

Conciliationism as Epistemic Concession in Religious Peer Disagreement

Dini İhtilafta Epistemik Taviz Olarak Uzlaşıcılık

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines religious disagreements between epistemic peers—individuals with equal cognitive capacities—focusing on the two dominant responses: conciliationism and steadfastness. While conciliationism advocates for a moderate attitude towards epistemic peers and revising one's beliefs in case of disagreement, steadfastness argues that it is rational for an individual to maintain their current beliefs. I argue that conciliationism faces serious epistemic challenges, rendering it an unsustainable position. Building on a novel account of steadfastness, this study contends that retaining one's belief in religious peer disagreement is rational if the following four conditions are met: (i) the believer's evidence continues to support their belief within their interpretive and epistemic framework (independent justification); (ii) no genuine defeater undermines the belief either by rebutting it directly or undercutting the reliability of the evidence (absence of genuine defeat); (iii) the believer's confidence remains above a rational threshold appropriate to the stakes of inquiry (confidence threshold); and (iv) the believer holds a higher-order judgment affirming that their justification remains at least as strong as their peer's (meta-belief endorsement). By integrating these conditions, the paper demonstrates that conciliationism (a) has a restrictive effects on religious and philosophical inquiry, (b) is internally inconsistent, (c) carries the risk of widespread epistemic uncertainty by opening the way to skepticism, and finally (d) carries the risk of weakening or even eliminating the function of evidence. Consequently, this study argues that this revised steadfastness framework offers a more defensible and epistemically responsible alternative to conciliationism, preserving the integrity of religious, inquiry while upholding the demands of epistemic rationality.

Keywords: Philosophy of Religion, Religious Peer Disagreement, Epistemic Rationality, Epistemic Concession, Conciliationism, Steadfastness.

Öz

Bu makale, eşit bilişsel kapasitelere sahip epistemik denklemler arasındaki dini ihtilafları ele almakta ve bu ihtilaflara yönelik iki baskın yaklaşım olan uzlaşıcılık ve kararlılık görüşlerini incelemektedir. Uzlaşıcılık çeşitli epistemik problemler barındırır ve ortaya çıkardığı şüpheli sonuçlara bağlı olarak rasyonel bir pozisyon olarak sürdürülebilir olup olmadığı tartışmalıdır. Kararlılık tutumuna dair yeni bir yaklaşım sunan bu çalışma, denk ihtilafta kişilerin inancını korumasının şu dört koşulun sağlanması şartıyla rasyonel olduğunu savunmaktadır: (i) bireyin elindeki kanıtların kendi epistemik çerçevesi içinde inancını desteklemeye devam etmesi (bağımsız gerekçelendirme); (ii) inancı doğrudan çürüten veya kanıtın güvenilirliğini zedeleyen ihtilaftan bağımsız bir çürütenin bulunmaması (hakiki çürüten eksikliği); (iii) bireyin inancına yönelik güveninin, ilgili konunun epistemik önemine uygun bir rasyonel değer üzerinde kalması (güven eşliği); ve (iv) bireyin, kendi gerekçesinin denginin gerekçesinden en az onun kadar güçlü olduğuna dair meta bir yargıya sahip olması (ikinci dereceden inanca dayanan tasdik). Çalışmamız, bu ilkelerden hareketle uzlaşıcılık yaklaşımının (a) araştırmayı kısıtlayıcı bir etki doğurduğunu, (b) kendisiyle tutarsız olduğunu, (c) şüpheliğe kapı aralayarak geniş çaplı bir epistemik belirsizlik riski taşıdığını ve son olarak (d) kanıtın işlevini zayıflatma ve hatta ortadan kaldırma riski taşıdığını savunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, sunduğumuz kararlılık yaklaşımının, uzlaşıcılığa kıyasla daha savunulabilir, tutarlı ve epistemik açıdan sorumlu bir alternatif sunduğunu; hem dini sorgulamanın özerkliğini hem de epistemik rasyonelitenin gereklerini koruduğunu ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Felsefesi, Dini İhtilaf, Epistemik Rasyonelite, Epistemik Taviz, Uzlaşıcılık, Kararlılık.

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INTRODUCTION

'Peer disagreement' denotes a situation in which individuals possessing equal epistemic capacities arrive at different conclusions concerning the same issue. While peer disagreements can arise across a range of domains, this paper focuses particularly on religious disagreements. Depending on the nature of the subject matter, such divergence may sometimes reflect a superficial interpretive difference between two views, while at other times it may escalate into outright opposition or contradiction. In these cases, a central question emerges: should one maintain one's current belief, or revise it in light of the differing judgments of one's epistemic peers? In this context, two primary approaches are commonly distinguished: steadfastness and conciliationism. The steadfastness view maintains that the mere fact that subject S1 holds a different belief about proposition *p* than subject S, or that S believes *p* while S1 believes not-*p*, does not necessarily require a revision of belief for either party.¹ Conciliationism, by contrast, holds that epistemic peers ought to assign a certain weight to each other's views and, accordingly, revise their beliefs by reducing their confidence in *p*.² Although conciliationism purports to offer a framework for resolving peer disagreements, it ultimately fails to address the distinctive challenges posed by religious disagreements, as various formulations of the view encounter persistent difficulties. This paper proposes a novel account of steadfastness, examines the limitations of conciliationist approaches, and argues that in the case of religious disagreement, maintaining one's belief constitutes the more rational response.

Although conciliationism has been widely defended in the existing literature, the epistemic problems it generates have been examined only within a limited framework when it comes to religious disagreement; such examinations often remain confined to everyday disputes and fail to capture the distinctive epistemic challenges posed by deep-seated religious conflict. While previous discussions have recognized certain difficulties for conciliationism in religious contexts, this study discusses these difficulties with a novel steadfast approach.³ Conciliationism encourages individuals engaged in disagreement to adopt greater intellectual humility and to take opposing evidence seriously. However, intellectual humility should not entail a willingness to abandon the pursuit of truth. When disagreement is treated as a defeater, the relationship between propositions, evidence, and truth becomes destabilized, raising serious concerns about acquiring rational belief.⁴ A subject ought to cultivate sufficient epistemic humility to correct errors and remain responsive to new evidence, but such humility should not undermine rationally justified beliefs or lead to cognitive inertia. Maintaining a balance between cognitive stability and openness to revision allows one to avoid both skepticism and uncritical epistemic dogmatism. This paper argues that conciliationism demands an excessive degree of epistemic concession and, particularly in religious contexts, undermines—and at times precludes—the formation of rational belief. The notion of epistemic concession denotes the manifestation of conciliationism in a form that risks undermining the normative role of evidence. Accordingly, when S and S1 disagree about *p* it is epistemically unreasonable for them to suspend judgment or leave open the possibility of not-*p* simply on the basis of their disagreement. In such cases, rational agents ought to fulfill the function of evidence by adhering to the proposition indicated by the available evidence. As long as conciliationism threatens the normative role of evidence, I contend that the mere existence of disagreement cannot be regarded as a defeater against steadfastness, particularly with respect to religious disagreements.

One further overlooked issue in conciliatory defenses lies in their failure to offer a systematic account of how conciliation principles apply when epistemic authority and parity are indeterminate—most notably in religious disagreements. In such contexts, determining who counts as an authority and whether two parties are genuinely on a par gives rise to serious methodological uncertainties regarding both the rational revision of beliefs and the demarcation of conciliation's proper limits. My argument unfolds in three stages: (1) advancing a model of epistemic steadfastness—whereby one retains their prior commitments—as furnishing a more secure epistemic foundation, (2) demonstrating that conciliation is internally inconsistent, and (3) showing that its inquiry-curtailing posture threatens the autonomy of religious scientific and political thought. The first section of the paper situates the debate on peer disagreement, advancing a defense of the steadfastness alongside a brief introduction to conciliationism. The second section engages in a detailed analysis of the four criticisms outlined above, ultimately concluding that these criticisms serve to support the rationality of steadfastness.

1 See David Enoch, "Not Just a Truthometer: Taking Oneself Seriously (but not Too Seriously) in Cases of Peer Disagreement", *Mind* 119/476 (2010), 959-997; Michael Bergmann, "Rational Disagreement after Full Disclosure", *Episteme* 6/3 (2008), 336-352; Thomas Kelly, "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement", *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, ed. John Hawthorne-Tamar Gendler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 167-196.

2 See David Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News", *The Philosophical Review* 116 (2007), 187-217; Adam Elga, "Reflection and Disagreement", *Noûs* 41/3 (2007), 478-502; Jonathan Matheson, "Disagreement: Idealized and Everyday", *The Ethics of Belief: Individual and Social*, ed. Jonathan Matheson ve Rico Vitz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 315-330.

3 For debates concerning whether disagreement can serve as evidence for agnosticism, see Nesim Aslantatar, *Agnostisizm: Tanrı'nın Bilinmezliği Sorunu* (Ankara: Elis Yayınları, 2023), 149; Nesim Aslantatar, "Evidence, Uncertainty, and Belief: A Critique of the Common Epistemic Grounds for Fideism and Agnosticism," *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 22/2 (2022), 822. For a critical discussion of the theses advanced by Christensen and Feldman, see Abdulkadir Tanış, "Denklerin İhtilafı, Dini İnanç ve Şüphecilik", *Artuklu Akademi* 11/1 (2024), 15-31.

4 I take defeaters as in Michael Bergmann, "Defeaters and Higher-Level Requirements", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 55/220 (2005), 419-436.

1. A NOVEL ACCOUNT OF STEADFASTNESS

The steadfastness maintains that the mere existence of disagreement does not constitute evidence-warranting revision of one's beliefs or judgments; rather, it can be entirely rational to retain confidence in one's position in the face of a peer disagreement.⁵ Crucially, this confidence should not be dismissed as mere dogmatism or as stemming from an unreflective distrust of one's peers. Instead, proponents of steadfastness distinguish among various grounds on which one may legitimately maintain their confidence. For example, Peter van Inwagen appeals to what he calls a *special insight*⁶—an intuitive sense that your belief is correct—while Richard Foley and Linda Zagzebski emphasize the broader notion of *self-trust*, or trusting your own judgment.⁷ On either account, when confronted with a disagreement among epistemic peers, it is more rational for each party to rely on their intuitive judgment or self-trust regarding the truth of their proposition than to accord equal evidential weight to the rival view. Such an approach upholds one's epistemic autonomy and prevents an infinite regress of mutual deference. I refer to this as the 'Revised Principle of Steadfastness:' in the absence of defeaters beyond the mere fact of peer disagreement, one is rationally permitted to preserve their prior attitude toward her belief:

Revised Principle of Steadfastness: If a subject S holds an epistemic attitude φ_1 —such as belief, a specific credence level, or knowledge—with respect to a proposition p , then, *ceteris paribus*, S is epistemically justified in maintaining φ_1 toward p even after discovering that an epistemic peer holds a differing attitude φ_2 toward p , so long as S retains independent justification for φ_1 and is not confronted with a compelling defeater.

While the Principle of Steadfastness provides a general guideline for maintaining one's epistemic attitude in the face of disagreement, the specific context of religious belief brings additional considerations. In such contexts, agents may rationally maintain their beliefs when certain conditions are met, as outlined below:

In contexts of religious peer disagreement, an agent S who at time t holds belief φ_1 in proposition p on evidential basis E and confidence level C may rationally maintain φ_1 upon learning at time t_2 that an epistemic peer S_1 holds a conflicting belief φ_2 if and only if all four conditions obtain:

- (1) *Independent Justification:* E continues to support φ_1 within S's epistemic framework (i.e. $E \vDash \varphi_1$).
- (2) *Absence of Genuine Defeat:* There is no defeater δ for φ_1 that (a) directly rebuts p on independent grounds or (b) undercuts the reliability of E , and δ must be distinct from mere peer disagreement.
- (3) *Confidence Threshold:* S's confidence (C) in φ_1 remains strictly above a rational threshold θ , which reflects the domain's epistemic stakes.⁸
- (4) *Meta-Belief Endorsement:* S holds a higher-order judgment φ_3 to the effect that "my justification for φ_1 is at least as strong as S_1 's for φ_2 ," thereby self-endorsing φ_1 without dogmatism.

In this context, it is important to highlight that the relevant defeater must be something other than mere peer disagreement and should not be *entirely* subjective in nature or grounded *solely* in a personal inference. To illustrate this principle and the broader discussion, consider the following example: Suppose that at time t , subject S holds the belief (b) to p "God exists" with a certain degree of confidence φ_1 . At a later time t_2 , S encounters an argument p_2 presented by S_1 , which offers a naturalistic account of the origin and order of the universe, as well as the foundation of morality, concluding with the atheistic proposition p_2 "God does not exist" and any belief or degree of confidence for p_2 is φ_2 . S recognizes that this conclusion directly conflicts with her original belief. According to the Principle of Steadfastness, S is not epistemically required to abandon φ_1 upon encountering p_2 or similar arguments, so long as the following conditions are satisfied:

5 In a recent paper, I argue that while the notion of peerhood is theoretically coherent, it proves practically untenable and is applicable only under restricted or deliberately constructed conditions, thereby complicating its relevance to real-world disagreement. Similar difficulties arise with evidence: when decisions are based on evidence, disagreement often becomes inevitable. I contend that if the meta-level problems concerning peerhood and evidence in epistemology of disagreement remain unresolved, then the notion of peer disagreement cannot function as a higher-order or higher-order evidence, as some claim. In such cases, the steadfast view adopted prior to the disagreement remains the most rational response. In the present paper, however, I propose a novel defense of steadfastness that applies specifically to cases where the subject finds herself in a state of disagreement—facing it involuntarily and unavoidably. See Nesim Aslantatar, "İhtilaf Epistemolojisi ve Meta Problemler", *Şirnak Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 36 (2025), 24-42.

6 Peter van Inwagen, "It is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything Upon Insufficient Evidence", *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality: Philosophy of Religion Today*, ed. J. Jordan and D. Howard-Snyder (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 139; Peter van Inwagen, "We're Right. They're Wrong", *Disagreement*, ed. Ted Warfield, Richard Feldman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10-29.

7 Richard Foley, *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 110-111; Linda T. Zagzebski, "Self-Trust and the Diversity of Religions", *Philosophic Exchange* 36/1 (2006), 63-77.

8 At this point, I should note that I do not specify a particular ratio for the confidence threshold, and likewise, that this confidence does not stem from inertia—nor should inertia serve a justificatory function for such confidence. I address the problems of specifying a particular confidence level in the following paper: Nesim Aslantatar, "Does Agnosticism Have Positive Evidence", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 97 (2025), 263-287.

(2.1) S possesses a rational justification for her belief (φ_1).

(2.2) S acknowledges that φ_2 is logically valid but recognizes that it is grounded in a different argument p_2 , the premises of which she is not epistemically *obligated* to endorse within her epistemic framework.

(2.3) Between t and t_1 , S has not encountered a strong defeater for her belief.

Given these conditions, as long as S can rationally defend her belief in God (φ_1), it remains epistemically permissible for her to retain that belief even after encountering p_2 . In such a case, S holds a higher-order belief φ_3 —namely, that her belief φ_1 is better justified than φ_2 . Importantly, φ_3 does not itself require the same kind of justification as φ_1 or φ_2 . Its justificatory privilege lies in the fact that it functions as a meta-belief within S's own epistemic framework, supporting the rational preservation of φ_1 . This reasoning reflects a broader epistemic principle we might refer to as the 'Principle of Confidence in Belief,' which can be formally expressed as follows:

$\neg \diamond E \neg p \rightarrow (Cp \rightarrow R(Bp))$: If there is no evidence to question the justification underlying p (that is, the meta-belief supporting φ_1), then the subject's confidence in p suffices to make her belief in p rational.⁹

In other words, if p is not necessarily false, then when Cp is true, $R(Bp)$ is also true. This suggests that a key factor in determining whether a belief can be sustained is the dynamic between the degree of confidence in the belief (φ_1) and the strength of the defeater (δ) encountered. If the defeater is strong enough to lower the believer's confidence below a critical threshold (θ), rendering the belief no longer rationally maintainable, then one ought to abandon or revise that belief. However, if the defeater lacks sufficient force and the confidence in the belief remains above the threshold θ , then continuing to hold the belief remains rational. To illustrate this, consider the following scenario: at time t , S believes the proposition p —for instance, "Moral facts are objective" or "Moral realism is true"—with a given level of confidence (φ_1). S holds several reasons in support of the belief p :

- (i) Human beings possess strong moral intuitions.
- (ii) There exists no conclusive defeater for the objectivity of moral truths.
- (iii) The cross-cultural similarity of moral norms suggests the presence of objective foundations.

At time t_2 , S encounters a potential defeater:

(δ) According to Mackie's Moral Error Theory—particularly the Argument from Queerness—moral realism is false.¹⁰

Let us now assess, based on Bergmann's definition of a defeater, whether this argument constitutes a *defeater that defeats* for S—that is, whether it renders p unjustifiable for S:

- (1) δ constitutes a propositional attitude. (✓)
- (2) S becomes acquainted with the argument at time t_2 . (✓)
- (3) Due to δ , S's belief in p (i.e., moral realism) is no longer epistemically justified. (✗)

At this point, the threshold θ —representing the minimum level of confidence required for the rational maintenance of a belief—becomes relevant. If S's level of confidence in p (φ_1) drops below θ upon encountering Mackie's defeater—due to pragmatic, psychological, or epistemic reasons—then continuing to hold the belief is no longer rationally permissible. However, if S's confidence in p remains above θ , and if Mackie's argument does not undermine p within S's epistemic framework, then maintaining the belief remains epistemically rational. In the present case, S is justified in maintaining the belief, since the defeater does not succeed in undermining it ($\varphi_1 > \theta$). Therefore, as long as new evidence or potential defeaters do not reduce the confidence level below θ , the belief may be rationally retained.

This analysis supports the steadfast view, which holds that beliefs can justifiably be maintained unless one encounters a genuine defeater. In contrast, the conciliatory view contends that when one becomes aware of an epistemic peer who

9 Suppose PD represent peer disagreement and θ the minimum confidence threshold required for the Principle of Steadfastness. If we accept that peer disagreement alone cannot serve as sufficient justification for conciliationism, and further acknowledge—so as to avoid Kripke's paradox of dogmatism—that it is not rational to believe a proposition in which one lacks confidence, then the final formulation of the principle is as follows: $\neg \diamond (E \neg p \wedge \neg PDp) \rightarrow (Cp \geq \theta \rightarrow R(Bp))$. This reformulated principle both excludes unjustified beliefs and safeguard against premature doxastic revision in the face of disagreement. In doing so, it navigates between the extremes of epistemic dogmatism and epistemic concession. For Kripke's paradox, see Saul A. Kripke, "On Two Paradoxes of Knowledge", in *Philosophical Troubles: Collected Papers, Vol. 1* (New York: Oxford University Press), 27–51. I argue that this final version of the principle remains unaffected by Catherine Elgin's critiques. See Catherine Elgin, "Reasonable Disagreement", in *Voicing Dissent: The Ethics and Epistemology of Making Disagreement Public*, ed. Casey Rebecca Johnson (New York: Routledge, 2018), 14.

10 See John L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 38.

disagrees, one should either revise the belief or at least reduce confidence in it to move closer to the peer's position.¹¹ Typically, conciliationism argues that when equally informed and competent individuals with comparable epistemic credentials hold conflicting beliefs, each ought to adjust their confidence accordingly. A principle akin to the steadfast view can also be formulated within a conciliatory framework:

Principle of Epistemic Deference: When a disagreement arises concerning a proposition p , one should accord epistemic respect to those with appropriate qualifications and expertise. This entails treating the opinion of an epistemic peer as equally credible to one's own, assigning greater credence to the view of someone judged to be epistemically more competent, and correspondingly reducing one's confidence in one's own belief.¹²

Accordingly, if S holds a belief, degree of confidence, or justification φ_1 regarding a proposition p , then upon learning that another subject S_2 holds a differing belief, degree of confidence, or justification φ_2 about p , it is rational for S to reconsider φ_1 and adopt an attitude more in line with φ_2 —provided that S_2 occupies an epistemically equal position and has not offered a strong defeater supported by opposing evidence.

This study contends that adopting such a principle gives rise to numerous challenges, particularly in the context of religious, scientific, and philosophical disagreements. While conciliationism aims to reach common ground by emphasizing epistemic humility among epistemic peers, it risks sliding into an unwarranted form of concession. This, in turn, may inhibit individuals from defending their beliefs—even when those beliefs are true—and may render the essential processes of critical reflection and inquiry unnecessary. Moreover, adopting a conciliatory stance even in trivial matters, or in cases where making a decision is far more reasonable than withholding judgment, can impose unnecessary cognitive and psychological burdens. Such an approach may lead to unwarranted skepticism or excessive moderation. While I argue in the second section that conciliation or dynamic models such as those advanced by Lackey, Loughheed, or Kelly may be reasonable in practical, everyday situations, I maintain that in domains like religion which affect one's life far more deeply than, say, a mistaken restaurant bill, treating peer disagreement as evidentially significant appears epistemically implausible.¹³ I therefore argue that, in such cases, conciliationism is not a viable approach, for both logical and epistemological reasons.

2. THE EPISTEMIC LIMITS AND COSTS OF CONCILIATIONISM

The critique of conciliationism in this section should not be taken as a call for unwavering commitment in all matters of belief. Rather, I aim to emphasize that in cases where conciliationism emerges as the sole defeater against p , one should not diminish their belief in or confidence toward p merely due to the presence of peer disagreement. Unless confronted with a genuine defeater—one that renders belief in p impossible—it would be irrational for a person to abandon their belief. At this point, understanding how epistemic defeaters function within the context of religious disagreement is crucial to demonstrating why conciliationism is problematic.

Defeaters are typically divided into two principal categories: undercutting and rebutting defeaters. Undercutting defeaters do not directly refute a belief; rather, they call into question the adequacy of the justification for that belief, thereby weakening its epistemic credibility.¹⁴ Within the context of religious disagreement, such defeaters may undermine the reliability of the epistemic sources—such as sacred texts, religious authorities, or personal religious experiences—upon which a one's religious belief is based. Conciliationism maintains that in these circumstances, individuals should reduce their confidence in their beliefs.¹⁵ The problem, however, lies in the fact that religious beliefs are typically grounded not in a single source, but instead are supported by a network of sources, including revelation, tradition, and rational deliberation. Thus, disagreement with an epistemic peer alone does not necessarily provide adequate grounds for abandoning one's belief.

Rebutting defeaters, in contrast to undercutting ones, provide compelling counter-evidence that directly demonstrates a belief to be false.¹⁶ In the context of religious disagreement, establishing a rebutting defeater against a belief requires presenting evidence that clearly invalidates or refutes the belief in question. For instance, if someone believes that a particular religious text originates entirely from a divine source, but compelling evidence of historical or logical

11 For instances of this, see Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News", 193; David Christensen, "Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy", *Philosophy Compass* 4/5 (2009), 757.

12 John Pittard, "Resolute Conciliationism", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 65/260 (2015), 449-451.

13 See Thomas Kelly, "Peer Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence", *Social Epistemology: Essential Readings*, ed. Alvin I. Goldman, Dennis Whitcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 202-204; Jennifer Lackey, "A Justificationist View of Disagreement's Epistemic Significance", *Social Epistemology*, ed. Adrian Haddock vd. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 319; Kirk Loughheed, *The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement* (Cham: Springer, 2020), 20-21.

14 For a detailed discussion on defeaters see Michael Bergmann, "Defeaters and Higher-Level Requirements", *Philosophical Quarterly* 55 (2005), 419-36; Michael Bergmann, "Deontology and Defeat", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 60 (2000), 87-102; John Pollock, "The Structure of Epistemic Justification", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 4 (1970), 62-78.

15 Diego E. Machuca, "Conciliationism and the Menace of Scepticism", *Dialogue* 54/3 (2015), 471.

16 For a detailed discussion see John Pollock, "Defeasible Reasoning", *Cognitive Science* 11 (1987), 481-518.

contradictions within the text is presented, this may constitute a rebutting defeater against the claim of divine authorship. However, in the majority of religious disagreements, opposing views tend to arise from differing interpretations of epistemic sources or alternative claims rooted in distinct religious traditions. The mere existence of a conflicting belief does not, in itself, amount to a rebutting defeater; rather, it merely highlights that the parties involved hold different convictions without providing independent evidence for which side is correct. Therefore, conciliationism's assumption that religious disagreement functions as a rebutting defeater—thereby requiring a reduction in belief or confidence—is epistemically problematic. By the end of this section, the aim is to demonstrate that such disagreement not only fails to qualify as a rebutting defeater, but also lacks sufficient strength even to serve as an undercutting defeater. In the absence of genuine rebutting defeaters, it is epistemically reasonable for individuals to retain their beliefs and to continue engaging in inquiry to strengthen the justification for those beliefs. This discussion brings us to the first major dilemma.

2.1. The Epistemic Limits of Conciliationism for Rational Religious Inquiry

In the context of religious disagreement, conciliationism can prompt individuals to unjustifiably diminish their confidence in their beliefs and to adopt an unwarranted level of epistemic humility. The principle that one should reduce confidence in their belief to match that of an epistemic peer in cases of disagreement is problematic not only in terms of interpersonal epistemic dynamics but also with respect to broader epistemological concerns. While intellectual humility is undoubtedly a virtue and should be cultivated, there is a fine line beyond which such humility ceases to be virtuous and instead becomes a liability, especially in contexts where the formation and maintenance of justified belief require resilience in the face of opposition. I argue that, in the face of religious peer disagreement, rather than diminishing one's belief through conciliation, it is often more rational to continue seeking rational foundations that may reinforce the belief. The central concern here is that limiting the process of inquiry and critical reflection—both of which are necessary for the development and refinement of belief—risks undermining not only individual epistemic confidence but also the broader progress in both scientific and religious domains. Historical examples underscore this point. Copernicus's heliocentric model and Einstein's theory of relativity both constituted radical departures from the dominant paradigms of their times. Had they chosen to weaken their commitments for the sake of conciliating with prevailing views, the revolutionary scientific advancements they initiated might never have occurred.¹⁷ Religious history offers analogous cases. According to the Torah, Bible, and Qur'an, Abraham rejected the dominant polytheism of his milieu, instead affirming monotheism, engaging in a deep conflict with his cultural environment. Rather than adopting a conciliatory stance that would have aligned him with prevailing beliefs, he pursued a rational process of inquiry to strengthen his conviction.¹⁸ These examples suggest that conciliationism when adopted as a universal response to disagreement, risks undermining both the integrity of belief and the epistemic virtues that sustain inquiry. Far from irrational, the decision to preserve or even fortify one's belief in the face of disagreement—when accompanied by continued investigation—may constitute a more responsible and truth-conducive epistemic posture.

The literature also offers perspectives that support this defense. To Catherine Elgin, if a subject, *S*, refrains from defending a belief solely because they encounter disagreement from their epistemic peers, this may seriously constrain the process of inquiry. Suspending judgment in the face of disagreement limits argumentation by reducing the number of available premises and thereby slows intellectual progress. Moreover, individuals' continued efforts to develop their positions contribute not only to their personal epistemic growth but also to the long-term benefit of scientific communities. Therefore, rather than adopting a conciliatory stance and abandoning inquiry at the moment of disagreement, it would be a more rational attitude to persist in processes of inquiry that can yield epistemic benefits.¹⁹ Similarly, Kirk Lougheed argues that conciliationism negatively affects research processes and maintains that an argument against conciliationism is necessary to prevent harm to scientific practices:

- (1) If agent *S* reasonably believes that there are future epistemic benefits to be gained from continuing to believe proposition *p* in the face of epistemic peer disagreement within a research context *R*, then *S* is rational to be a non-conciliationist about *p* in the context of *R*.
- (2) *S* believes *p* within the context of *R*.
- (3) There is at least one epistemic peer of *S*'s who believes *not-p* within the context of *R*.
- (4) *S* reasonably believes that there are future epistemic benefits to be gained from continuing to believe *p* within the context of *R*.

Therefore,

17 Albert Van Helden, "Galileo", *Encyclopedia Britannica Online Academic Edition* (Accessed 11 Şubat 2025); Lougheed, *The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement*, 67-69.

18 *Kur'ân-ı Kerîm Meâli*, trans. Halil Altuntaş-Muzaffer Şahin (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2009), el-En'âm 6/76-79.

19 Catherine Elgin, "Persistent Disagreement", *Disagreement*, ed. Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 64-65; Elgin, "Reasonable Disagreement", 10-21.

(5) S is rational to be a non-conciliationist about p within the context of R .²⁰

Lougheed's argument does not address ordinary, everyday disagreements; instead, it targets beliefs that one cannot easily abandon simply because peer disagreement is possible. The Independent Justification clause of my Revised Steadfastness Principle requires that the believer's evidence E continue to support p within her hermeneutical and faith commitment framework. Conciliationism, however, treats mere disagreement as if it automatically undercuts one's justificatory resources. By contrast, our principle highlights that religious inquiry often depends on interpretive commitments—such as exegesis, tradition, and spiritual experience—that conciliationism illegitimately sidelines. By making explicit that only genuine undercutters of those interpretive grounds count as defeaters, we clarify that conciliationism risks prematurely curtailing the very modes of inquiry that grant religious belief its epistemic grounding. In doing so, it unjustly sidelines the hermeneutical commitments that sustain belief, halting inquiry where it should instead demand truth-relevant challenges to those commitments.

I propose applying this argument specifically to religious disagreements, particularly with respect to premises (1) and (4), as follows. Let R refer to the research on the existence of the afterlife, and let p refer to one or more propositions related to R , such as: "There is reward and punishment in the afterlife," "Human beings will be resurrected after death," or "The afterlife is shaped by one's actions in this life." I offer the following reformulations:

(1*) If subject S reasonably believes that continuing to hold belief p , despite peer disagreement regarding R , will provide long-term epistemic and pragmatic benefits, then it is rational for S not to adopt a conciliatory stance regarding p .

(4*) S believes that maintaining belief p will bring epistemic and pragmatic benefits within the context of R .

While the benefits in question may take different forms within religious contexts, an example can illustrate how a defense of this view might be constructed within the framework of pragmatic faith. *Pascal's Wager*, for example, presents an argument that considers maintaining religious belief rational for pragmatic reasons.²¹ If God exists and R is true, then holding belief p promises infinite gain. Even if R —and thus p —turns out to be false, religious belief may still confer psychological, moral, and existential benefits. Therefore, it can be rational for S to persist in believing p despite disagreement with epistemic peers. Likewise, William James argues that certain beliefs, even if epistemically uncertain, can be reasonably maintained when they are practically and existentially forced. Since belief in God constitutes a *live hypothesis* that carries profound significance for the individual, it may be rational—on a Jamesian account—for S to retain belief in the face of epistemic disagreement.²² In sum, this discussion demonstrates the validity of premise (1*) in the context of religion, and, as Lougheed rightly observes, empirical considerations further support this conclusion.²³

2.2. The Self-Defeat and Meta Belief Endorsement

One of the most significant criticisms is that conciliationism is inherently self-defeating. In a debate over whether one ought to remain steadfast or conciliatory in the face of peer disagreement, conciliationism finds itself forced to question its validity. If conciliationism demands that all parties revise their views and move closer to their epistemic peers, then conciliators themselves would be expected to follow this principle by either abandoning their position in favor of steadfastness or reducing their confidence in conciliationism itself. This leads to the conclusion that conciliationism cannot sustain itself on its own terms and is compelled to reject its own validity.²⁴ Given that a theory requiring its rejection entails a logical inconsistency, it follows that conciliationism is internally incoherent and fails to adhere to its own methodological principles. Adam Elga, while acknowledging that conciliationism is internally inconsistent, argues that the nature of offering consistent advice necessarily involves a kind of dogmatism regarding the correctness of the advice itself and claims that this is inherent to any inductive method aimed at determining what one ought to believe.²⁵ In other words, according to Elga and those who share his view, conciliators must remain *steadfast* at least with respect

20 Lougheed, *The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement*, 80; Kirk Lougheed, "The Epistemic Value of Deep Disagreements", *Informal Logic* 38/2 (2018), 263–292.

21 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 122.

22 William James, "The Will to Believe," *Pragmatism and Other Writings*, ed. G. Gunn (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 198–218. Also see Abdulkadir Tanış, *Pragmatik İman* (Ankara: Episteme Yayınları, 2022) for a detailed discussion of pragmatic faith.

23 See Lougheed, *The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement*, 80.

24 Adam Elga, "How to Disagree About How to Disagree", *Disagreement*, ed. R. Feldman and T. Warfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 179. For other approaches that arrive at similar conclusions, see: Timothy O'Connor, "Religious Pluralism", *Reason for the Hope Within*, ed. M. Murray (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 165–181; Alvin Plantinga, "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism", *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, ed. P. Quinn and K. Meeker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 172–192.

25 Elga, "How to Disagree About How to Disagree", 185. Also see Tomas Bogardus, "A Vindication of the Equal Weight View", *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology* 6/3 (2009), 324–335; Christensen, "Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy", 756–767; Bryan Frances, "The Reflective Epistemic Renegade", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 81 (2010), 419–463; Shawn Graves, "The Self-Undermining Objection in the Epistemology of Disagreement", *Faith and Philosophy* 30/1 (2013), 93–106; Hilary Kornblith, "Is Philosophical Knowledge Possible?" *Disagreement and Skepticism*, ed. D. Machuca (New York: Routledge, 2013), 131–149; Clayton Littlejohn, "Disagreement and Defeat", *Disagreement and Skepticism*, ed. D. Machuca (New York: Routledge, 2013), 169–192.

to one proposition—namely, their own methodological ground—for their position to be rationally tenable.

Logical positivism offers a historical counterexample to Elga's defense of arbitrariness.²⁶ A core claim of logical positivism—the verification principle—holds that a statement is meaningful only if it can be empirically verified or is analytically true. However, since the verification principle itself cannot be empirically verified, it fails its own criterion of meaning and becomes self-refuting. Some logical positivists, like Carnap, sought to revise or abandon the principle rather than defend it dogmatically.²⁷ This historical case demonstrates that philosophical theories can acknowledge internal inconsistencies and reshape themselves without resorting to dogmatic commitment. Therefore, Elga's claim that meta-level epistemic principles must necessarily be dogmatic to maintain their coherence is weakened by the example of logical positivism. Moreover, Elga's attempt to exempt conciliationism from its own principles faces several problems. First, such a move is arbitrary: if conciliationists can selectively apply their principles, then the principle's claimed objectivity is undermined. Second, this exemption grants conciliationists an unjustified epistemic privilege: they demand that others revise their beliefs in light of disagreement, yet refuse to apply the same demand to their own principle when it is contested. Third, Elga offers no justification for this exemption. To claim that some principles must be dogmatic falls short of explaining why conciliationism, in particular, deserves such an exemption.

John Pittard likewise supports the conclusion we have reached here and argues that Elga's argument fails to provide an adequate response to the arbitrariness objection. According to Pittard, Elga's argument merely identifies an exceptional case in which the 'Conciliation Principle' should not be applied in a disagreement between epistemic peers, in order to preserve the internal coherence of conciliationism.²⁸ Pittard contends that Elga has not given us a compelling reason to think that a conciliatory policy that exempts itself [from its own rules] is the only viable path. Therefore, we also lack a compelling reason not to reject conciliationism.²⁹ Pittard maintains that, even in light of the Principle of Epistemic Deference, conciliationism cannot be consistently applied according to its own standards. If a conciliationist were to revise their belief in response to disagreement about conciliationism itself, they would be doing so based on the reasoning that their peer does not accept as valid; thus, they would fail to genuinely defer epistemically to their peer. On the other hand, if they maintain their belief, they would be attributing no epistemic weight to their peer's view at the level of belief, while adopting their peer's approach at the level of reasoning, methodologically. Since there is no decisive reason to privilege one level over the other, Pittard concludes that conciliationism's internal consistency is undermined by its reliance on arbitrary choices.³⁰

The traditional self-defeat objection shows that conciliationism must ultimately concede its own rule. My *Meta Belief Endorsement* clause sharpens this critique by revealing the internal arbitrariness of the view. Any coherent epistemic method must allow for a non-dogmatic, higher-order judgment— φ_3 —that assesses whether one's justification remains at least as strong as that of one's peer. Steadfastness can accommodate such a meta-level endorsement; conciliationism cannot. Because conciliationism lacks a principled analogue to φ_3 , it cannot distinguish between cases where belief revision is rational and cases where it is not. As a result, conciliationism must either apply its principle dogmatically or exempt itself arbitrarily. The very need for a meta-belief clause thus exposes the structural gap in conciliationism and reinforces the charge that it is not just self-undermining, but methodologically incoherent. My concern can be illustrated with an example: A and T are friends who frequently engage in philosophical and religious debates. A is an atheist and a conciliationist who endorses the 'Principle of Epistemic Deference,' while T is a theist who rejects this principle, insisting, "As long as I have strong reasons, I do not regard another's disagreement as a reason to reduce my confidence." In this scenario, A faces a dilemma: (i) If A follows conciliationism, they must lower their confidence in conciliationism itself, since T, as an epistemic peer, rejects the principle. Yet doing so would mean failing to apply conciliationism consistently, as conciliationism lacks a higher-order judgment (φ_3) to assess whether A's justification for conciliationism is still stronger than T's justification for steadfastness. (ii) If A refuses to reduce confidence in conciliationism, they mimic T's stance by maintaining their belief despite disagreement—thus failing to act as a conciliationist. In this case, A would be choosing to maintain their commitment to conciliationism without any principled reason, exposing the arbitrariness of the view. The absence of a meta-belief clause in conciliationism leaves A with no way to rationally decide between these two conflicting options. Thus, no matter which option A chooses, they will end up inconsistent: if they question conciliationism effectively, they have to reject it; if they maintain their commitment despite disagreement, they violate their own principle. The absence of φ_3 illustrates how conciliationism collapses into either dogmatism or self-undermining concession.

Finally, a response must be given to Reining's claim that the principle of conciliation should be treated as a *pro tanto* reason. Reining argues that when we are confronted with opposing views, we ought to treat disagreement as a *pro tanto*

26 For the labeling of arbitrariness see Lougheed, *The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement*, 9.

27 See Rudolf Carnap, "Testability and Meaning", *Philosophy of Science* 3/4 (1936), 425-427.

28 Pittard, "Resolute Conciliationism", 446.

29 Pittard, "Resolute Conciliationism", 447.

30 Pittard, "Resolute Conciliationism", 450-451.

justification—meaning that such disagreement should diminish our confidence in our initial belief, but not necessarily lead us to abandon it entirely.³¹ This approach acknowledges that the presence of disagreement warrants a reassessment of our belief while offering flexibility by maintaining that it is not the decisive factor in determining what we ought to believe. However, this view fails to provide a conclusive resolution to the self-defeating nature of conciliationism when it is applied to itself; indeed, the proposed solution may itself be *pro tanto* justified. My critique rests on the claim that this position is open to significant objections. First, if the opposing views are based on faulty reasoning or insufficient evidence, it is unclear why one should reduce confidence in their belief. Second, because not all instances of disagreement are epistemically sound or well-founded, routinely downgrading one's beliefs in response to disagreement risks promoting an unwarranted form of epistemic modesty, potentially culminating in apathy or skepticism. Considering that most of our beliefs are in flux and some are never fully justified, this approach risks leading to a kind of epistemic paralysis. As such, Reining's proposal does not adequately resolve the contradiction within conciliationism itself, and may in fact inadvertently amplify the danger of undermining well-grounded rational beliefs.

2.3. A Critique from Skepticism and the Role of Context-Sensitive Credences

Conciliationism faces two closely connected challenges: its tendency to lead to skepticism and the internal inconsistency this tendency reveals. The central problem with philosophical skepticism is that it is "intuitively implausible." Accordingly, any stance that entails philosophical skepticism is also intuitively implausible.³² In addition to its intuitive implausibility, the skeptical core within conciliationism significantly complicates the process of justification. As a result, many proponents of conciliationism are notably cautious about avoiding any commitment to radical skepticism. Underlying this caution is the belief that if conciliationism necessarily entails skepticism, then this would serve as an implicit refutation of the view itself. Hence, to be associated with such a form of skepticism is seen as an unacceptably high cost. Still, some conciliationist thinkers like Christensen argue that skepticism should be regarded as a natural, albeit non-ideal consequence of the current state of evidence and justification.³³ However, David Enoch does not share Christensen's view; he contends that a particular form of conciliationism, especially the *Equal Weight View* (EWW), leads to extremely implausible conclusions, which he takes to constitute a strong reason against this view.

EWW: In a case of peer disagreement, when there is no reason independent of the disagreement itself to prefer the view of one party over the others, it is rationally required to give equal weight to the views of all parties involved.³⁴

Enoch's most prominent criticism of the EWW is the "spinelessness objection."³⁵ This objection is grounded in the concern that the EWW requires one to abandon their beliefs even in high-stakes situations, rendering the view deeply troubling. In response, Matheson rejects the spinelessness objection, arguing that EWW's promotion of skepticism in the face of significant disagreements should not be interpreted as a lack of intellectual virtue or integrity. Rather, he contends that epistemic humility—an intellectual virtue in its own right—requires one to acknowledge their cognitive limitations and fallibility. Since the presence of disagreement provides strong evidence that one may be mistaken, adopting a skeptical stance in the face of high-stakes, controversial issues can be considered an epistemically justified position.³⁶ Ernest Sosa, however, agrees with Enoch, asserting that the objection is well-founded. He maintains that the implications of this debate are far-reaching, spanning issues from politics to religion to philosophy, and that being forced to suspend judgment on every controversial matter poses a serious epistemic problem.³⁷ Critics of EWW often argue that skepticism is so clearly mistaken that it requires no direct refutation—its implausibility speaks for itself.

Conciliationism's "equal weight" or "split the difference" moves lack any calibration for the stakes or domain. Our Confidence Threshold clause specifies when doubt becomes epistemically disabling, not by stipulating a fixed cutoff, but by grounding a context-sensitive minimum credence (θ) in the unique features of the domain. We propose three complementary models for how θ might be specified, each drawing from a different epistemic tradition. First, a Pascalian interpretation would ground θ in the asymmetry of existential stakes: the cost of error in religious belief warrants a higher tolerance for disagreement without undermining confidence. Second, a Jamesian pragmatist interpretation would tie θ to the practical significance of the belief—its status as a "forced, living, and momentous" option demands greater epistemic resilience. Third, a Bayesian interpretation would derive θ from the agent's priors and background knowledge,

31 Stefan Reining, "On The Supposed Dilemma of Conciliationism", *Episteme* 13/3 (2016), 305-328.

32 Michael Thune, "Partial Defeaters' and the Epistemology of Disagreement", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 60 (2010), 369-370.

33 Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News", 214.

34 Elga, "Reflection and Disagreement", 490; Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News", 193.

35 Enoch, "Not Just a Truthometer: Taking Oneself Seriously (but not Too Seriously) in Cases of Peer Disagreement", 954-955.

36 Jonathon Matheson, *The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 140.

37 Ernest Sosa, "The Epistemology of Disagreement", *Social Epistemology*, ed. A. Haddock, A. Millar, D. Pritchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 283-284.

such that disagreement must be weighed against the epistemic entrenchment of prior probabilities.³⁸ Together, these models illustrate that θ is not arbitrary but tracks rational thresholds appropriate to religious epistemology. By contrast, conciliationism lacks any mechanism for calibrating such thresholds, defaulting to a one-size-fits-all skepticism that fails to distinguish trivial from profound disagreement. Our threshold approach restores rational agency in religious disagreement, affirming that sustained belief is permissible so long as confidence remains above the relevant θ . This shows that conciliationism's failure to specify—and respect—such thresholds inevitably drags believers toward global skepticism. In light of this, I will attempt to show—through a critique of Hilary Kornblith's attempt to offer a plausible account of the relationship between conciliationism and skepticism—that conciliationism cannot escape the threat of skepticism.

Kornblith begins by distinguishing between merely possible disagreements and actual disagreements, contending that the former holds no significant epistemic weight. He argues that if we were to treat possible disagreements as equivalent to actual ones, then the ever-present potential for disagreement on virtually any topic would undermine the justification for all our beliefs. However, the mere possibility that someone might disagree with us in the future should not lead us to question our current knowledge. In this regard, actual disagreements can be said to play a more decisive role compared to merely possible ones.³⁹ Nonetheless, the precise contribution of Kornblith's distinction to the broader debate remains unclear; skepticism persists even in the face of actual disagreement. In such a context, as Peter van Inwagen points out, it is especially valuable for one to remain steadfast in one's religious belief, as a way of avoiding potentially paralyzing skepticism. Van Inwagen maintains that any philosopher who wishes to avoid embracing a broadly skeptical position should agree with him that the following question must have a satisfactory answer: any philosopher who does not wish to adopt a broadly skeptical stance in a situation where there are philosophers who—by all objective and external standards—are at least equally competent and yet reject a certain philosophical thesis, is it still possible for one to be justified in accepting that thesis, regardless of the grounds on which it is held?⁴⁰

Van Inwagen argues, with good reason, that virtually any epistemic stance is preferable to embracing skepticism. Finding the very idea of being a skeptic deeply objectionable, he argues that there must be a sound and valid justification for holding philosophical beliefs. However, Diego Machuca contends that van Inwagen's strong antipathy to skepticism renders him insensitive to compelling arguments in favor of suspending judgment in the face of peer disagreement.⁴¹ Nevertheless, it is more appropriate to interpret van Inwagen's objection not as a form of dogmatic insensitivity but rather as a critical response to the *uniqueness thesis* often assumed by conciliatory views. This thesis holds that, given a subject's total evidence, there is exactly one rational propositional attitude to adopt toward any given proposition—belief, disbelief, or suspension of judgment.⁴² Thus, only one of these attitudes can be epistemically appropriate for all individuals with the same total evidence:

Uniqueness thesis: A subject's total body of evidence E justifies, with respect to a proposition p , only one epistemically appropriate propositional attitude or degree of belief.⁴³

This thesis is grounded in a strict evidentialist framework and centers on the uniqueness of evidence. I contend that this thesis is untenable, since, in cases of genuine disagreement, it is highly improbable that epistemic peers ever share the same body of evidence. As Gideon Rosen also observes, it is possible for rational individuals to arrive at different views even when they share the same set of evidence. In a legal context, for example, when a jury or court is divided over a complex case, the mere fact of disagreement does not entail that any party is acting irrationally.⁴⁴ One may have formed their current belief on the basis of a different body of evidence. For this reason, I argue that rather than adopting

38 For a study in which Bayesian probability calculations are used to evaluate the teleological argument, see İbrahim Yıldız, "Teleolojik Argüman'ın Bayes Teoremiyle İmtihani: Wesley Salmon'un Argümanına İlişkin Bir Değerlendirme", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 63/2 (2022), 1021-1038.

39 Hilary Kornblith, "Belief in the Face of Controversy", *Disagreement*, ed. R. Feldman, T. Warfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 34.

40 Peter van Inwagen, "It is Wrong, Everywhere, Always, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything upon Insufficient Evidence", 138-139.

41 Machuca, "Conciliationism and the Menace of Scepticism", 478.

42 Roger White, "Epistemic Permissiveness", *Philosophical Perspectives* 19/1 (2005), 445; Jonathan Matheson, "The Case for Rational Uniqueness", *Logos and Episteme: An International Journal of Social Philosophy* 6/3 (2011), 269-279. Although the majority of philosophers who support conciliatory views also endorse the uniqueness thesis (see Richard Feldman, "Epistemological Puzzles about Disagreement", *Epistemology Futures*, ed. Stephen Hetherington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 216-236; Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News", 187-217) it is nevertheless possible to find conciliatory theorists who reject this thesis. (see Elga, "How to Disagree About How to Disagree", 175-186; Kornblith, "Belief in the Face of Controversy", 29-52; Elga, "Reflection and Disagreement", 478-502; Matthew Lee, "Conciliationism without Uniqueness", *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 88/1 (2012), 161-188. For those who reject the uniqueness thesis, see Thomas Kelly, "Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence", *Disagreement*, ed. Richard Feldman, Ted A. Warfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 111-174; Miriam Schoenfield, "Permission to Believe: Why Permissivism is True and What it Tells us about Irrelevant Influences on Belief", *Nous* 48/2 (2014), 193-218.

43 Richard Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements", *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, ed. L. Antony (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 194-214.

44 Gideon Rosen, "Nominalism, Naturalism, Epistemic Relativism", *Philosophical Perspectives* 15 (2001), 71-72. For a similar example see Schoenfield, "Permission to Believe: Why Permissivism is True and What it Tells us about Irrelevant Influences on Belief", 196.

the uniqueness thesis, epistemic permissivism provides a more compelling and rational framework for understanding epistemic rationality.

Epistemic permissivism: A subject's total evidence E , with respect to a proposition p , does not necessitate a single rational propositional attitude or a specific degree of credence. Rather, it allows for multiple distinct propositional attitudes or a range of credence levels to be epistemically reasonable. Accordingly, individuals who share the same set of evidence can, within the bounds of rationality, hold different beliefs about p or assign it varying degrees of confidence.⁴⁵

The argument presented in this section should not be taken to imply a rejection of the possibility of evidence or as claiming that religious beliefs can or should be adopted independently of evidential support. Rather, it claims that the nature of evidence is variable and that as long as disagreement cannot escape skepticism, such disagreement cannot be treated as higher-order evidence. Denying the uniqueness of evidence leading to a single propositional attitude is not equivalent to rejecting the very possibility of evidence for justification. For this reason, it becomes inevitable to question the epistemic coherence of conciliationism with respect to its relation to evidence.

2.4. Taking 'Independent Justification' Seriously

One of the most significant problems with the conciliatory approach lies in the epistemic challenges that emerge from its relation to evidence. Conciliationism holds that, in cases of disagreement between two equally competent individuals, both parties ought to reduce their confidence in their respective beliefs. Yet this position faces three problems: (i) it risks pushing individuals toward an epistemically unwarranted middle ground—not based on the available evidence, but solely on the existence of disagreement—making the stance irrational; (ii) the strict application of the independence thesis can create cognitive impasses; and (iii) the externalization of epistemic authority may lead individuals to excessively diminish the value of their critical judgment.

One of the most serious challenges for conciliationism is the bootstrapping problem, which renders the process of rational justification simpler than it ought to be.⁴⁶ For instance, when two individuals with equal epistemic competence assess an evidence set E and both accept a proposition p , the conciliationist approach claims that this belief is rational. However, what if both individuals have misinterpreted E ? Would conciliationism not be asserting the rationality of a false p merely because two equally confident epistemic peers have reached an agreement, regardless of the actual evidence?⁴⁷ In the context of religious disagreement, this poses a significant risk: since the peers adopt a consensus independent of the evidence, they may fall into a kind of epistemic inertia regarding the pursuit of true belief, leading to a situation where evidence is entirely abstracted from religious belief.

The requirement that any defeater δ be distinct from mere peer disagreement—and that it either rebut p on independent grounds or undercut the reliability of E —makes explicit the bootstrapping problem. Conciliationism treats disagreement itself as a kind of defeater, effectively externalizing the authority of evidence to the mere fact of consensus. Our absence of genuine defeat clause exposes this novel pitfall: unless δ arises from new, independent evidence, the mere fact that an epistemic peer disagrees cannot legitimately override the believer's own evidence. In doing so, the Revised Steadfastness Principle restores evidence's normative role and highlights conciliationism's dangerous tendency to displace it with consensus. As Kelly rightly points out, in any case where consensus is adopted as the criterion of truth, it would follow that a single person (S), merely by lacking an epistemic peer who disagrees, would be entitled to regard their belief in p as true.⁴⁸ In such a scenario, the criterion for p 's truth would not be the evidence but rather S 's belief that p is true—a position that, on its own, does not seem rationally tenable.

The bootstrapping problem reveals a further tension when examined in conjunction with one of conciliationism's central claims, the *Independence Thesis*. According to this thesis, resolving a peer disagreement requires the parties to appeal to evidence that is independent of both their belief about p and the reasons supporting that belief.⁴⁹ This principle maintains that it is rational to revise one's confidence in a belief not merely on the basis of the disputed reasons but through an external, independent evaluative process.⁵⁰ Advocates of the thesis contend that, in the absence of any clear

45 Schoenfield, "Permission to Believe: Why Permissivism is True and What it Tells us about Irrelevant Influences on Belief", 193-218.

46 Lougheed, *The Epistemic Benefits of Disagreement*, 11. For the discussion between Elga and Enoch see Elga, "Reflection and Disagreement", 486-88; Enoch, "Not Just a Truthometer: Taking Oneself Seriously (but not Too Seriously) in Cases of Peer Disagreement", 991-92.

47 See Kelly, "Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence", 126, 128 for a similar conclusion.

48 Kelly, "Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence", 129-130.

49 Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News", 187-217; Adam Elga, "Reflection and Disagreement", 478-502; Kornblith, "Belief in the Face of Controversy", 29-52.

50 cf. David Christensen, "Disagreement, Question-Begging and Epistemic Self-Criticism", *Philosopher's Imprint* 11/6 (2011), 1-2.

epistemic asymmetry between the two peers, neither party's position can be granted epistemic privilege.⁵¹ When paired with the *Uniqueness Thesis*, however, the Independence Thesis implies that, in cases of peer disagreement, both parties cannot remain rational simultaneously. Accordingly, if individuals in such a disagreement cannot appeal to mechanisms such as common sense, special insight, or self-trust, they must instead rely on independent evidence that is mutually acceptable. Yet since conciliationism treats the mere fact of disagreement as evidence in itself, it follows that the parties either must or already do, move toward agreement even before any independent evidence is introduced. This raises a critical problem: the specific role and necessity of independent evidence in such a framework becomes difficult to determine.

Within the context of the bootstrapping problem, another way in which conciliationism devalues evidence lies in its tendency to render one excessively dependent on the epistemic authority of others during the process of belief revision. If one is required to reconsider their beliefs in every instance of disagreement, this can lead to a complete externalization of epistemic authority and an undue underestimation of their cognitive competence. As a result, even when a person has strong and valid reasons for holding a belief *p*, they may nonetheless feel compelled to revise it. While such a process may be justifiable in cases where the other party is epistemically superior, the same process operating in favor of an epistemically less competent interlocutor risks producing an irrational concession.⁵² This outcome fosters an epistemic stance that distances individuals from the truth, encourages them to undervalue their evidence, and leads to an unwarranted dependence on the epistemic authority of others.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that conciliationism conflicts with the demands of epistemic rationality and encounters significant theoretical difficulties. The core principle of conciliationism—namely, the requirement to revise one's belief in the face of disagreement—emerges as a practice that undermines the formation of rational belief and leads toward skepticism. First, this principle risks constraining scientific, philosophical, and religious inquiry. The expectation that individuals should weaken their beliefs merely for the sake of reaching an agreement with their epistemic peers hampers the pursuit of knowledge, obstructs intellectual progress, and fosters a stance of unjustified suspension of judgment. Second, when applied to conciliationism itself, this principle yields an internal inconsistency: if one disagrees about whether conciliationism is an epistemic requirement, conciliationism would demand that they revise this very belief. This results in a form of self-defeat, either undermining or diminishing confidence in the very principle it upholds. Such a contradiction undermines conciliationism's viability as a sustainable epistemic position. Third, conciliationism fosters an environment conducive to skepticism, leading to widespread epistemic uncertainty. By continuously requiring peers to question and adjust their beliefs—it risks weakening even well-justified commitments. Finally, conciliationism risks weakening the role of evidence and externalizing epistemic authority, which may result in inertia in the pursuit of truth. By minimizing the function of evidence in belief evaluation, conciliationism opens the possibility of adopting irrational beliefs or replacing rational beliefs with irrational ones. In contrast, the revised steadfastness principle articulated here offers a more defensible epistemic foundation by specifying four necessary conditions under which an agent may rationally maintain belief in the face of peer disagreement: (1) that the agent's evidence continues to support the belief within their epistemic framework (independent justification); (2) that no genuine defeater, distinct from mere disagreement, undermines the belief or its evidential basis (absence of genuine defeat); (3) that the agent's confidence remains above a rational threshold commensurate with the domain's epistemic stakes (confidence threshold); and (4) that the agent endorses a higher-order judgment affirming that their justification remains at least as strong as their peer's (meta-belief endorsement). In sum, these critiques indicate that the epistemic concessions demanded by conciliationism are excessive and undermine rational belief formation. This study concludes that conciliationism, as an epistemic position, lacks sustainability, while the steadfast approach proposed provides a more robust and defensible epistemic foundation.

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⁵¹ Feldman, "Epistemological Puzzles about Disagreement", 231.

⁵² cf. Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News", 210; Adam Elga, "Reflection and Disagreement", 483.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

İhtilaf epistemolojisi, epistemik denkler arasında ortaya çıkan ihtilafları konu alır ve bu ihtilaflar genel olarak *kararlılık* ve *uzlaşımıcılık* başlıkları altında incelenir. Uzlaşımıcılık, epistemik denkler arasında ortaya çıkan ihtilaf durumlarında, bireylerin karşıt görüşe kayda değer ölçüde ağırlık vermesi ya da inançlarını ortak bir noktada buluşturarak revize etmesi gerektiğini savunur. Buna karşılık, kararlılık yaklaşımı, epistemik denklerle yaşanan ihtilaflarda kişinin inancını rasyonel bir şekilde sürdürebileceğini ileri sürer. Bu makale, uzlaşımıcılığın içsel tutarsızlıklarını, entelektüel ve dini sorgulamaya getirdiği kısıtlayıcı etkileri, septisizme açık doğası ve delil kavramı bakımından yarattığı sorunları ortaya koyarak söz konusu yaklaşımı sistematik biçimde eleştirecek ve kararlılık yaklaşımına yönelik yeni bir temellendirme sunacaktır.

Uzlaşımıcılığın temel problemlerinden biri, sorgulayıcı düşünceye haklılaştırılmayan epistemik sınırlamalar getirmesidir. Bireylerin yalnızca bir ihtilaf durumuyla karşılaştıkları için inançlarını gözden geçirmeye ya da terk etmeye zorlanması, bağımsız akıl yürütmeyi teşvik etmek yerine baskılamaktadır. Dahası, uzlaşımıcılık, hangi durumlarda inanç revizyonunun epistemik olarak gerekli olduğuna ve hangi durumlarda mevcut inancın korunabileceğine dair açık bir ölçüt sunmamaktadır. Bu belirsizlik, uzlaşımıcılığı genel bir epistemik norm olarak güvenilmez kılmaktadır. Uzlaşımıcılıkla ilgili bir diğer önemli sorun ise bu tutumun kendini çürüten bir niteliğe sahip olmasıdır. Zira uzlaşımıcılığın bizzat kendisi de felsefi bir tartışma konusudur; dolayısıyla savunucularının, kendi ilkelerine bağlı kalmak istiyorlarsa, bu görüşle çelişen epistemik denkleriyle karşılaştıklarında kendi görüşlerine olan güvenlerini azaltmaları gerekir. Bu durum bir paradoks doğurur: Uzlaşımıcılar ya uzlaşımıcılığı savunmaya devam ederek kendi ilkeleriyle çelişmek ya da bu görüşü terk ederek onun evrensel geçerliliğini ortadan kaldırmak durumundadırlar. Ayrıca uzlaşımıcılığın kişilerin önermelerine duydukları güveni sürekli azaltan bir mahiyette tezahür etmesi kişileri kalıcı bir epistemik belirsizlik içinde bırakma riski taşır. Bu durum, özellikle ihtilafın yaygın ve çoğu zaman çözümsüz olduğu dinî inançlar söz konusu olduğunda daha belirgindir. Her ihtilaf durumunda inanç revizyonu beklentisi, gerekçelendirilmiş inançların istikrarını zayıflatmakta ve epistemik tavize yol açabilmektedir. Buna ek olarak, uzlaşımıcılık epistemik temellendirmeyi ciddi şekilde zedeleyen “kendi kendini doğrulama” (*epistemic bootstrapping*) sorununa da açıktır. Bu sorun, bir inancın yalnızca birden çok kişi tarafından paylaşılması sebebiyle rasyonel kabul edilebileceğini ifade eder. Uzlaşımıcılığın, uzlaşmayı epistemik bir erdem olarak görmesi, gerekçelendirme bakımından yetersiz olan inançların yalnızca fikir birliğine dayanarak meşrulaştırılması riskini doğurur. Böyle bir yaklaşım, inanç oluşumunda delil temelli yaklaşımı zayıflatır ve rasyonel gerekçelendirmenin nesnel delilden ziyade fikir birliğine dayanabileceğini ima eder. Dinî bağlamda ise bu durum daha da sorunludur; çünkü uzlaşımıcılığın tutarlı bir şekilde uygulanması hâlinde bir dine mensup bireyler, bağımsız gerekçelendirme yerine grup içi uzlaşmaya öncelik verebilir. Bu da bireylerin inançlarını, delillerine olan güvenleri sebebiyle değil, içinde buldukları grubun ortak kanaatinden hareketle sürdürmelerine yol açabilir. Sonuç olarak, uzlaşımıcılığın dinî bağlamda epistemik değerini ciddi biçimde sorgulamak gerekir.

Bu çalışma, söz konusu problemler dikkate alındığında, kararlılık yaklaşımının sunacağımız güçlendirilmiş versiyonunun dini ihtilaflar hususunda daha rasyonel olduğunu savunmaktadır. Buna göre, bireyin dinî inancını epistemik denklerle yaşadığı ihtilaflar karşısında rasyonel biçimde sürdürebilmesi ve uzlaşımçı olmaması aşağıdaki dört koşulun sağlanmasına bağlıdır: (i) Bireyin inancını destekleyen deliller, kendi yorumlayıcı ve epistemik çerçevesi içinde geçerliliğini korumaktadır (bağımsız gerekçelendirme); (ii) Söz konusu inancı doğrudan çürüten ya da delilin güvenilirliğini zayıflatan hakiki bir çürüten bulunmamaktadır (hakiki çürüten yokluğu); (iii) Bireyin inancına olan güveni, sorgulamanın epistemik risklerine uygun olan rasyonel eşik düzeyinin üzerindedir (güven eşiği); (iv) Birey, kendi gerekçelendirmesinin epistemik dengine kıyasla en az onunki kadar güçlü olduğu yönünde ikinci dereceden bir yargıya sahiptir (ikinci dereceden inanca dayanan tasdik). Bu çerçeve, inanç revizyonunu bütünüyle dışlamamakta; ancak sırf ihtilafın varlığı nedeniyle inanca güven derecesinin düşürülmesini de zorunlu görmemektedir. Sunduğumuz kararlılık yaklaşımı, bireye akıl yürütme yetilerini kullanma hakkı tanıyarak epistemik özerkliği savunur ve sırf ihtilaf yaşandığı için hatalı olunabileceği varsayımını reddeder. Ayrıca, bireylerin görüşlerini gerekçeli biçimde geliştirmelerine olanak tanıdığı için entelektüel ilerlemeyi de teşvik eder. Sonuç olarak, bu kararlılık modeli, inanç revizyonunu, yalnızca fikir ayrılığına tepki olarak değil, epistemik açıdan sağlam gerekçelere dayalı olarak mümkün kılarak dinî ve felsefi sorgulamanın bütünlüğünü korur ve rasyonel inancın gerekliliklerine sadık kalır.