Chapter 3: The Equal Weight View and the Uniqueness Thesis

I’ve already noted that disagreements, particularly among epistemic peers, raise, in a particularly compelling way, an interesting epistemological question about justification. That this kind of disagreement raises this interesting epistemological question has been well-noted in the epistemological literature in recent years.\(^{\text{149}}\)

Out of this exploding epistemology of disagreement literature, several general positions have taken shape. One such position is The Equal Weight View.\(^{\text{150}}\) Here is how Tom Kelly presents the view:

**The Equal Weight View (EWV).** In cases of peer disagreement, one should give equal weight to the opinion of a peer and to one’s own opinion.\(^{\text{151}}\)

EWV has its defenders.\(^{\text{152}}\) And it has its detractors.\(^{\text{153}}\) The remaining chapters in this dissertation contribute to the defense of EWV by responding to a lot of tough and

\(^{\text{149}}\) See fn. 1 of Chapter 1 for a sampling of the relevant literature.

\(^{\text{150}}\) As far as I’m aware, the name The Equal Weight View was first used in Elga (2007).

\(^{\text{151}}\) See Kelly (forthcoming). The ‘should’ here is clearly meant to pick out an epistemic appraisal. More on this below. Note also that others in the literature present EWV in just this way as well. For example, Adam Elga writes: “When you count an advisor as an epistemic peer, you should give her conclusions the same weight as your own. Denying that view—call it the ‘equal weight view’—leads to absurdity….” See his (2007) (abstract). According to Barry Lam, EWV states that “knowledge of a peer’s opinion about whether P should have equal evidential weight as knowledge that you have a certain opinion about whether P.” See his (unpublished). (Interestingly, and indicative of the confusion I’ll point out below, Lam also presents EWV as (roughly) the view that peers should split the difference.)

\(^{\text{152}}\) Proponents of (something like) EWV seem to include Richard Feldman, David Christensen, and Adam Elga. See Feldman (2003b), (2006) and (2007), Christensen (2007) and (2009), and Elga (2007) and (forthcoming).

\(^{\text{153}}\) Explicit rejections of (something like) EWV can be found in Kelly (2007) and (forthcoming), van Inwagen’s (1996), Plantinga (1995), O’Connor (1999), Mavrodes (2008), and Taliaferro (2009).
important objections raised against it. In particular, this chapter begins the defense
of EWV by, first, offering some clarifying remarks about EWV and, second, by
presenting, explaining, and evaluating the first of a sizable series of objections to
EWV.

3.1 Some Clarifying Remarks About EWV

As indicated, a few preliminary clarifying remarks about EWV are in order.
Since a lot of the objections we’ll consider come from Kelly, it will be helpful to be
clear on what he means by ‘The Equal Weight View’. It’s true that the above
displayed presentation of EWV comes straight from Kelly, but he says other things
that suggest he means more by ‘The Equal Weight View’ than what’s displayed
above. Consider, for example, the following passage from Kelly, which he uses to set
up EWV:

Question: once you and I learn that the other [epistemic peer] has
arrived at a different conclusion despite having been exposed to the
same evidence and arguments, how (if at all) should we revise our
original views?

Some philosophers hold that in such circumstances, you and I are
rationally required to split the difference. According to this line of
thought, it would be unreasonable for either of us to simply retain his
or her original opinion. Indeed, given the relevant symmetries, each of

---154 No doubt I won’t be able to consider every single objection that has been raised against EWV. But I
do intend to consider the more pressing objections. As will become clear, a lot of the objections I
respond to come from Kelly (forthcoming). In addition, it will also become clear that the view I intend
to defend seems to be different than the view Kelly is objecting to. It is still worth considering Kelly’s
objections, though. There’ll be more on this below.
us should give *equal* weight to his or her opinion and to the opinion of
the other in arriving at a revised view. Thus, given that I am confident
that the accused is guilty while you are equally confident that he is not,
both of us should retreat to a state of agnosticism in which we suspend
judgment about the question.\(^{155}\)

Kelly then immediately presents the above displayed version of EWV.

Now, it should be clear from the above passage that Kelly means more by
‘The Equal Weight View’ than the initial displayed presentation above might have
suggested. Specifically, Kelly seems to equate explicitly a *split the difference*
principle about reasonable belief with EWV.\(^{156}\) That is, Kelly seems to equate the
following principle about justified belief with EWV:

**The Split the Difference Principle.** For any persons S1 and S2,
proposition p, and time t, if S1 and S2 know that (1) they are epistemic
peers about p at t, and (2) they have different credences about p at t,
then it is reasonable for S1 and S2 to revise their prior credences by
adopting the credence obtained by averaging their prior credences.

It becomes especially clear that Kelly equates The Split the Difference Principle with
EWV when he discusses the many cases he presents and makes claims about what

---

\(^{155}\) See Kelly (forthcoming).

\(^{156}\) Kelly happens to use ‘reasonable’ in the passage. I’m going to assume that ‘justified’, ‘reasonable’
and ‘rational’ are all (at least nearly) synonymous for Kelly. He seems to use ‘justified’, ‘reasonable’
and ‘rational’ interchangeably throughout his paper. So will I. Also, perhaps Kelly doesn’t *equate*
EWV and The Split the Difference Principle. Rather, perhaps he thinks that EWV *entails* The Split the
Difference Principle. Either way is mistaken.
EWV implies in each case. He always seems to have The Split the Difference Principle in mind when drawing those implications.\textsuperscript{157}

Here’s why this matters. It’s just not true that EWV (as displayed above) and The Split the Difference Principle are equivalent. Nor is it true that EWV entails The Split the Difference Principle.\textsuperscript{158} They are logically distinct. So, successfully arguing against The Split the Difference Principle does not count as successfully arguing against EWV.\textsuperscript{159} Here are some considerations that will help show that EWV stands apart from The Split the Difference Principle.\textsuperscript{160} It’s certainly consistent with EWV that, in at least some cases of peer disagreement, one is to afford \textit{no weight at all} to either party’s opinion.\textsuperscript{161} That is, one might consistently endorse both EWV and

\textsuperscript{157} Here’s some additional evidence of this: Kelly considers the position of those philosophers who wonder about peer disagreement yet maintain coarse-grained distinctions between belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment, Kelly offers a case where one peer disbelieves \( p \) and the other peer suspends judgment about \( p \). Kelly wonders how EWV applies in such a case. His way of putting the question: “How do they split the difference?” That Kelly equates the two positions will become more evident when we discuss his cases (and commentary) below.

\textsuperscript{158} Here David Enoch and Barry Lam are mistaken. Enoch writes: “And perhaps sometimes you should split the difference, as the Equal Weight View requires.” See his (forthcoming). And Lam writes: “Equal Weight views state (1) that knowledge of a peer's opinion about whether \( P \) should have equal evidential weight as knowledge that you have a certain opinion about whether \( P \). On the basis of (1), Equal Weighters can be understood to advocate the following Equal Weight rule: (2) in light of known peer disagreement about whether \( P \), revise your opinion in such a way as to “split the difference” or meet halfway between your own view and that of your peer's.” See his (unpublished).

\textsuperscript{159} And so the recent technical arguments that have been leveled against The Split the Difference Principle leave EWV untouched. See, for example, Jehle and Fitelson’s (2009) and Shogenji’s (unpublished).

\textsuperscript{160} An additional consideration is this: Kelly notes (and he’s not alone here) that Richard Feldman is a proponent of EWV (see his (forthcoming)), but I’m confident (based on personal conversation) that Feldman does not accept The Split the Difference Principle, even when assuming a more fine grained degrees of belief model.

\textsuperscript{161} Note that we haven’t yet said what it means to \textit{afford or give weight to} one’s opinion. That will come shortly.
The Absolutely No Weight View. In at least some cases of peer disagreement, it can be perfectly reasonable for both parties to give no weight at all to any party’s opinion, including their own opinion.\textsuperscript{162} There’s no claim here that this is a plausible view. Maybe it isn’t, but that’s not important here. It’s a possible view, and I take it that it is pretty clearly consistent with EWV. After all, both peer opinions are getting equal weight (namely, none) on The Absolutely No Weight View. But if both EWV and The Absolutely No Weight View are true, then presumably The Split the Difference Principle is false. Surely it would be reasonable for one to violate The Split the Difference Principle in at least some cases by refraining from adopting the credence obtained by averaging the peers’ prior credences on the grounds that it’s perfectly reasonable in at least some cases for one to give no weight at all to those prior credences. Thus, it’s possible for EWV to be true while The Split the Difference Principle is false. Again, they are logically distinct.

That line of reasoning relied on appeal to The Absolutely No Weight View.\textsuperscript{163} But we need not appeal to The Absolutely No Weight View to yield the result that

\textsuperscript{162} This way of formulating the principle is not ideal. There’ll be more on this below. However, it is formulated so as to mirror Kelly’s stated alternatives to EWV, namely, The No Independent Weight View and The Symmetrical No Independent Weight View. (See his (forthcoming).) The difference is that these principles are genuine alternatives to EWV (in that they are inconsistent with each other) whereas The Absolutely No Weight View is not an alternative to EWV (since they are consistent with each other).

\textsuperscript{163} And some might find this troubling. Surely, they may claim, the presumption behind EWV is that some weight is to be assigned to the opinion of one (or both) peer(s) in cases of peer disagreement. Appeal to The Absolutely No Weight View ignores this presumption. What follows in the text should be enough to show that this complaint will not save the day for one who thinks EWV and The Split the Difference Principle are equivalent (or that EWV entails The Split the Difference Principle).
EWV and The Split the Difference Principle can come apart logically. This can best be shown by thinking more about what EWV states. Let’s do that now.

EWV is not a completely general principle.\(^{164}\) It asserts that in a rather specified context (peer disagreement), “one should give equal weight to the opinion of a peer and to one’s own opinion.” It seems to me that we are to read this context-specific principle as a statement about the evidential worth or value of peer testimony. So, in such contexts, the opinion of my peer counts as much evidentially as my opinion. That is, in those specified contexts, my peer’s opinion is worth no more or less than my own as a piece of evidence; evidentially, it is just as potent. In short, EWV asserts evidential parity between peer opinions in the context of disagreement. Here’s how we might reflect this understanding:

**The Restated Equal Weight View (REWV).** For any persons S1 and S2, any proposition p and any time t, if S1 and S2 are in a peer encounter over p at t, then the opinions of S1 and S2 about p at t are worth the same evidentially.

REWV is not meant to be different than EWV. They are (intended to be) the same principle. Consequently, reference to EWV just is reference to REWV.\(^{165}\)

---

\(^{164}\) This claim will play a role in the replies to some of the objections considered below. Note also that Adam Elga (a defender of EWV) doesn’t even think EWV is completely general with respect to peer disagreements. Rather, on his view, EWV doesn’t apply to the topic of disagreement itself. See his (forthcoming). There will be more on this in chapter 7.

\(^{165}\) This isn’t quite right. One difference between REWV and EWV is the move from ‘peer disagreement’ to ‘peer encounter’. I made this move for several reasons. First, recall the argument from chapter 1: not all cases where peers hold different credences for some proposition p are cases where we have genuine disagreement. However, it seems that others (like Kelly) regard these cases as cases of disagreement. So, for them, REWV and EWV are equivalent. Second, the principle should cover cases where two peers meet, compare notes, and realize that they have exactly the same credence
Now, there’s more one could say about this restatement, but we’ve said enough to make the point we set out to make: namely, that EWV is logically separate from The Split the Difference Principle. Consider that there is nothing in EWV about what it is reasonable to believe or about what doxastic attitude is justified in any given situation. It is not a claim about what’s reasonable or justified. Again, it is just a statement asserting evidential parity between peer opinions. The Split the Difference Principle, on the other hand, is a claim about what’s reasonable or justified.  

Clearly, and importantly, an EWV proponent need not go along with a proponent of The Split the Difference Principle in making this additional claim about what is reasonable or justified in cases of peer disagreement. Rather, the EWV proponent can get on board with some other principle about what’s reasonable or justified in cases of peer disagreement.

So, let’s sum up what we’ve done so far. We’ve noted that Kelly means more by “The Equal Weight View” than might otherwise be suggested by the displayed view above. He seems to have in mind The Split the Difference Principle, a claim about what’s reasonable or justified in cases of peer disagreement. We’ve shown that EWV is not to be understood as a claim about what’s reasonable or justified. Rather, EWV is to be understood as REWV, which is simply a claim asserting evidential parity between peer opinions in cases of peer disagreement. Consequently, a

---

level for p. There’s clearly no disagreement here, but there is an encounter. Nothing of substance turns on any of this in what follows.  

166 Compare: one might think that DNA evidence and clear video surveillance evidence are evidentially on a par in all court cases. However, this view hardly commits one to some particular final verdict in any court case. Similarly, one might think that peer testimony is evidentially on a par in any case of peer disagreement. This hardly seems to commit one to some particular final verdict on what’s reasonable or justified in any case.
proponent of EWV is not committed to The Split the Difference Principle. There’s plenty of logical space between those two positions for an EWV proponent to maneuver.

Now, there’s a worry here that needs to be addressed. We’ve already indicated that many of the objections to EWV that we’ll consider are presented by Kelly. But, the worry goes, if Kelly means something more by “The Equal Weight View” than we do, then what’s the use of considering these objections? After all, they’re not even really objections to EWV (as we’re construing it). They’re actually targeting something else, some other position altogether. So why bother with all of this?

This is a legitimate complaint, but one that can be answered. There are several things to say in response. First, consider this parallel. Many folks have rejected evidentialism about epistemic justification on the basis of what seem to be strong objections to something called ‘evidentialism’.167 This is especially unfortunate when the thing called ‘evidentialism’ seems to be a departure from what is actually claimed in the standard evidentialist thesis itself.168 Now here’s the parallel: some folks might be inclined to reject EWV on the basis of what seem to be strong objections to something called ‘The Equal Weight View’. This is especially unfortunate when the thing called ‘The Equal Weight View’ seems to be a departure from what is actually claimed in the standard EWV thesis itself.169

---

167 Of course, evidentialism is hardly the only example here. A lot of theories have suffered this fate. Utilitarianism, foundationalism, and skepticism come immediately to mind as well.
168 There are many examples of this. A lot can be found in the so-called Reformed epistemologists’ rejection of evidentialism. See, for example, Plantinga (1993), Clark (1990), and Wolterstorff (1983).
169 As far as I can tell, Adam Elga was the first to use in print “The Equal Weight View” as the name of a particular position. As previously noted in fn. 151, here’s how he first uses it: “When you count an
Second, though I’m not intending to defend The Split the Difference Principle, it’s not clear that Kelly’s objections even succeed against it. This may come out as we discuss his objections.

Third, Kelly’s objections raise important cases and points to think about in the peer disagreement literature, and it’s worth seeing how EWV handles these cases and points. Pointing out that EWV says nothing implausible about any of this goes a long way toward defending it. Moreover, it’s worth considering how we should think through those cases and points regardless of EWV’s stance vis-à-vis those cases and points.

Fourth, it simply doesn’t matter whether these are actual objections to EWV raised by Kelly or merely potential objections to EWV raised by somebody else. Showing that EWV doesn’t fall on their account is useful. There’s plenty to learn here about EWV and the epistemology of peer disagreement in general as we think through Kelly’s objections.

And so, with all of this firmly in mind, let’s consider now the first objection to EWV.

3.2 The First Objection: EWV Implies that The Uniqueness Thesis is True

advisor as an epistemic peer, you should give her conclusions the same weight as your own. Denying that view—call it the “equal weight view”—leads to absurdity....” See his (2007). We should also note that one worry immediately comes to mind at this point in the conversation: is this now a debate about what gets to be called ‘The Equal Weight View’ in the same way that the internalism/externalism debate in epistemology now seems to be a debate about what gets to be called “internalism”? Well, perhaps it is. But if that’s so, my understanding of EWV has a lot going for it insofar as it is a straight read of the formulation itself. It seems to be a more plausible, fair reading of EWV than one that attaches to EWV The Split the Difference Principle (or some other principle about justification).

170 The rest of the paper will continue on as though these are actual objections to EWV raised by Kelly. But if this bothers you, read them simply as merely potential objections to EWV merely inspired by Kelly.
Kelly makes the case that EWV implies that The Uniqueness Thesis is true.\footnote{As far as I’m aware, Richard Feldman coined the name The Uniqueness Thesis. It occurs in his (2007). Importantly, Feldman’s version of The Uniqueness Thesis is not in reference to degrees of belief or credence levels (as Kelly’s is). Feldman explicitly restricts his version to belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment. Note that The Uniqueness Thesis (and its ilk) goes by other names, too. For example, David Christensen refers to it as “Rational Uniqueness” in his (2007) and refers to it simply as “Uniqueness” in his (2009). Roger White displays the thesis simply as “Uniqueness” in his (2005).} Here is how he presents The Uniqueness Thesis:

**The Uniqueness Thesis.** For a given body of evidence and a given proposition, there is some one level of confidence that it is uniquely rational to have in that proposition given that evidence.\footnote{See Kelly (forthcoming). There may be other (more plausible) versions of The Uniqueness Thesis. There will be more on that below.}

This (alleged) implication provides us with our first objection against EWV. Here’s how the simple argument seems to go:

**The Uniqueness Thesis Argument Against EWV**

1. If EWV is true, then The Uniqueness Thesis is true.
2. But The Uniqueness Thesis is not true.
3. Therefore, EWV is not true. (1,2)

Let’s consider now the merits of this plainly valid argument.

Kelly seems to think that line (1) is true primarily because of how a proponent of EWV must (he thinks) respond to a certain kind of case. Here is the case Kelly considers:

**Case 3.** How things stand with me:

At time $t_0$, my total evidence with respect to some hypothesis $H$ consists of $E$. My credence for $H$ stands at $.7$. Given
evidence E, this credence is perfectly reasonable. Moreover, if I were slightly less confident that H is true, I would also be perfectly reasonable. Indeed, I recognize that this is so: if I met someone who shared my evidence but was slightly less confident that H was true, I would not consider that person unreasonable for believing as she does.

How things stand with you:

At time t0, your total evidence with respect to H is also E. Your credence for H is slightly lower than .7. Given evidence E, this credence is perfectly reasonable. Moreover, you recognize that, if your credence was slightly higher (say, .7), you would still be perfectly reasonable. If you met someone who shared your evidence but was slightly more confident that H was true, you would not consider that person unreasonable for believing as she does.

At time t1, we meet and compare notes. How, if at all, should we revise our opinions?173

That’s Kelly’s case. Now here’s Kelly’s commentary on the case:

According to the Equal Weight View, you are rationally required to increase your credence while I am rationally required to decrease mine. But that seems wrong. After all, *ex hypothesi*, the opinion that I

---

173 See Kelly (forthcoming).
hold about \( H \) is within the range of perfectly reasonable opinion, as is
the opinion that you hold. Moreover, both of us have recognized this
all along. Why then would we be rationally required to change?\(^{174}\)

Kelly explicitly claims that any attempt on the part of a proponent of EWV to stick to
one’s guns and defend the (alleged) implication would be “heroic” and, by
implication I take it, clearly implausible. Consequently, on Kelly’s view, the best way
for a proponent of EWV to respond to the case is to deny that it is possible. Appealing
to The Uniqueness Thesis is the only way to do this.\(^{175}\) So, Kelly continues,
proponents of EWV are committed to The Uniqueness Thesis. That’s the case for line
(1) of the argument.

An EWV proponent need not be troubled by this argument. There’s nothing in
EWV that commits one to The Uniqueness Thesis. That is, merely affirming that the
opinions of both peers are evidentially on a par in cases of peer disagreement does not
commit one to the view that there is some one level of confidence that it is uniquely
rational to have toward a proposition given a body of evidence. They’re entirely
separate claims.

But what about Kelly’s case? That’s supposed to show that an EWV
proponent must appeal to The Uniqueness Thesis in order to avoid the allegedly
absurd implication that one is rationally required to adjust one’s credence level after
learning of the peer disagreement. Kelly could grant that EWV doesn’t seem, at first

\(^{174}\) See Kelly (forthcoming).

\(^{175}\) The reasoning here is this: Given The Uniqueness Thesis, only one credence level is the reasonable
one given any body of evidence. Consequently, it is not possible for both .7 credence and a slightly
less than .7 credence to both be reasonable given the same body of evidence. But Case 3 explicitly
states that both credence levels are reasonable. So Case 3 is impossible.
glance, to be related to The Uniqueness Thesis, but his Case 3 shows otherwise.

Kelly’s challenge amounts to this: can an EWV proponent show that they can avoid the allegedly absurd implication that credence adjustment is called for in Case 3 without appealing to The Uniqueness Thesis?

In short, the answer is ‘yes’. At this point, it might be useful to consider how an EWV proponent could read the case Kelly presents. Kelly stipulates that in Case 3 your credence for H given our shared total evidence E is “slightly lower than .7” Let’s assign a value (for the sake of discussion). Let your credence for H given E in Case 3 be .69.176 Now, after “we meet and compare notes” we have both acquired new evidence, namely, our peer testimony about what credence level is justified given the state of the prior shared total evidence E.177 So, given your opinion, I get evidence that credence .69 for H is called for given E. You, on the other hand, given my peer testimony, get equally good evidence that a .7 credence for H is called for given E.

Stopping here, Kelly says that we have the clear implication that credence adjustment is called for on EWV. But this is not so clear. We’re not done with this possible EWV reading of Case 3 yet. After comparing notes with you, I also learn that you think I have been perfectly reasonable in having the different credence that I do. That is, I hear from you that I have been perfectly reasonable in having credence

176 I can’t imagine that this precise value (.69) is going to cause trouble for what I have to say in what follows. But, if you think it does, make the credence level as close to .7 as you need it to be.
177 I suppose that one could question whether we really get peer testimony that a particular credence, say, .69, is the justified one given the total evidence. It’s not like one’s peer has said “Hey, the justified credence to have given this total body of evidence is .69.” But it’s not necessary that one say anything like this to get testimony to that effect. The fact that one believes as one does is (under normal circumstances) testimony that one thinks that believing in that way is the right way to go, where ‘right’ is understood as equivalent to ‘reasonable’ or ‘justified’. Of course, there’s the hard question of how either of us can reasonably discern such a (by hypothesis) fine and subtle difference in our credences.
.7 for H on E. In effect, what I hear from you is this: “I think that my credence level .69 for H given E is reasonable, but I also think that your credence level .7 for H given E is reasonable. Indeed, there’s absolutely no rational difference between our two credence levels. Both are perfectly reasonable.”

This is an utterly crucial detail. What I hear from this testimony is that going with your credence over mine is arbitrary, from the standpoint of reason, and I seem to get from this peer testimony a clear confirmation of my original credence. At the very least, I do not get peer testimony against my original credence of .7 for H given E. So it’s not clear why we should follow Kelly in thinking that EWV implies that I must, in the face of that peer testimony, adjust my credence for H. Indeed, it seems that EWV doesn’t imply this at all insofar as I didn’t get any peer testimony to the effect that my original credence of .7 was mistaken. And notice that nowhere did I appeal to The Uniqueness Thesis here. An EWV proponent can meet Kelly’s challenge: she can show that EWV is not committed to the allegedly absurd implication that credence adjustment is called for in Case 3, and she can do so without appealing to The Uniqueness Thesis.

We’ve said enough to reject this first objection to EWV. There’s no good objection to EWV on these grounds. But it’s worth considering (at least briefly) line (2) of The Uniqueness Thesis Argument Against EWV. Is The Uniqueness Thesis true?
Obviously, Kelly thinks it isn’t true. At one point, he claims that it is “an extremely strong and unobvious claim” and, at another point, he claims that it has a “radical character”. Here’s how Kelly frames the discussion:

Clearly, The Uniqueness Thesis is an extremely strong claim: for any given batch of evidence, there is some one correct way of responding to that evidence, any slight departure from which already constitutes a departure from perfect rationality. How plausible is The Uniqueness Thesis? For my part, I find that its intuitive plausibility depends a great deal on how we think of the psychological states to which it is taken to apply. The Uniqueness Thesis seems most plausible when we think of belief in a maximally coarse-grained way, as an all-or-nothing matter. On the other hand, as we think of belief in an increasingly fine-grained way, the more counterintuitive it seems. But as we have seen, the advocate of The Equal Weight View has strong reasons to insist on a framework which employs a fine-grained notion of belief.

So, according to Kelly, the discussion unfolds as follows for a proponent of EWV. Either we think of belief as merely an all-or-nothing matter (stopping at the traditional tripartite division of belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment), or we think of belief in a more fine-grained way (incorporating degrees of belief or credences). But if we think of belief as an all-or-nothing matter, then EWV is false.

---

178 See Kelly (forthcoming).
179 See Kelly (forthcoming).
(and The Uniqueness Thesis is not especially plausible\textsuperscript{180}). But if we think of belief in a more fine-grained way, then The Uniqueness Thesis is clearly false (and EWV is thereby false, on Kelly’s view, since—as line (1) of the above argument asserts—EWV is committed to The Uniqueness Thesis). So, Kelly argues, either way we take belief, The Uniqueness Thesis turns out to be (at best) not especially plausible, and EWV turns out to be (at best) false. Here’s the argument in standard form:

\textbf{An Argument Against The Uniqueness Thesis (and so EWV)}

1. Either we take belief to be merely an all-or-nothing matter, or we take belief to be more fine-grained, coming in degrees.

2. If we take belief to be merely an all-or-nothing matter, then both EWV and The Uniqueness Thesis are false.

3. If we take belief to be more fine-grained, coming in degrees, then The Uniqueness Thesis is false.

4. Therefore, The Uniqueness Thesis is false. (1,2,3)

5. If The Uniqueness Thesis is false, then EWV is false.

6. Therefore, EWV is false. (4,5)

The argument is valid. Matters look grim for proponents of The Uniqueness Thesis and, you might think, EWV. And so all of this is worth a much closer look. Let’s consider each premise in turn.

I’m happy to grant line (1). I will spend no time on that premise. Line (5) is a line we can deal with rather quickly here. I’m not happy to grant it: it is false. As has\textsuperscript{180} Kelly articulates the argument on this point in a footnote. We’ll get to that argument in just a moment.

\textsuperscript{180}Kelly articulates the argument on this point in a footnote. We’ll get to that argument in just a moment.
already been demonstrated in rejecting line (1) of The Uniqueness Thesis Argument Against EWV, EWV is simply not committed to The Uniqueness Thesis. They are logically independent of one another. So, if The Uniqueness Thesis turns out to be false, that poses no special problem for EWV. The argument fails at line (5), if nowhere else. But let’s consider whether the argument does fail at any other point. After all, it may still be that we have a successful argument against The Uniqueness Thesis, and that would be an interesting result, no matter its implications for EWV.

Let’s consider line (2). Line (2) requires some further explanation. Let’s first consider why Kelly thinks we can argue directly from thinking of belief in an all-or-nothing way to the denial of EWV.\textsuperscript{181}

Kelly thinks it is “an elementary point” that “an advocate of The Equal Weight View should insist on a framework which treats belief as a matter of degree since only such a framework can adequately capture what is clearly in the spirit of his or her view.”\textsuperscript{182} His reason for thinking this comes by way of reflection upon an example. Kelly first imagines a world consisting of two peers, say, a theist and atheist. Once they encounter one another, Kelly claims that “the response mandated by The Equal Weight View is clear enough: the two should split the difference and become agnostics with respect to the question of whether God exists.”\textsuperscript{183} So far there’s no trouble. But then Kelly imagines a world where the two peers are an atheist

---

\textsuperscript{181} I say ‘directly’ since Kelly thinks we can offer an indirect argument against EWV by moving directly from belief as all-or-nothing to the denial of The Uniqueness Thesis which, in turn, gets us to the denial of EWV. Of course, we’ve already seen that that move won’t work given the logical independence of EWV and The Uniqueness Thesis.

\textsuperscript{182} See Kelly (forthcoming). We’re not told what the ‘spirit of the view’ is and how that differs from what the view (EWV) actually states.

\textsuperscript{183} See Kelly (forthcoming).
and an agnostic. Kelly indicates that there just is no such thing as splitting the difference if we continue to maintain the all-or-nothing tripartite model of belief.\textsuperscript{184} So, since (on Kelly’s view) EWV is committed to splitting the difference, he concludes that “it does not seem that The Equal Weight View can even be applied in full generality in a framework which treats belief as an all-or-nothing matter.”\textsuperscript{185} As a result, Kelly thinks EWV proponents must abandon that all-or-nothing model for a model that allows for degrees of belief. Otherwise, if we maintain an all-or-nothing model, we must reject EWV (because of examples like these).

By now, one reply to this line of reasoning should be abundantly clear: EWV properly understood is not committed to The Split the Difference Principle. But it was The Split the Difference Principle that seemed to cause trouble in Kelly’s example.\textsuperscript{186} So, insofar as EWV and The Split the Difference Principle are logically independent of one another, there’s just no reason to think that EWV must work hard to maintain The Split the Difference Principle in light of the example Kelly offers. Consequently, there’s no motivation here for an EWV proponent to abandon the all-or-nothing

\textsuperscript{184} This is so since, on the tripartite model, there is no middle ground between belief and suspension of judgment. And, as Kelly rightly notes, “in this case, of course, agnosticism hardly represents a suitable compromise.” See Kelly (forthcoming).
\textsuperscript{185} See Kelly (forthcoming).
\textsuperscript{186} One might argue that The Split the Difference Principle doesn’t really cause trouble in Kelly’s example. This is because, one might claim, there is a way of splitting the difference between suspension of judgment and disbelief. Ernest Sosa (who ultimately rejects it) considers this alternative. He writes: “Is there some position intermediate between withholding and disbelieving? Surprisingly enough, it can be argued that there is: namely, deliberately abstaining both from positively forbearing and also from disbelieving.” See his (2010) fn. 4. As noted, Sosa rejects that there is this intermediate position. But suppose there is. Call that intermediate position abstinence. The Split the Difference Principle isn’t out of the woods yet. For we can run an example now where the disagreeing peers take the following stances: suspension of judgment and abstinence. What does The Split the Difference Principle call for there? Well, the intermediate position, of course. But surely there is no intermediate position between suspension of judgment and abstinence. That’s bad for The Split the Difference Principle.
model. Contra Kelly, EWV is consistent with an all-or-nothing model of belief. That’s enough to show that line (2) is false. But let’s still consider whether we can, as Kelly insists, infer from the truth of an all-or-nothing model of belief the denial of The Uniqueness Thesis.

Here’s Kelly’s argument to that conclusion. He thinks that, even on an all-or-nothing model of belief, The Uniqueness Thesis “comes under pressure from marginal cases”. He elaborates:

Suppose that the evidence available to me is just barely sufficient to justify my belief that it will rain tomorrow: if the evidence was even slightly weaker than it is, then I would be unjustified in thinking that it will rain. Suppose further that you have the same evidence but are slightly more cautious than I am, and so do not yet believe that it will rain tomorrow. It is not that you are dogmatically averse to concluding that it will rain; indeed, we can suppose that if the evidence for rain gets even slightly stronger, then you too will take up the relevant belief. Is there some guarantee, given what has been said so far, that you are being less reasonable than I am? — I doubt it.

Prior to considering the merits of this case and its accompanying commentary, we should note the following: we should revise The Uniqueness Thesis to reflect the

---

187 This is so because, on the assumption that we are to take belief as an all-or-nothing matter, it doesn’t follow that EWV is false, and so (obviously) it doesn’t follow that both EWV and The Uniqueness Thesis are false.
188 See Kelly (forthcoming) fn. 10.
189 See Kelly (forthcoming) fn. 10. Richard Feldman entertains a case very similar to this one in his (2003a). See his Example 9.3 Risky and Cautious (p. 186).
current assumption that an all-or-nothing model of belief is correct. Here’s a restatement reflecting that revision:

**The Uniqueness Thesis (All-Or-Nothing Version).** For a given body of evidence and a given proposition, there is some one doxastic attitude (belief, disbelief, or suspension of judgment) that it is uniquely rational to have in that proposition given that evidence.\(^{190}\)

With this restatement in mind, let’s proceed to consider the merits of Kelly’s line of reasoning.

To object to The Uniqueness Thesis, Kelly appeals to the possibility of reasonable disagreements given the same evidence.\(^{191}\) Kelly thinks that given our

---

\(^{190}\) This restatement more accurately reflects Feldman’s version of The Uniqueness Thesis. See, for example, his (2007). There (on p. 205) he writes: “These considerations lend support to an idea that I will call ‘The Uniqueness Thesis’. This is 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 that it justifies at most one attitude toward any particular proposition. As I think of things, our options with respect to any proposition are believing, disbelieving, and suspending judgment. The Uniqueness Thesis says that, given a body of evidence, one of these attitudes is the rationally justified one.” Ernest Sosa also presents The Uniqueness Thesis in this way. He takes it as the thesis that “No body of evidence E justifies more than one doxastic attitude (believing, disbelieving, withholding) on any given question.” See his (2010). On the surface, this restatement of The Uniqueness Thesis matches Roger White’s, Earl Conee’s, and David Christensen’s formulations of Uniqueness. Here’s Roger White’s formulation: “Given one’s total evidence, there is a unique rational doxastic attitude that one can take to any proposition.” See his (2005). Here’s Earl Conee’s formulation: “Rational uniqueness principles imply that our epistemic reasons determine the doxastic attitudes that are uniquely epistemically rational for us to take.” See his (forthcoming). David Christensen says that his term, ‘Rational Uniqueness’, refers to “the assumption that there is a unique maximally rational response to a given evidential situation…..” See his (2007) fn. 6. But in each case the match is merely superficial. All three explicitly use ‘doxastic attitude’ to refer to different degrees of belief.

\(^{191}\) I will assume here that The Uniqueness Thesis is incompatible with the possibility of reasonable disagreements given evidential parity. Gideon Rosen is a strong proponent of reasonable disagreements in the face of evidential parity. In an oft-quoted line, he claims, “It should be obvious that reasonable people can disagree, even when confronted with the same body of evidence.” See p. 71 of his (2001). Both Earl Conee and Alvin Goldman defend the possibility of reasonable disagreements given evidential parity. See Conee (forthcoming) and Goldman (forthcoming). Pretty clearly, there is a larger discussion on the possibility of reasonable disagreements lurking here, a discussion that, if carried through, will take us too far afield of our main topic. Consequently, our main focus will be
shared evidence, both my belief that it will rain and your suspension of judgment over whether it will rain (due to caution) are justified. Presumably, Kelly thinks that your being slightly more cautious than me is relevant here to arriving at the verdict that we are both justified. The fact that you are slightly more cautious is doing some justificatory work here. It (allegedly) makes a difference in justification.

But it’s not clear why the fact that you are slightly more cautious has any justificatory effect. Indeed, it seems that it does not have any effect on justification. But Kelly would have to maintain that it does in order to press this case. That seems implausible.

Moreover, it does not seem so bad for a proponent of The Uniqueness Thesis to bite the bullet, that is, to maintain that your suspension of judgment in this case just is unreasonable. Such a proponent might wonder why it is implausible to think that in a case like this being slightly more cautious can result in holding an unreasonable position. Frankly, it doesn’t seem implausible to suppose that in a case like this being

---

192 I’m assuming several things here. First, I’m assuming evidentialism about justification. That is, I’m assuming (roughly) that the justification of one’s belief supervenes entirely upon the evidence one has at a time. (For much more on this, see the essays in Conee and Feldman (2004).) Second, I’m assuming that your being slightly more cautious is not all by itself evidence (anymore, say, than my being slightly warmer in virtue of my wearing more layers counts all by itself as evidence). This is not the place to argue for either assumption.

193 After all, by hypothesis, the only relevant epistemic difference between us in the case is that your belief is (in part) the result of your being slightly more cautious than me. By hypothesis, there are no evidential differences at all.
slightly more cautious can result in an unreasonable position. In short, this would not be a bad bullet for a proponent of The Uniqueness Thesis to have to bite. So, contra Kelly, I see here no basis for inferring from the truth of an all-or-nothing model of belief the denial of The Uniqueness Thesis.

Let’s sum up what we’ve done thus far. We’ve granted line (1) of An Argument Against The Uniqueness Thesis (and so EWV) and rejected lines (2) and (5) of that argument. There’s only one line left to consider: line (3). Let’s consider it now.

Recall that line (3) asserts that assuming that belief comes in degrees gives us good reason to think that The Uniqueness Thesis is false. Why should we think that? Here Kelly briefly appeals (largely) to an in-house debate among Bayesians regarding the rational constraints on prior probability distributions. He contends, “With respect to this long-running debate then, commitment to The Uniqueness Thesis

---

194 In this way, being slightly more cautious is no different than lots of other states typically regarded as beneficial (which, I’m assuming, being cautious is regarded as in this case). Consider, for example, the state of being hopeful, or the state of being optimistic, or the state of being loyal/faithful. All such states, when playing a causal doxastic role, can result in unreasonable doxastic positions.

195 Note that the proponent of The Uniqueness Thesis can still consistently say nice epistemic things about you in this case. For example, assuming that being epistemically justified is not equivalent to being epistemically blameless, the proponent could say that you are epistemically blameless in believing as you do. (Of course, the proponent is not committed to saying that.) The proponent could also say that, though your position of suspension of judgment in this case is unreasonable, it is certainly not downright crazy. After all, by hypothesis the evidence against you is quite modest, and pretty clearly there is another far less reasonable position to maintain: outright disbelief that it will rain.

196 We are now returning to the original statement of The Uniqueness Thesis, the one that explicitly invokes talk of credence levels.
Thesis yields a view that would be considered by many to be beyond the pale, too hard line even for the taste of most hard liners themselves.\(^{197}\)

I will not settle long-running debates between bayesians here. That’s not my goal, and that will surely take us too far afield of our primary topic. But a few words are in order.\(^{198}\)

There is certainly something to the idea that we should adopt the degree of belief that correlates with the level of support yielded by the evidence.\(^{199}\) A very simple example will help. Suppose there are ten balls in an urn. Further suppose that five of the balls are black and five are white.\(^{200}\) Clearly, the reasonable attitude to take toward the proposition that the next blind draw will produce a black ball is suspension of judgment, or .5 credence. Change the example. Now suppose that six of the balls are black and four are white. It seems reasonable now to believe that the next blind draw will produce a black ball. But, rationally, one shouldn’t be too confident of this, say, a credence of .6. Change the example again. Suppose that there are seven black balls and 3 white balls in the urn. It still seems reasonable to think that the next blind draw will produce a black ball. But now, rationally, one’s confidence should increase a bit, say, to .7. Change the example yet again. Now there are eight black balls...

---

\(^{197}\) See Kelly (forthcoming). Kelly uses ‘hard liners’ to refer to those bayesians who think that “there are substantive constraints on rational prior probability distributions other than mere probabilistic coherence”. Again, see Kelly (forthcoming).

\(^{198}\) Note that in what follows, we continue to assume that belief is graded, i.e., comes in degrees. There is no claim here that this is the correct way to think about belief.

\(^{199}\) Richard Feldman puts this idea (as I understand it) in the form of a principle. He calls it the ‘principle of proportional belief’ and labels it ‘\(PB\)’: “It is rational to proportion the strength of one’s belief to the strength of one’s evidence. The stronger one’s evidence for a proposition is, the stronger one’s belief in it should be.” See his (1999), p. 45.

\(^{200}\) Assume no funny business. Keep the example perfectly boring. So, there are no weighted balls, no different sensations associated with different colored balls, etc.
balls and just two white balls. Of course, it’s still reasonable for one to believe that the next blind draw will produce a black ball. But now, rationally, one should be quite confident that this is so. Rationally, one’s confidence should increase to the tune of .8. Change the example so that now there are nine black balls and just one white ball. It’s still reasonable for one to think that the next blind draw will produce a black ball. Furthermore, rationally, one should be nearly certain that this will be so. Rationally, the confidence should increase again, this time to .9. Finally, making it so that there are ten black balls and zero white balls has the same result. It’s perfectly reasonable for one to think that the next blind draw will yield a black ball, and, rationally, one should be certain of this. Rationally, one’s confidence should increase to the point of maximal confidence, a 1.0 credence. The moral seems to be this: rationality demands an increase in confidence, a higher credence, given increases in evidential support. It would seem to be a violation of rationality to maintain the same confidence, or credence level, as the evidential support increases. Examples like this provide modest support to The Uniqueness Thesis since it does seem true that in cases like this rationality does pick out one single credence level as the rational response.

Of course, Kelly could grant that in examples like this, one credence level is rationally called for. However, he may further contend that examples like this are unusual, nothing like the messier examples often dealt with in ordinary life. And, he may continue, it’s in those messier examples where it seems implausible to think that
rationality picks out just one credence level as the rational response. If that’s so, that’s enough to show that The Uniqueness Thesis (a completely general thesis) is false.201

There are a couple of things to say here. First, one could bite the bullet. That is, on this bite the bullet reply, one could maintain that even in messier examples, rationality does pick out just one credence level as the rational credence to have given that evidence. It’s just that, unlike in the above urn examples, in messier examples the precise level of evidential support yielded by the evidence will be opaque to us. Presumably, this opacity is due to our being imperfect rational agents. This fact may absolve us from being epistemically blameworthy in adopting the wrong credence level.202 But, one may maintain, neither that fact of unavoidable opacity nor any other fact makes some other credence level a rational response to the evidence.

An example might help illustrate the point. Take a messy example. Suppose my total evidence supports taking a .6 credence toward the proposition God exists. But suppose that I take .7 credence toward that proposition. On this bite the bullet reply, I have departed from rationality by taking that credence. It’s an unreasonable response to the evidence. I am simply overconfident. Now, it’s consistent with this evaluation that I am not to be blamed (epistemically) for adopting that credence. After

201 David Christensen echoes something like this line of thinking. He writes, “It might seem that once one thinks in degree-of-belief terms, the alternative to a permissive notion of rational belief [i.e., The Uniqueness Thesis] is obviously untenable. Many have noted that in situations in which evidence bearing on some proposition P is relatively meager, it does not seem that one unique number could possibly be singled out as the uniquely rational degree of belief in P.” See his (2007) fn. 9. Here I’m taking messier cases to be relevantly like those where the evidence is relatively meager. I have no forthcoming analysis of ‘messy cases’. I’m assuming I don’t need one, either.
202 The ‘may’ is important here. Unavoidable opacity does not let us completely off the hook epistemically. That is, it’s not the case that just any response to the evidence will be a blameless response. Note also that I’m assuming here that being epistemically justified is not equivalent to being epistemically blameless. For some discussion on this (alleged) distinction, see Pryor (2001): 95-124.
all, I’m close to the right credence.²⁰³ And it’s also consistent with this evaluation that both suspension of judgment and disbelief are not only unreasonable, but blameworthy as well. Finally, there may be some nice epistemic things we can say about me given that I am believing when believing is called for (taking matters in a coarse-grained way).

That’s the bite the bullet reply. Another reply is available to a proponent of The Uniqueness Thesis in light of messy examples.²⁰⁴ Here’s a close cousin to the bite the bullet reply. One could grant that the current version of The Uniqueness Thesis is too stringent, but modify it in a very modest way. For example:

The Uniqueness Thesis (Very Modest Revision). For a given body of evidence and a given proposition, there is some one level of confidence that it is uniquely maximally rational to have in that proposition given that evidence.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Of course there’s vagueness here about what counts as close. I don’t need to settle that matter, nor does a bite the bullet proponent. Vagueness is inescapable.
²⁰⁴ In presenting this alternative formulation of The Uniqueness Thesis, I do not mean to argue that it is, upon reflection, plausible or defensible. Maybe it isn’t. Rather, I simply mean to suggest that there is an alternative formulation of The Uniqueness Thesis that seems to withstand Kelly’s scrutiny. This is a very modest purpose.
²⁰⁵ The italicized portion represents the change. It’s worth noting that this version of The Uniqueness Thesis may very well be exactly what Kelly had in mind all along. There’s some textual evidence to this effect. Consider a passage already quoted in the main text: “Clearly, The Uniqueness Thesis is an extremely strong claim: for any given batch of evidence, there is some one correct way of responding to that evidence, any slight departure from which already constitutes a departure from perfect rationality” (my emphasis). See Kelly (forthcoming). Moreover, this version of The Uniqueness Thesis matches David Christensen’s version found in both his (2007) fn. 6 and (2009) p. 8. In the latter (as in the former), he asserts that The Uniqueness Thesis claims that “only one doxastic response is maximally rational in a given evidential situation.” Finally, this version of The Uniqueness Thesis matches precisely David Enoch’s understanding of The Uniqueness Thesis. He writes, “The Uniqueness Thesis is the claim that, with given evidence, there is a unique degree of belief that is maximally rational.” See his (forthcoming) fn. 8.
One could then maintain that while there is one maximally rational response to the evidence, even in messy examples, there may remain other (less) rational responses to the evidence in those messy cases. 206

Let’s take the above God exists example to illustrate this view. In that example, the uniquely maximally rational response is a .6 credence. That’s what the evidence supports. On this view, by taking a .7 credence I am still departing from maximal (or perfect) rationality. I am still overconfident. And as with the bite the bullet reply, one can still consistently say that I am (epistemically) blameless in taking the credence I do. Furthermore, as with the bite the bullet reply, one can still consistently say that suspension of judgment and disbelief are unreasonable and blameworthy. But now, on this view but unlike the bite the bullet reply, one can consistently say that my response is still reasonable. Sure, it’s not maximally reasonable, but it is reasonable nonetheless. 207

206 I’m assuming that we are to read this version of The Uniqueness Thesis in such a way that allows for rational responses that nevertheless fail to be maximally rational. Of course, one could maintain that the maximally rational response in any and all cases just is the only rational response. But that would just collapse this version of The Uniqueness Thesis into the first version of The Uniqueness Thesis. Interestingly, this version of The Uniqueness Thesis is suggested (but not necessarily endorsed) by David Enoch in his (forthcoming) fn. 8. He writes: “How about the view, though, according to which there is one degree of belief that is maximally rational, but some other degrees of belief – though less than maximally rational – are still rationally permissible? This is a possible position that as far as I know is not discussed in this context, but it is a rather natural position to hold, and anyway is the one suggested by the analogy with moral permissiveness.”

207 I will not work here to identify the criteria for reasonable-in-a-non-maximal-way judgments. My purpose in putting it forth is not to develop or defend it. It’s just to say that there are (at least initially plausible) versions of The Uniqueness Thesis that seem to avoid the complaints Kelly presses. Note also that a proponent of this version of The Uniqueness Thesis need not in all cases grant that there are responses to the evidence that are reasonable, but not in a maximal way. It may very well be that in some cases, the maximally rational response is the only rational response while all other responses are unreasonable. The more frequently this line is taken, the more this approach will look like the bite the bullet reply.
Pretty clearly, on this view, there are degrees of rationality, i.e., responses to the evidence may be more or less reasonable.\textsuperscript{208} Now, it is fairly standard to think that justification comes in degrees.\textsuperscript{209} But this is usually understood to mean that a proposition (or doxastic attitude) may have more or less evidence in its favor.\textsuperscript{210} That is, the same proposition (or doxastic attitude) may be more (or less) justified given this particular body of evidence than it is with this other, different, particular body of evidence. The proposition (or doxastic attitude) is held stable while the evidence varies. With this version of The Uniqueness Thesis, however, the degrees of rationality are understood differently. Here, the body of evidence is held stable while the proposition (or doxastic attitude\textsuperscript{211}) is varied. That is, the same body of evidence may justify (to more or less degrees) different propositions (or doxastic attitudes).

As a modest defense of this approach, one could argue that this view aligns nicely with ordinary language. Even upon reflection\textsuperscript{212}, we seem to speak in ways that suggest that some doxastic responses to the same body of evidence can be more or less reasonable than others. Consider: The total evidence E has prompted a detective, Jones, to narrow the list of suspects down to the usual two ne’er-do-wells, Smith and Wesson. However, E on balance supports believing that Smith committed

\textsuperscript{208} See fn. 206.
\textsuperscript{209} To illustrate this claim, here are just two introductory epistemology texts that say as much. First, Matthias Steup writes, “Justification comes in degrees: some beliefs are more justified than others.” See his (1996) p. 11. Second, Richard Feldman writes, “Justification is something that comes in degrees—you can have more or less of it.” See his (2003a) p. 21. Frequent talk of beliefs being \textit{fully} justified, \textit{completely} justified, having \textit{knowledge-level} justification, and so on also suggest degrees of justification.
\textsuperscript{210} If necessary, convert this expression to whatever non-evidentialist expression you prefer.
\textsuperscript{211} And this is taken now to include different degrees of belief.
\textsuperscript{212} I add this to distinguish it from speech that is quick and sloppy, and typically retracted upon reflection. Here’s a simple example: One may utter “This blasted car \textit{knows} I’m in a hurry! That’s why it isn’t starting!” when one is not at all prepared to grant that the car is capable of knowing things.
the crime. Now, given E, one might say that it would be unreasonable for Jones to suspend judgment on who committed the crime, and that it would be *a bit more* unreasonable for Jones to believe that Wesson committed the crime. However, given E, one might say that it would be *crazy* for Jones to think that Queen Elizabeth committed the crime and *downright insane* for him to think that Genghis Khan is guilty of the offense. Ordinary usage suggests that some responses to the same evidence are better or worse epistemically than others. This version of The Uniqueness Thesis aligns nicely with that usage.

It’s time to get our bearings. Recall that we are considering Kelly’s line (3) in his argument against The Uniqueness Thesis. Line (3) claimed that thinking of

---

213 We could present other (alleged) formulations of The Uniqueness Thesis. For example, David Christensen, in his (2007) fn. 9, describes (though not necessarily endorses) a view according to which “the uniquely rational response to an evidential situation is representable by a particular set of probability assignments, and the uniquely rational attitude toward a proposition P is represented by a particular range of values between 0 and 1 [presumably inclusive].” As best as I can tell, this view amounts to something like the following:

**The Uniqueness Thesis (The Range Revision).** For a given body of evidence and a given proposition, there is some one *range of credence levels* that it is uniquely rational to have in that proposition given that evidence.

This version of The Uniqueness Thesis is similar to the Very Modest Revision version in that it rationally allows for more than one credence level in (at least) some cases. It differs from the previous version in that it does not single out one of those credence levels as epistemically superior to any of the others within that identified range. It’s consistent with this version that all of the credence levels within that identified range are rationally on a par.

Now, the issue with this proposal is that it may not be plausibly regarded as a version of the Uniqueness Thesis at all. After all, it’s consistent with this proposal that (1) the range of rationally permissible credence levels is quite wide, perhaps even as wide as 0-1 (inclusive) so that just any response at all (understood even in a graded way) counts as rationally permissible, and (in a less extreme case), (2) that the range of rationally permissible credence levels spans .5 so that, say, belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment (all understood in a coarse-grained way) turn out to be rationally permissible. (Thanks to Rich Feldman and Earl Conee for raising these worries.)

There is a potential reply to this worry. First, a proponent of this proposal could grant that it would be terrible were this proposal to allow for such a wide range as 0-1 (inclusive) in any case, but claim that it is simply never the case (perhaps as a matter of *necessity*) that the range of rationally permissible responses spans 0-1 (inclusive). Second, a proponent could claim that it would not be terrible were this proposal to allow, in some cases, for the rationally permissible range to be, say, [.4, .5, .6], even though this rationally permits belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment (all understood in a coarse-grained way). The proponent might press that there just do seem to be cases where the
belief in a graded, degrees-of-belief way gives one good reason to think that The Uniqueness Thesis is false. We then suggested that this doesn’t seem to be the case. There are a couple of ways for a proponent of The Uniqueness Thesis to accommodate a degrees-of-belief model. One way is to offer the *bite the bullet reply* and accept the implications Kelly pins to The Uniqueness Thesis, claiming that they are not damning implications. The other way of accommodating a degrees-of-belief model involves granting that those (alleged) implications are damning, dumping the initial formulation of The Uniqueness Thesis, and appealing to another quite similar version of the thesis. That other version is (at least) initially credible, and so we have reason to reject line (3) of Kelly’s argument.

So, we have considered all of the premises in

**An Argument Against The Uniqueness Thesis (and so EWV)**

1. Either we take belief to be merely an all-or-nothing matter, or we take belief to be more fine-grained, coming in degrees.

2. If we take belief to be merely an all-or-nothing matter, then both EWV and The Uniqueness Thesis are false.

3. If we take belief to be more fine-grained, coming in degrees, then The Uniqueness Thesis is false.

4. Therefore, The Uniqueness Thesis is false. (1,2,3)

5. If The Uniqueness Thesis is false, then EWV is false.

---

evidence is particularly complex, or modest, or otherwise ambiguous such that highly tentative belief, suspension of judgment, or highly tentative disbelief doesn’t, intuitively, seem rationally out of bounds. Maybe none of this is plausible, but we need not settle that here. The main line of reasoning in the text isn’t touched either way.
6. Therefore, EWV is false. (4,5)

and have found reason to reject them. Kelly’s argument fails. Of course, this does not
mean that The Uniqueness Thesis in any version is true. Maybe it isn’t. But we
haven’t found good enough reason yet to reject it.²¹⁴

Of course, Kelly thinks he has. However, even though Kelly explicitly rejects
The Uniqueness Thesis (as the above objection and corresponding argument makes
clear), he sets aside that objection in presenting the rest of his objections to EWV.²¹⁵
So, merely for the sake of discussion, Kelly proceeds on the assumption that The
Uniqueness Thesis is true. So will we in the remaining chapters.

²¹⁴ Obviously the ‘it’ here fails to refer since we just claimed that there are multiple version of The
Uniqueness Thesis. So let me stipulate. Take ‘it’ here (and in subsequent references) to refer to the
original, initial formulation of the thesis. I don’t think anything in the remaining chapters will turn
crucially on this stipulation.

²¹⁵ See Kelly (forthcoming).