using induction rather than counterinduction?) Just as it seems in principle possible for a subject to have coherently eccentric desires, it seems in principle possible for a subject to have coherently eccentric ideas about how evidence should be interpreted and evaluated. On the other hand, if the idealized framework-dependence theorist admits that it's *possible* for the gambler's fallacy to be rational – even for purely hypothetical individuals who do not share much in common with ordinary epistemic subjects – then she again faces the charge of accepting obvious falsehoods.

To put the point more positively, as a consideration favoring framework-independence/responsivism, it just seems as though certain ways of thinking – canons of inductive reasoning, employing modus ponens, etc. – can count as rational. Other ways of thinking – wishful thinking, the gambler's fallacy, etc. – can't. This doesn't and shouldn't depend on what anyone thinks of the matter. Here we have a motivation specifically for subject-insensitive framework-independence or responsivism.[45]

More carefully, the *negative* claim – that some attitudes/inferences just are not rational – is equally a motivation for responsivism as well as framework-independence. Responsivists can agree with the subject-insensitive framework-independence theorist

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[44] Korsgaard (1996) is perhaps the foremost contemporary defender of a form of stance-dependence that guarantees substantial intersubjective constancy in practical reasons. Her views are widely respected but less widely shared. In the epistemic domain, one might try to argue that just as one does not have a belief unless one is trying to believe what is true about a subject (see Sosa (2015), Velleman (2000)), perhaps one does not have a framework unless one is sensitive to certain alethic features of one's evidence. This is an intriguing strategy for the framework dependence theorist, although full consideration is outside current scope.

[45] This also might motivate 'partly' subject-insensitive framework-independence, according to which there can be *some* variation in rational attitudes according to subjects' frameworks, yet not sufficient variation to allow for, e.g., the rationality of the gambler's fallacy.

that some attitudes or inferences – e.g., the gambler's fallacy – are not licensed by any salutary framework, so they can never be rational. According to the responsivist, there 'just are' facts about the sorts of frameworks that are salutary, and these may entail some subject-insensitive facts about the kinds of attitudes which can never count as rational. Admittedly, however, the responsivist cannot go further to say with the framework-independence theorist that there are subject-insensitive facts about kinds of attitudes that *always* count as rational. (At least, she cannot do this unless she also adopts a highly idealized view of subjects' frameworks.) But the responsivist nonetheless deserves some substantial credit for capturing the plausible framework-independence idea that some plainly irrational inferences/attitudes are indeed never rational. Indeed, the positive claim that some attitudes/inferences are rational regardless of a subject's framework is at any rate dubious, as I shall suggest in the next section.

In summary, then, some forms of framework-independence and responsivism stand to vindicate the intuitive connection between the normativity of epistemic rationality and the fundamental epistemic normativity of accuracy. Other (overlapping) forms can stand by our intuitive judgments about particular cases of definite (ir)rationality. These are impossible or difficult feats for the framework-dependence theorist.

Putting together these considerations with those of the previous section, it seems to me that both the considerations favoring framework-dependence/responsivism over framework-independence and the considerations favoring these forms of framework-independence/responsivism over framework-dependence are reasonably weighty. If we accept that responsivism can capture major motivations for both framework-dependence

and framework-independence – and especially if we are also moved by any of the independent considerations from section 3.3: explaining the pre-theoretic dual nature of rationality, or the resonance with existing views and the natural ease with which responsivism explains why rationality might exhibit variation across subjects but only within constraints – we have a prima facie case for responsivism. However, there are significant objections to be considered. In the space remaining, I focus on a few of the more pressing ones.

3.6 Objections

Perhaps the most pressing objection to responsivism is that, by positing strictly more in the ground of epistemic rationality's normativity than either framework-dependence or framework-independence, responsivism makes epistemic rationality too exclusive. The responsivist certainly owes an account of cases in which subjects lack epistemically salutary frameworks.

The first thing to note is that depending on a responsivist's more particular commitments, these cases may be quite rare. A responsivist could motivate this in part by refining her position to localize the assessment of frameworks. For example, a subject might have lots of unsalutary commitments when it comes to assessing how to bet at a poker table. But she might nonetheless have salutary epistemic dispositions otherwise. Perhaps then she should only be excluded from the possibility of having rational attitudes in betting circumstances.

Moreover, the responsivist may want to claim that (i) there are *multiple* salutary frameworks for interpreting and evaluating evidence, and/or that (ii) subjects'

frameworks are a somewhat *idealized* affair. (Certainly, as we've said, not every way of

reasoning that immediately strikes a subject as good should be included in her

framework.) These refinements would help make it plausible that cases where people

truly have an unsalutary framework or unsalutary local commitments will be uncommon.

The responsivist picture needn't be one on which all but a chosen few are regularly

excluded from the possibility of epistemic rationality.

When faced with the case of a person who really is not committed to a salutary

framework (or whose local commitments are unsalutary), the responsivist should admit

this person is doomed to take up only irrational or nonrational doxastic attitudes. This

may sound harsh. But, first, notice that the responsivist is free to think there's *something*

good about such a person adopting attitudes that accord with his standards, or that happen

to coincide with other, better standards. These aren't *rational* attitudes, of course, but

they may have some other sort of merit – even an important or valuable kind. We might

think attitudes that are in keeping with a subject's framework always further the subject's

mental *coherence*, or respect the value of *integrity,* even when said subject's framework

is unsalutary. We might think attitudes that are in keeping with salutary frameworks –

even if not an subject's own framework – would reflect or promote epistemic values and

even perhaps be *propositionally justified* for an subject.[46] Recognizing such possibilities

for other ways of evaluating subjects' attitudes – including both ways that are subject-

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[46] Sosa (2015: 105-6) discusses whether there might be both more- and less- relativized forms of
knowledge, according to whether the standards for reliability are those actually set by an epistemic
community vs. some ideal standards. One way of understanding the responsivist claim I'm envisioning is as
saying that an attitude's satisfying some "ideal" standards – being in keeping with some actually salutary
framework – may be sufficient for knowledge, or knowledge of a sort. But there's a necessary requirement
distinctive of rationality, that one satisfy the actual standards one holds. Officially, I want to remain neutral
on the relationship between rationality and knowledge.

insensitive and even more radically subjectivist ways – somewhat alleviates the appearance of harshness, in the responsivist's reserving rationality for cases in which subjects have and believe in accordance with salutary frameworks.

But ultimately, some harshness in assessing the rationality of subjects who lack salutary frameworks seems warranted. Consider the committed flat-earther who, let's suppose, really has an unsalutary framework that has led him to his view. *Given that this is truly the way of going about his epistemic business that seems best to him*, no attitude he could now take toward the proposition, "The earth is round (spherical)," would be rational. Either he would be flagrantly disregarding his own best lights, or he would be employing methods that do not remotely conduce to epistemically valuable states.[47] The responsivist verdict in this case seems actually quite appropriate.

At least, this is the case as long as we help ourselves to a relatively *local* or context-dependent assessment of frameworks, which I've been tacitly assuming. The flat-earther's framework is presumably nonsalutary when it comes to the shape of the earth and related matters in science; this isn't to say that he can't have a salutary framework and rational beliefs about what he had for breakfast. For the flat-earther's particular, non-salutary commitments (say, a vastly lopsided weighting of self-trust and other-trust, and/or a dogmatic clinging to a few particular beliefs in the fact of counter-evidence) presumably only affect his ability to interpret and evaluate certain kinds of evidence, on certain kinds of questions. Now there are clearly some thorny questions here, about just how we should demarcate the "parts" of frameworks that partially ground the normativity

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[47] It's an interesting question whether the flat-earther's framework might *change,* over time, and whether we could properly see this as a rational improvement if it made rational attitudes available to him in more circumstances. But that's a can of worms for another paper – see discussion in the previous chapter.

of particular rational attitudes. But, here again, there will be room for particular

responsivists to disagree, and this issue will be outside current scope.

One might object that an analogous move in the practical domain – disqualifying

those with relevantly "nonsalutary" practical commitments from rational actions or

reasons – would be unsatisfactory. We should not just say that "ideally coherent

eccentrics" are not subject to practical reasons.[48] After all, many committed practical

stance-dependent and stance-independent theorists think these eccentric subjects really *do*

have reasons (though stance-dependent and stance-independent theorists disagree, of

course, over what those reasons are). This is clearly no place to settle large and

longstanding metaethical disputes. But I will suggest some of the considerations

motivating committed stance-dependent and stance-independent treatments of eccentric

subjects in the practical domain seem less well-motivated, when we consider their

epistemic counterparts.

The practical stance-dependent theorist who accepts that the desires of ideally

coherent subjects – no matter how eccentric – ground normativity and generate reasons,

may do so because she is skeptical of any wholly objective, stance-independent practical

value. However, as we noted in section 3.5, the existence of objective epistemic values is

far less controversial. Epistemologists who agree about little else tend to agree that we do

not merely "gild and stain" the world with the epistemic value of truth. So there seems to

be less pressure, in the epistemic case, to admit that frameworks alone must be the

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[48] Terminology from Street (2009), who defends an attitude-dependent view of practical reasons.

ultimate source of epistemic normativity and hence that even "eccentrics" with unsalutary frameworks must have framework-generated rational attitudes.

The practical stance-independent theorist, on the other hand, often points to *moral* cases, to support the view that we must have some reasons regardless of whether we do or could ever recognize them. Clearly, she might say, Hitler had good reason not to commit genocide, regardless of his desires or dispositions. Denying this would be deeply problematic and offensive. But notice again that the epistemic case is less fraught. Let us suppose, hypothetically, that Hitler* lacked an epistemically salutary framework, when it came to forming beliefs about the moral status and rights of Jewish people. According to the responsivist, it would thus not be epistemically rational for Hitler* to believe that Jewish people have rights (nor that they lacked rights). This may also seem problematic or offensive. But it is open to the responsivist to maintain that, even still, Hitler* had extremely strong *moral* reasons to honor the rights of Jewish people (regardless of his beliefs), to believe against epistemic rationality, and/or to try to *make* it epistemically rational for him to believe that they had rights.[49] This is because, unlike the practical theorist, the responsivist as an epistemologist is under less pressure to craft a theory that encompasses moral reasons. The responsivist is free to take any position on the bearing of moral reasons on what we all-things-considered ought to believe or do. She may think we sometimes have strong moral reason to act in ways contrary to our beliefs, and/or to have or try to have certain beliefs, even when those beliefs (temporarily) lack the status of being epistemically rational. All of this is perfectly consistent with responsivism, and

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[49] How exactly moral reasons impinge on beliefs is a fascinating and large topic, on which pragmatists and evidentialists will disagree. But even evidentialists tend to accept that we can have practical or moral reasons (as in Pascal's wager) to indirectly affect what it's epistemically rational for us to believe by exposing ourselves selectively to evidence.

it allows responsivists about epistemic rationality easily to avoid the morally repugnant seeming-implications of stance-dependence about practical reasons.

I am suggesting that responsivism is generally, schematically attractive as a view of the ground of epistemic rationality's normativity. But we've brushed against several important ways in which particular responsivists may disagree with each other, and I fully admit that some versions of the view will be less defensible or attractive than others. The responsivist faces not only objections to her view in general but also the familiar challenge of crafting a specific, defensible version of a plausible general idea. I certainly can't attempt to meet this challenge here, but I can state the main elements of the project. First, responsivists – like framework-dependence theorists – need a specific and defensible story about what it is for a subject to have a framework. Second, responsivists need a story about what it takes for a subject's framework to be salutary.[50] (The responsivist's commitments here may further commit her to, e.g., either permissivism or uniqueness about epistemic rationality.) And finally, responsivists need to commit to a particular story about the normative situation of subjects who lack (locally or globally) salutary frameworks.

3.7 Conclusion

Much work certainly remains to be done to establish responsivism and particular forms of it as attractive positions. But in this paper, I've attempted to establish that responsivism –

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[50] There is also the further issue of how to understand any required *relationship* between a framework's being salutary and a subject's having it. As mentioned above, responsivists may want to specify that frameworks cannot just "happen" to be salutary. Or, perhaps instead we should say that in order to be *truly* salutary, a subject's having an objectively good set of commitments or true beliefs must be responsive to those very objective conditions. (To borrow familiar terminology from Sosa, perhaps the framework must be *apt* and not only successful in its relation to epistemic values.)

as well as the meta-normative question about epistemic rationality it purports to answer –

deserve such further attention.

Appendix: What Exactly do Permissivists and Uniqueness Theorists Disagree About?

A.1.   Introduction

Notice what happens when we try to give a very *informal* gloss on uniqueness and permissivism. Uniqueness is, very roughly, the thesis that there is no slack in epistemic rationality.[1] Given some evidence (or, we might want to say, some epistemic circumstances more broadly), there is just one (or at most one) attitude it would be rational (or fully rational) to take toward any proposition – e.g., belief (or 60% confidence), etc. Uniqueness definitely rules out its being the case that there are multiple different attitudes it would be fully rational (for some particular person? for any person?) to take toward some proposition, given some epistemic circumstances. Uniqueness theorists claim rationality is not loose or permissive in that way. Permissivism – everyone agrees – is simply the denial of uniqueness.

As informal glosses go, this one has an awful lot of unwieldy parentheticals. I suspect that this is more to be blamed on the ambiguity of formulations of uniqueness in the literature, than on my summarizing abilities.

Were unwieldiness in stating the positions the only problem with ambiguity in the literature, we might go on without any more precise statements of the views. After all, this informal gloss of uniqueness and permissivism – however unwieldy – may be sufficient for many purposes, including the purpose of sparking heated debate. But, as this paper will attempt to help show, the various choice points for would-be uniqueness

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[1] Kelly (2014) uses this term, "slack."

theorists are, in fact, substantive decisions that result in significantly different theses. These different theses, and the various versions of permissivism that are constituted by their denials, will be supported and challenged by different arguments. Therefore when we ignore the differences among versions of these views, we risk dialectical confusion.

The intra- /inter- personal uniqueness distinction is a recently much-discussed example of how eliding versions of these views has already led to such confusion. Kelly (2014), noting that we can distinguish between intra- and inter- personal versions of uniqueness, argues convincingly that many of White's (2014) criticisms of permissivism seem to target only the strongest, intrapersonal version of that view. Whereas, White himself (2014) is committed to the *inter*personal version of uniqueness and hence needs to critique the weaker, interpersonal permissivist thesis. Kelly writes:

> [T]here is a significant gap between statements of uniqueness that have interpersonal import and those that lack such import: the former are significantly stronger than the latter, as witnessed by the fact that there are positions in contemporary epistemology with actual, flesh-and-blood proponents that are inconsistent with the former and consistent with latter. Second, the debate in the literature on this topic is really about whether the stronger principles are true. Notably, however, many of the kinds of considerations that friends of Uniqueness offer in its favor actually seem best suited to establishing the weaker principles, principles that lack interpersonal import. For example, both Roger's "arbitrariness argument" and his "arbitrary switching" cases invite us to consider how things look from the perspective of a single subject…
>
> However, I don't think that arguments of this general form could possibly establish anything as strong as Uniqueness, a principle that has interpersonal as well as intrapersonal import. This is because a theorist might very well agree with the conclusion that there is something incoherent or absurd about the supposition that a person could be in a situation in which she had rationally permissible doxastic options, while holding that some other person (say, someone with a different prior probability distribution) might reasonably believe something else on the basis of the same evidence. The kind of subjective Bayesian described above is an example of such a theorist. Notice that this possible combination of view is no mere occupier of logical space, something cooked up in order to avoid having to accept Uniqueness; rather, it follows immediately from independently motivated positions in epistemology that have prominent defenders.

At least when it comes to the intra- / inter- personal issue, eliding distinctions and proceeding to debate permissivism/uniqueness while particular parties have in mind various subtly varying views seems to have deterred progress in this debate. I suspect, in fact, that additional variations are similarly deterring progress. Once we clarify more precisely what exactly proposition(s) uniqueness theorists definitively espouse and therefor which proposition(s) permissivists deny, it is my hope that (i) we will be better able to tell which arguments for and against the views really hit their marks, and (ii) various underlying reasons for the disagreement may be brought to light.

Here I have two aims. First, I want to catalogue various choice points for uniqueness theorists and permissivists, to arrive a clearer and more complete taxonomy of available versions of the two views. My second aim is to explore the relationship between this debate and seemingly related debates within epistemology, in the hopes of identifying some potential underlying sources of disagreement. It turns out that while the positions one wants to take in some of these debates (formal vs. traditional views of attitudes, evidentialist vs. pragmatist views of epistemic considerations) merely qualify the kinds of versions of uniqueness or permissivism that will be attractive, the positions one wants to take in other debates seem to map (imperfectly) onto the uniqueness/permissivist divide itself. Namely, in section A.3, I consider the epistemic subjectivism/objectivism debate and also debate over the primacy of doxastic vs. propositional justification, as related to the permissivism/uniqueness divide.

A.2.   The many (64) forms of uniqueness

I shall in this section try to formulate more precisely what it is that uniqueness theorists are committed to and, hence, what it is that permissivists deny. In offering his initial, influential arguments for the Uniqueness thesis, White (2005) presents it as follows:[2]

> **Uniqueness (2005):** Given one's total evidence, there is a unique rational doxastic attitude that one can take to any proposition (White 2005: 445).

White (2014), however, offers a subtly different formulation:

> **Uniqueness (2014)**: If an agent whose total evidence is E is fully rational in taking doxastic attitude D to P, then necessarily, any subject with total evidence E who takes a different attitude to P is less than fully rational (White 2014: 312).

Which, if either, version of uniqueness should we take to be canonical? The choice matters a good deal. In part, this is because permissivism is always defined as the denial of uniqueness. So in formulating uniqueness we *ipso facto* formulate permissivism as well, and the differences here among versions of uniqueness result in complementary differences in versions of permissivism. It seems to me that since at least some differences between the two theses are substantive and result in types of theses that may be attractive for different reasons, the best strategy will be to formulate even more and different, more explicit versions of uniqueness, based on the various possibilities these versions suggest.

The first important difference between White's formulations, which has already been discussed in the introduction and of course in chapter 2, is what Kelly (2014: 304) calls the "interpersonal import" of the second formulation, in contrast with the first.

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[2] See also chapter 2, footnotes 1 and 2.

Following other recent attempts to clarify this issue, I will call versions of uniqueness that restrict the doxastic attitudes that are rational for a particular individual, given her evidence, "intrapersonal", and I will versions of uniqueness that restrict the doxastic attitudes that are rational for all individuals, given a set of evidence, "interpersonal." Interpersonal uniqueness is strictly stronger than intrapersonal uniqueness.

Other important differences, though, have received less attention. Notice that Uniqueness (2005) claims that in any evidential situation *there exists* a unique rational attitude, while Uniqueness (2014) claims only that *if* some attitude is rational, then it's uniquely so. This is the difference between positing *exactly* one rational attitude in every situation and *at most* one rational attitude.[3] One can see how either position might be attractive. One might think that there are situations in which no attitude would be rational to adopt, or one might also think that there is always at least one rational attitude to hold toward any proposition. Since either version of the thesis would still seem clearly to be in keeping with uniqueness's "no slack" spirit, we will allow that both deserve to be called versions of uniqueness. Call versions of uniqueness on which exactly one attitude is said to be rational in evidential situations "existence" versions. Call versions on which at most one attitude is said to be rational in evidential situations "upper bound" versions. Note that the first are stronger than the second (and hence that versions of permissivism which *deny* only the first will be weaker than those which also deny the second).

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[3] White claims even in his (2005) to be following Feldman's (2007) formulation, which officially cast uniqueness as: "…the idea that a body of evidence justifies at most one proposition out of a competing set of propositions (e.g., one theory out of a bunch of exclusive alternatives) and it justifies at most one attitude toward any particular proposition (205)." See also Matheson (2011: 361).

Next, notice that whereas Uniqueness (2005) makes a claim about *there being a (unique) rational doxastic attitude*, once we fix the evidence, Uniqueness (2014) makes a conditional claim about *subjects being fully rational in taking a doxastic attitude.* Now, White himself does not seem to think that the switch from talking about attitudes that are rational for subjects to talking about subjects that are fully rational in holding attitudes is a significant one. He seems to think that the following are equivalent: "D is rational for S to hold toward P while having total evidence E," and "S has total evidence E and is fully rational in taking D to P." One might demur for at least two reasons.

First, note the "fully" adverb in the second formulation. If "rationality" may differ from "full rationality," then there is clearly room for a person to think that *full* rationality is a unique affair, while rationality *simpliciter* is more permissive.[4] Call versions of uniqueness restricted only to "full" rationality "idealized" versions, and call versions of uniqueness meant to apply to rationality *simpliciter* "strict." Although the relationship between the two versions is not quite as clear here, we can safely assume that those who are committed to "strict" uniqueness will also be committed to "idealized" uniqueness but not *vice versa.*

Second, one might think an *attitude's* being rational is quite a different thing than a *subject's* being rational (or "fully rational") in taking some attitude. One might think (first formulation) there's only one rational attitude, given some evidence – in the sense of an attitude someone *could* be rational in taking, a rationally recommended attitude and therefore a potentially or possibly rational attitude. Or one might think (second

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[4] In a footnote, Enoch (2010: 957) suggests that uniqueness has a plausible rival in a kind of permissivism that would accept uniqueness about *maximally* rational attitudes but maintain that multiple attitudes are sometimes rationally permissible. See Simpson (2016) for discussion.

formulation) that if a subject *actually* rationally takes an attitude, then this attitude is the only one any subject could (actually) rationally take. These aren't obviously equivalent, and I'll return to the relation between potentially rational attitudes and rationally held attitudes in the next section. Call versions of uniqueness that claim restrictions on (potential) rational attitudes, "attitude" versions, and call versions of uniqueness restricting what subjects may (actually) rationally do or think, "subject" versions. Here, unlike as with previous distinctions, we do not obviously have a hierarchy of a stronger and weaker member of our pair of options.[5]

We have now surveyed the points of divergence between White's two original formulations. But there are a few additional places where would-be uniqueness theorists might differ amongst themselves, while still seemingly retaining the spirit of uniqueness.

For one thing, White's characterization of E as a set of total evidence commits him unnecessarily, and perhaps implausibly, to evidentialism – or, roughly, the thesis that what's rational supervenes on what evidence an agent has.[6] A weaker version of uniqueness would remain agnostic on what it is about a set of circumstances (or perhaps epistemic circumstances) that fixes rational attitudes uniquely. Perhaps this is just evidence, but perhaps not. Call versions of uniqueness characterized in terms of evidence "evidentialist," and call versions characterized more agnostically (perhaps in terms of epistemic circumstances) "ecumenical."[7]

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[5] I will argue in the next section, however, that subject versions seem more defensible.
[6] See also Ballantyne and Coffman (2011).
[7] See also chapter 2, fn. 2.

And finally, White himself takes no stand on how finely or coarsely grained we should take the attitude D he has in mind to be. There is at least some reason to suppose that a more finely grained view of attitudes will make uniqueness more difficult to defend. Say the rational attitude to take in some situation is 0.92847359728739593737398201938877398 confidence. Shall we call you irrational if you adopt a nearly identical credence, except with the last digit replaced by 9? For this reason it seems helpful to distinguish between "fine-grained" and "coarse-grained" versions of uniqueness. Of course, this shouldn't really be thought of as a binary distinction. One might have a middling view, according to which there are neither three nor an infinite number of attitudes to take toward a proposition. But in what follows I will use just two labels to separate types of uniqueness that are committed to a relatively fine-grained view of attitudes from types that are committed to a relatively coarse-grained view. Moreover, although it seems very plausible to think of fine-grained versions as strictly stronger and entailing coarse grained versions, this entailment relies on certain other premises about the relationships between coarse- and fine- grained states. I will say only that fine-grained versions of uniqueness are *arguably* stronger than coarse-grained versions.

By way of summary, we have identified six points on which (seemingly-properly-so-called) uniqueness theorists might differ in characterizing their defining claim. Uniqueness theorists can be either:

- Existence (stronger) or upper-bound (weaker)

- Interpersonal (stronger) or intrapersonal (weaker)

- Strict (stronger) or idealized (weaker)

- Attitude or subject

- Evidentialist (stronger) or ecumenical (weaker)

- Fine-grained (arguably stronger) or coarse-grained (arguably weaker)

It seems all of these distinctions are orthogonal to one another and that any combination of these six pairs is possible. If this is correct, then we also have 64 distinct versions of *permissivism,* defined by denying each more particular form of uniqueness.

The differences among these concomitant forms of permissivism are additional to some of the most-discussed differences among permissivists. It is somewhat common to distinguish between more "moderate" and more "extreme" permissivists, on the basis of how widely these permissivists allow that rational attitudes toward a single proposition might diverge in given evidential circumstances.[8] We have focused instead on differences among the claims that need to be rejected in order to count as permissivsts (uniqueness-deniers) at all. In fact, if we grant that there are many stronger and weaker ways to be a uniqueness theorist, it follows that some weaker forms of uniqueness are compatible with forms of permissivism that deny only stronger forms of uniqueness. Permissivism and uniqueness broadly are compatible, although any particular version of permissivism will be defined by the rejection of a particular version of uniqueness.

With this taxonomy in hand of possible versions of permissivism and uniqueness, I turn in the next section to considering a few additional, potentially related debates in

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[8] See, e.g., Horowitz (2014).

epistemology. Some epistemological debates – namely, controversy over whether evidentialism is true and what fineness of grain our doxastic attitudes should be supposed to have – have already come up in this section. I take it that the positions one takes in these debates can constrain the versions of uniqueness or permissivism that one will find promising. But it seems obvious that these debates do not go far in settling whether one ought to be (more of a) permissivist or uniqueness theorist in the first place. I turn now to debates that seem, potentially, more intertwined.

A.3.　　　Related debates

Epistemic subjectivism and objectivism

I am thinking of epistemic subjectivism, as I have throughout the dissertation, roughly as White (2007) characterizes the position. He writes:

> Roughly, the [epistemic subjectivist] idea is that what I (epistemically) ought to believe depends on which epistemic rules *I* happen to accept. There is no higher authority, as it were, governing what *I* should believe beyond what seems right to *me*. And the same of course goes for you (you are your own authority, that is, not me). The upshot is that we may all go about forming our beliefs in different ways, and indeed believe many different things. But no one need be going astray epistemically. The search for more specific rules applying to everyone by which we might distinguish those whose beliefs are justified from those whose are not is futile. (White 2007: 117, brackets mine)

The epistemic objectivist, on the other hand, thinks that this issue of what I ought to believe (or what attitudes I ought rationally to take toward propositions more broadly) is not at all dependent on which epistemic rules I happen to accept. Rather, the same rules or standards apply to everyone, regardless of whether they have internalized or endorsed those rules.

This debate turns largely on the extent to which one thinks epistemic reasons must be *perspectival*. Both subjectivists and objectivists agree that epistemic reasons are perspectival in one sense. Both agree that what attitude(s) are rational for a subject depends on the information or evidence to which she has been exposed. Although we can imagine a radically "objectivist" view on which the objective epistemic value of certain attitudes – believing truths, disbelieving falsehoods – also determined the rationality of those attitudes for subjects to hold, regardless of their exposure to evidence or information, this would not be a recognizable sort of rationality. So objectivists, of the much more plausible sort White has in mind, differ from subjectivists in thinking that the importance of a subject's perspective is *limited* to the scope of information or evidence to which she's been exposed. Importantly, a subject's perspective does not matter in determining which attitude(s) are rational for a subject, *given* her evidence. Regardless of whether a subject's own best apparatus for evidence interpretation and evaluation would recommend a particular attitude – regardless of whether she could even in principle recognize some attitude as rational – the objectivist claims that there is a particular, perspective-invariant answer to the question what is rational for an individual given some particular batch of evidence.

In contrast, as we've seen throughout the dissertation, the subjectivist maintains that rationality does not make such perspective-invariant demands. The subjectivist claims it cannot be that a rational attitude is one that a subject could never even in principle recognize as supported by her evidence. What unites subjectivists is the idea that rational attitudes must be in keeping with a subject's "framework."

Our question here is: what is the relationship between this debate and the permissivism/uniqueness debate? It is clear that there are no entailment relationships between a position in one debate and a position in the other debate. E.g., permissivists don't *have* to be subjectivists; they could think the objective rules of rationality just have some "slack" in them. Subjectivists, moreover, don't strictly *have* to be permissivists. They could argue that we all (deep down) have the *same* subjective framework for interpreting and evaluating evidence (or, at least, extensionally equivalent frameworks).

However, as it happens, most permissivists are epistemic subjectivists and vice versa, and most uniqueness theorists are epistemic objectivists. Why? Once one has accepted subjectivism, (interpersonal) permissivism seems a natural further commitment. For – though even permissivists may want to say there are *some* limitations on the expectations or policies that might issue rational recommendation, i.e., some limitations on legitimate epistemic standards – it would seem implausible for just *one* precise set of subjective expectations and policies for forming attitudes in response to evidence to be legitimate.[9]

Slightly more carefully: assume for the moment that epistemic subjectivism is true. Then the attitude(s) that are rational for a subject to adopt are partially dependent on her own epistemic standards. On most glosses of epistemic standards, these seem to be the kind of things that could vary pretty "innocently" from person to person. E.g., if standards are weighted epistemic values, it seems plausible to think that multiple weightings could be very and equally (or incomparably, or parity-wise) good. One person

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[9] See, e.g., Decker (2012: 777-782), Douven (2009), and Kelly (2014) for arguments to this effect. However, see Horowitz (2015) for worries about constraining permissivism in this way.

might put more weight on the value of believing truly, while another holds it more important to avoid error. Similar intuitions seem to hold if standards are endorsed inferential or belief-forming procedures, or if they are simply sets of expectations about what would confirm what. Sure, we might think, *some* wacky sets of expectations or belief-forming procedures should somehow be excluded. But surely there's no *single,* precise, privileged way of interpreting and evaluating evidence. Epistemic subjectivism – paired with intuitions about innocent variability of the kinds of things epistemic standards are supposed to be – thus seems to support permissivism.

It follows that those keen to avoid permissivism may be rightly wary of subjectivism. However, subjectivism is perfectly compatible with uniqueness, strictly speaking. Note that there is actually substantial intersubjective agreement about what attitudes are rational, on the basis of fixed bodies of evidence. (I take it everyone in my evidential shoes should admit that it's rational to believe there's a laptop in from of them.) Perhaps the best way to explain this is to assume that if we were to properly *idealize* the frameworks subjects are committed to, we'd see that we are all (deep down) committed to the same framework – or at least to extensionally equivalent frameworks. Relatedly, there are some powerful arguments mooted in recent literature favoring uniqueness. Perhaps the would-be subjectivist should accept that there is always at most one rational attitude, because of objective, uniqueness-entailing constraints on what can count as rational, but further require that if there is going to be any rational attitude at all it must also be one that's in keeping with a subject's framework.

In summary, the argument from subjectivism to permissivism is plausible but not airtight. Notice moreover that there is even less of a clear argument from objectivism to

uniqueness. Permissivist objectivism has not received much attention in the literature, but this package of views may seem particularly attractive if one both worries about the tenability of principled constraints on "crazy" variation in subjective frameworks and also thinks sometimes our evidence is not sufficiently fine-grained or informative to pick out a particular attitude it would be rational to have. Perhaps the objective standards of rationality make it the case that a person with my present evidence ought to have some middling-ish credence in the proposition that it will rain tomorrow, without making the case that a person with my present evidence ought to have any specific credence (or imprecise credence) in particular.

I conclude that while epistemic subjectivism does support permissivism, it does not entail permissivism. And in fact, the positions comprised of the two more unusual combinations (subjectivist uniqueness theory and objectivist permissivism) deserve additional exploration.

Doxastic and propositional justification

It is sometimes noting in passing that the uniqueness/permissivism debate about rationality, insofar as it bears on debates about justification, bears on debates over *propositional* justification.[10] Accordingly, it seems that one's view of the nature of propositional justification and in particular its relationship to doxastic justification may be quite important in influencing the position one takes in the permissivism/uniqueness debate.

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[10] See, e.g., Matheson (2011).

Propositional justification is standardly understood in contrast with doxastic justification. Say I believe that human-caused climate change is occurring, but I believe it on the basis of rolling a die that came up four (having come to think that, if the die came up four, I should believe that human-caused climate change is occurring). Presumably the proposition that human-caused climate change is occurring is *propositionally* justified for me. I have been exposed to lots of good evidence and arguments, or lots of good reasons, for thinking it to be true. But my belief is not *doxastically* justified. For I do not hold the belief *for* the right reasons or in the right way.

Now, it is standard among many epistemologists to think of doxastic justification as derivative of propositional justification. To be doxastically justified in some belief is just for the content of that belief to be propositionally justified and for one to somehow appropriately base one's belief on that justification.[11] However, some demur. Instead, perhaps we should see propositional justification as derivative of doxastic justification. A proposition will be propositionally justified, on such a view, just when certain subjunctive conditionals about doxastic justification hold.[12] Call the standard claim that propositional justification is fundamental, "propositionalism" about justification, and call the claim that instead doxastic justification is fundamental, "doxasticism" about justification. These views have interesting consequences for the way we think about propositional justification.

As Kornblith (2017) has recently argued, propositionalism allows one to think about propositional justification without any consideration of human psychology.

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[11] See Turri (2010) for argument that the nature of this basing relation gives us reason to reject the traditional view of propositional justification as fundamental.

[12] See, e.g., Kornblith (2017).

According to propositionalism, whether a proposition is justified can be simply a matter of "a set of a priori certifiable features of the claim and its relation to potential justifiers (Kornblith 2017: 67)." On the other hand, if as doxasticism has it, propositional justification requires some kind of subjunctive or modal relationship to *doxastic* justification, then it would seem to matter whether subjects could – in suitable circumstances – come to actually believe the proposition in question in an acceptable way.

What factors might matter to whether subjects could come (perhaps in idealized circumstances) to believe the proposition in acceptable ways? Psychological factors common to the human species might be relevant. Also relevant might be differences in particular *individuals'* psychologies, or in their ideas about what evidence confirms what hypotheses. That there are then connections to the subjectivism/objectivism debate and the uniqueness/permissivism debate should be clear.

Let's assume that parties to the permissivism/uniqueness debate do intend their positions to carry over in a straightforward way to propositional justification as well as rationality: permissivists think that there can be variation in which propositions are propositionally justified, given fixed evidence, and uniqueness theorists think there is never any such variation. Doxasticists about propositional justification will likely then want to be permissivists, while propositionalists will be free to be uniqueness theorists.[13] For if, with the doxasticist, one is concerned to identify attitudes that people could be rational in holding, one will presumably want to respect individual as well as collective

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[13] Propositionalists will also of course be free to be permissivists.

limitations in the ways people can actually reason. On the other hand, if one is merely

concerned to identify attitudes that satisfy the condition that, *were* people to adopt that

attitudes in some suitable way, they would be rational, then one is not constrained to

respect limitations in this way.

This distinction is in fact related to the different "attitude" and "subject" forms of

uniqueness we discussed above. Are permissivists and uniqueness theorists arguing about

what attitudes subjects might (actually) rationally adopt, as the doxasticist would want to

say is definitive of propositional justification? (This would seem to make permissivism

more attractive; subject uniqueness would seem to be a tougher position to defend.) Or

are they instead arguing about which attitudes are (potentially) rational, simpliciter,

without regard for whether individuals could actually rationally adopt them? The

propositionalist would claim this latter is the correct gloss on propositional justification.

(And this would seem to make uniqueness theory more attractive; attitude uniqueness

may be much more plausible.)

Unfortunately, the literature on permissivism and uniqueness does not make

sufficiently clear whether permissivsts and uniqueness theorists are in fact arguing about

propositional justification, or what background view of propositional justification is

being employed. Moreover, the literature on permissivism and uniqueness does not even

make it clear what calling an attitude "rational" or "permitted" amounts to. This

ambiguity shows up in current literature when authors slide freely between talking about

attitudes that *are* rational and attitudes that *could* or *would* be rational. (See also

discussion in chapter 2.) Thus, even if it is to be maintained that debates over justification

are to be strictly separated from debates over rationality, there would seem still to be a

need to clarify the modal profile of the attitude(s) permissivists and uniqueness theorists make claims about. And similar intuitions about the fundamentality of abstract relations between propositions vs. the potential for rational adoption would seem again relevant.

A.4.   Conclusion

Uniqueness theorists and permissivists disagree broadly over whether there is slack in rationality, but this disagreement can take many forms. We should take care to notice that some forms of uniqueness are much stronger than others and that certain weaker forms may be endorse by permissivsts as well. Where there is real disagreement between uniqueness theorists and permissivists, this may also reveal deeper disagreements over, e.g., the relevance of subjects' perspectives to rationality or the fundamentality of abstract relations between propositions vs. human potential when it comes to theorizing about rationality.

Two profiles of views are standard: Subjectivist, doxasticist, permissivist, on the one hand, and objectvist, propositionalist, uniqueness theorist on the other. Considering the way these positions hang together reveal some of the scope and depth of the disagreement between permissivists and uniqueness theorists; these philosophers often have fundamentally different ways of thinking about rationality broadly. But it is also interesting to think about unorthodox combinations of views that break out of these usual packages. E.g., a subjectivist, doxasticist, uniqueness theory may be able to accommodate the importance of a subject's perspective and potential without allowing that people with "crazy" standards would be rational in having concomitant crazy attitudes. (Of course, this would presumably be purchased at the cost of excluding most of us from having any

rational beliefs at all.) My hope is that the taxonomy and relations traced here will

provide a fruitful map and vocabulary for dialogue.

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