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Epistemic Styles are Permissive

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A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MA)

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Leuven, 2024

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Francesco Praolini, for his support during this project. I am also grateful to the Institute of Philosophy for providing the environment and the resources necessary for my research and writing process. I owe the most to my family, especially my parents Darko and Sanjica, and my girlfriend Marharyta, whose love and sacrifices have made the whole process lighter. I am also thankful for the company and support of my friends and colleagues. A special thanks goes to Andrej, Iain, and Tom who gave valuable comments on various drafts, as well as to Lotte, Quentin, and Federico without whom the long days working on this thesis would have been duller and no fun at all.

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Introduction

Suppose you have two fax machines connected to the same phone line and modem. If you were to send an identical message to both in order to check whether they work, different outputs would suggest that either one or both devices have malfunctioned. In other words, we could say that it is *a priori* true (Wright 1992, see) that the two fax machines cannot both function properly and diverge in their outputs. The main idea is that for devices like fax machines, output *supervenes* on input. More precisely, divergence in output cannot occur without divergence of input. Next, suppose there are two groups of palaeoanthropologists studying the bones of a small archaic hominin (De Cruz and De Smedt 2013). The first group believes the remains belong to an ancestor of the human species with congenital birth defects, while the other group believes they belong to an unknown hominin species with insular dwarfism (2013, p. 172). In this case, the input is the evidence they have and the outputs stand for the opinions they take up about how to taxonomize the remains. The idea behind supervenience says that the only way their opinions could be different is if they interacted with different evidence. In this paper, I ask what conditions must be met to say that factors related to how we interact with evidence contribute to the differences in our opinions even if our inputs are the same.

Examples similar to the ones above are often used to illustrate different kinds of disagreements (in output, representation, opinion, etc.). Disagreement is interesting because it is a frequent and varied phenomenon among epistemic agents. We disagree about which colours go well together but also about things like whether capital punishment is morally permissible or not. To make matters more precise, I take all disagreements to have the following basic form:

> **(Disagreement)** If thinkers A and B consider the same proposition p, yet A believes p, and B does not believe p, then thinkers A and B disagree on p.

Not all disagreements are equally interesting just because they share a common form. We often make a distinction between disagreements where the difference in outputs is obviously caused by an error or a fault, and disagreements where the presence of error is not as obvious. Moreover, If two thinkers disagree about p, and they have totally different *evidence*, our explanation of disagreement will always take this difference into account. In this paper, I will show that there are important differences we must take into account in order to explain situations where agents disagree when they have the same evidence. More precisely, I will argue that differences in preferences related to evidential thresholds, preferred source of testimony, and methods of reasoning sometimes make agents disagree even if their evidence is the same.

The sort of cases we should pay more attention to when talking about disagreement about shared evidence are the ones where the assumption that either of the thinkers made a mistake is wrong. For one, because it is unclear what kind of verdict these cases warrant. A rough way of capturing the idea that some disagreements do not necessarily imply a fault is the following, borrowing the schema from (Kölbel 2004, p. 53):

> **(Faultless disagreement)** There can be, and there often are situations where, given two agents A and B, and a proposition p; A comes to believe that p, and B that not-p. Yet, neither A nor B has made a mistake or is at fault in believing either p or not-p.

This sort of disagreement is interesting because sometimes, when we disagree, we are alright with thinking that no one made a mistake because sometimes we have different *preferences*. Examples of faultless disagreement most often come from the domain of taste judgements (Egan 2010; Ferrari and Moruzzi 2020). Take for instance the disagreement between two friends about the status of rock climbing. Suppose Alice and Bob had taken a free rock climbing class together. Alice had the time of her life and believes that rock climbing is very fun. Bob, on the other hand, suffered terribly and thinks rock climbing is not fun at all. So, what should Bob and Alice do about their disagreement? Many philosophers agree with the common sense opinion that the answer is nothing. Partly because matters

of taste are proverbially not to be disputed, but also because the justification for our taste beliefs comes solely from the responses we have to our experiences (2020).

Although this tells us that we may be justified in disagreeing about whether rock climbing is fun, it does not do a good job of explaining how disagreement develops owing to our subjective preferences. Recall our two scientists debating the classification of fossils. Since their dispute is not about taste, we are more likely to attempt and troubleshoot our scientists, similar to how a fax checker would troubleshoot the machines. Why don't we feel inclined to troubleshoot Bob and Alice? Following the same reasons from above, philosophers seem to agree that we don't have to. Matters of taste simply lack anything like the objectivity of palaeoanthropology, so the stakes in each case vary. This paper defends the view which holds that the same sensibility that leads Bob and Alice to disagree about rock climbing causes our scientists to disagree about the fossils.

The only factor contributing to the different assessment of the two cases is that, whereas science seems to demand convergence of opinion, no such demand is imposed on disagreement about taste. Although this is the right priority to have in some cases, it could mislead us into neglecting factors that contribute to the formation of epistemic attitudes. The main upshot of this thesis is that preferences related to our interactions with evidence are an important factor of this sort. 'Epistemic styles' are ways of setting one's epistemic parameters that express unified sets of such preferences (Flores 2021). These parameters take stock of subject-relative values for variables related to evidential thresholds, prior probability distributions, go-to reasoning methods and others. The aim of this paper is to show that epistemic styles have advantages over other ways of talking about preferences insofar as they provide us with (a) some options for a view describing how our *interactions with evidence* may result in disagreements, (b) reasons why not all disagreements caused by a *difference of epistemic style* imply that one of the attitudes is not justified, and (c) a way to describe instances of the above schema which originate in divergent epistemic parameter settings.

0.1 Making room for epistemic styles

Ferrari and Moruzzi (2020) propose the idea that in domains of taste, we should endorse something like the following reason for why some disputes really are faultless. First, all judgements about whether an activity is *fun* are subjective because they depend entirely on the preferences of the agent. We can call this the subjective part of judging taste. Second, since two different agents may come up with different ideas of what is fun, tasty, or beautiful, we say these judgements are agent-relative. The idea is that subjective and relative parts of judging taste form a so-called 'world of taste' (Ferrari and Moruzzi 2020, p. 391) where the specific responses to experiences compose this world relative to the agent in question. I believe that some way of generalizing this idea also applies to cases of disagreement extending beyond the domain of taste. Think of the idea that it may be epistemically reasonable for you to stick with your opinion, as long as you have some subjective reasons to have the preference in the first place. There are ways to take these subjective reasons into account when disputing about taste, for example by speaking of basic preferences. However, in order to generalize our talk and break out of the boundaries of taste, we need a more precise way of speaking about preferences.

Epistemic styles (Flores 2021) are a way to reformulate and systematize this way of talking about epistemic preferences. In the first chapter, I open with an account of why style conceptually tracks the *epistemic* notion of preference quite well, and why we should pay closer attention to style over concepts capturing the notion of preference. Everyone, insofar as they hold beliefs and interact with evidence has epistemic parameter settings, and by default, takes up epistemic styles. After answering some sceptical doubts about the supposed reality of epistemic styles, I show how they figure into the assumption that the only reasonable thing to believe is that which your evidence supports. This seems like a good starting point for discussions about epistemic preferences in general, but it is still unclear how it helps us get to the bottom of our original concerns in cases of disagreement. The short answer is that it really doesn't. The first chapter is not explicitly concerned with disagreement, but it aims at the idea that the conditions for disagreement arise owing to subjective differences in how the agent sees the evidence,

and which hypotheses they find compelling.

In the final two sections of chapter one, I show how ideas about what it means to hold different attitudes on the same[1] evidence become most opinionated once we commit to some relatively orthodox epistemological positions. Some philosophers endorse views on which evidence puts tight bounds on rational belief or some other form of evidentialism (Conee and Feldman 2004). However, a particularly strong formulation of evidentialism raises a host of issues for the idea that what is rational for you to believe depends on the epistemic style you take up with respect to your evidence. On the so-called Strong Evidential Supervenience[2] view there can be no difference between two *rational* agents' attitudes without a difference in their evidence, or in other words the doxastic attitudes of all rational agents supervene on their total evidence (Titelbaum and Kopec forthcoming).

Holding a *permissive* view of evidential support requires a commitment to the idea that, in some cases, whether a belief is rational at least partly depends on which epistemic style one adopts. Proponents of strong evidentialism and permissivism have similar reasons to take their views as informative with respect to the question of whether all disagreements imply presence of an error. If strong evidentialism[3] is true, two agents who share the same evidence but disagree about some proposition p, could never both be rational. Conversely, if permissivism is true, two agents can sometimes disagree without fault, i.e. have different attitudes about p but be equally rational. Traditionally, the import of the debate between evidentialism and permissivism for the issue of disagreement has often been reduced to the question of whether the following principle is true.

[1]The notion of shared evidence used here is based on sufficient similarity. Two different agents share the same evidence about an arbitrary proposition just in case all the evidence one of them has is sufficiently similar to the other's evidence.

[2]For a discussion of supervenience in the context of evidential support, see (Conee and Feldman 2004; Ballantyne and Coffman 2011; Titelbaum and Kopec forthcoming; Littlejohn 2018; Nolfi 2018; Jackson and LaFore 2024)

[3]When speaking of evidentialism I explicitly refer to the aforementioned formulation of strong evidentialism. I distinguish strong evidentialism from other views about the relationship between evidence and epistemic justification by qualifying them with an adjective other than strong, namely *lax* or *weaker* evidentialism.

> **(Uniqueness)** For any body of evidence, there is a *single* way that rationality requires all agents to respond to that evidence. (White 2005; White 2014; Feldman 2000)

Perhaps our preferences do affect how we judge taste, but it is something else to hold that preferences can affect how we judge in general. Not all philosophers think that preferences have a say in what our evidence supports, such that it would justify different judgements for equally reasonable agents with different preferences. Some even go as far as to argue in favour of the idea that given any body of evidence, there is always a uniquely rational attitude that a reasonable agent ought to have, independent of preferences. If we consider attitudes as doxastic options available to the agent, proponents of Uniqueness will say there is only one rationally acceptable option. If this seems strict, that's because it is. It may even seem as if such a thesis is easy to counter. For example, by taking the denial of Uniqueness to be the claim that *not all* interactions with evidence elicit the same kind of intuitions as the following case does:

> **(basic unique case)** Suppose you flip a [fair] coin and invite your friend to consider the proposition p - the coin will land heads rather than tails. Your friend ought to divide her attitude evenly between belief in favour of p and belief in favour of not-p. Anything more or less than an even credence [belief] in the proposition and its negation is prima facie less than reasonable for her. (Kelly 2014, p. 2)

Given what we know about preferences; endorsing Uniqueness generates tension with our *stylistic* aims when evaluating different possible ways of interacting with evidence. In the final section of the chapter, I show how this principle becomes more worrying than we may initially have thought. To sum up, I give some motivation for the idea that the type of evidentialism we require to make sense of epistemic preferences must be considerably weaker. At least in the sense that it must deny the idea *Uniqueness* takes to the extremes. The view I will be defending here is permissive because it says that, in at least some cases of diverging attitudes on the same total evidence, both attitudes are possibly justified, rational, or otherwise good to have from an epistemic point of view.

0.2 Stylistic epistemic permissivism

The second chapter opens with a closer look at some proposed options for viewing interactions with evidence. There is an array of them to consider, and the debate often boils down to making motivated trade-offs between different ways of interpreting Uniqueness and subsequent differences in what permissivism is taken to deny. The options I take issue with are the ones that claim that all interactions with evidence which result in the agent holding a *good* doxastic state exhibit a kind of Uniqueness[4]. The first of these is plain Uniqueness, an obvious foe of our approach. The second option that could cause some trouble for epistemic styles is actually a kind of permissivism. Some permissivists hold that there are cases where evidential support is permissive, but are quick to point out that they only mean to say that two different, yet equally rational, people may sometimes respond to the same evidence with different attitudes. This option cautiously falls short of the claim that cases where two agents take up possibly different attitudes imply that any of these two agents is permitted to choose between more than one equally rational attitude[5].

The kind of view our theory of epistemic styles requires is closer to the latter claim, although it certainly agrees with other options that there are cases where evidential support is permissive in the former sense. The first section asks why at least some of our interactions with evidence may motivate the idea that evidential support is permissive. The answer, as anticipated earlier, has a lot to do with epistemic styles, i.e. ways of setting one's epistemic parameters that express unified sets of subject-relative preferences and goals. For example, if two agents happen to interact with the same evidence, differences in their epistemic parameter settings allow us to say why some cases do, and others do not permit divergent attitudes. Evidence is a controversial and contestable concept, and debates between those who say that evidential support functions one way or another often bypass questions about epistemic styles or anything in the vicinity of psychological profiles. Here I follow those philosophers who hold that the kind of evidential support con-

[4](White 2005; White 2014; Feldman 2007; Dogramaci and Horowitz 2016; Greco and Hedden 2016; Matheson 2011; Schultheis 2018)

[5](Schoenfield 2014; Kelly 2014; Meacham 2013; Titelbaum and Kopec 2019)

stitutive of epistemically justified belief is always, at least partly, affected by the agent's psychological makeup (James 1896; Quine 1969; Plantinga 1993; Goldman 2002).

> **(basic permissive case)** Judy and Jerry are walking through the park, and briefly stop to take a look at the mechanism of the weather station. As they are looking around, the mercury level in the barometer drops by a mark or two. Both are more or less aware of how environmental conditions cause weather changes; so given the drop in the level, Jerry comes to believe that a storm is imminent and tells Judy to hurry up so they don't get wet. Judy disagrees and does not come to believe that a storm is coming any time soon.

We would benefit a lot if we had a way to describe what about the evidence made it so that Jerry found his own attitude more compelling than Judy's. However, why should it be obvious that what makes any attitude compelling is always affixed to the evidence? Views which assume otherwise are often understood as a denial of broadly evidentialist commitments. Namely, if something like our sentiment or emotion can decide what we believe, then the evidence does not always bind rational belief as tightly as Unique cases would have us think. The most basic idea that heavily weighs on this issue is that our sentiments can often be described as *feelings of duty* which make different people see the evidence differently. This idea came to light with the Jamesian *Will to believe* doctrine, which says that variation in sentiments has a natural role in epistemology (James 1896; Aikin 2014). First, sentiment is important in the descriptive sense of showing how different psychological profiles often cannot but see the evidence in a particular way. It is equally important in the normative sense of holding that these profiles reflect a kind of permission or a right to be compelled by your own lights (Aikin 2014, pp. 110, 131). Some have recently taken up the task of seeing whether Jamesian sentiments help us describe decision rules for rational agents who may be permitted some but not other options, and how good or bad they generally get (Pettigrew 2016). This approach is taken up in section two, where I discuss how epistemic parameter settings affect the options an agent is permitted on a given body of evidence.

The penultimate section takes a closer look at the issue of whether evaluating epistemic styles for rationality requires any comprehensive commitments to a psychological theory. I am not sure whether we need to know a large number of details about different psychological theories to say that epistemic styles explain why evidential support has a normative and psychological part. Or that in some cases, it is only the nature of evidence which makes an option permitted, whereas in other cases it is the conjunction of evidence and the subject's psychological makeup which makes some beliefs justified or supported by evidence. To that end, I take styles to describe what makes some cases permissive, but not others. Here I attempt to give an example of how permissive cases arise if styles range over a restricted set of parameter settings. The benefit of talking about a smaller, well-defined model of epistemic parameter settings is that it allows us to see what role evidence can play in permissive theories of epistemic rationality. Evidentialism, or the view that evidence alone always binds belief tightly, is too strict for us, and we wish to say that sometimes, considerations going beyond evidence may bind belief tighter.

I then return to the issue of faultless disagreement as a kind of permissive scheme and sketch the answers to our original questions. If a disagreement is faultless, then it can sometimes be traced to a difference in epistemic parameter settings. Therefore, if two agents hold different attitudes on the same evidence and neither is obviously irrational in doing so, then they likely take up different sentiments towards what the evidence supports for them. In a similar vein, if two agents differ only in their psychological makeup then if they come to disagree, they may both be rational. To conclude, I summarize how taking epistemic styles to explain why agents may vary in their interactions with evidence often requires commitments to at least some instances of faultless disagreement, i.e. permissive interactions with evidence.

Chapter 1

Making room for epistemic styles

1.1 Systematicity of style

The Oxford English Dictionary (2023) defines *style* as a kind, sort, or type, as determined by manner of composition or construction or by outward appearance. A difference in style then implies either a difference in composition and construction, or a difference in outward appearance. This seems to capture only one aspect of the meaning we usually give to *style*. The OED definition focuses on the differences that come from the *attributes* of the things being described as having a particular style. For example, a style of architecture is determined by the way in which architectural attributes such as structural integrity, utility, or shape come together to form particular architectural objects. A style of writing is likewise determined by the choices the author makes concerning tone, literary devices, form or rhythm. If our aim is to give style a kind of critical function, for example by distinguishing between Industrial and Victorian architectural styles or understanding how Ovid's *Metamorphoses* differ from *Aesop's Fables*, we do well by focusing on the attributes that differ in each case and the outward appearance of the particular sort or type (Hough 1969).

The aspect of the meaning that is not presented in this attributive picture (Danto 1981) has to do with the fact that what often intrigues us the most about style is not a mere feature of a style but an understanding of variation. We want to know a great deal more than the simple taxonomy of different ways of designing a building or writing a book. More often, when we are wondering about styles, we are following an intuition that there is some deeper understanding to be had about why some attributes but not others express a certain style. In reality, our stylistic interests go well beyond books and buildings. For one, they

often extend to persons when we say things like "Samuel Beckett's style of writing is factive and prosaic." or that "Antonio Gaudi's architectural style is free and organic.". Some philosophical accounts approach style with the goal of elaborating on notions related to personal identity or 'selfhood'. They often endorse the idea that individual personal style relates directly to some intelligible aspect of the person's psychology and that the individual's psychological makeup gives at least some of the agent's activities their distinctive character.[1]

Carolina Flores' account of *epistemic styles* is a rare attempt to give the notion a systematic philosophical description and the only one that does so in the restricted context of variation in epistemic activities. However, the definition does not seem too remote from more traditional, personal accounts of style.

> **(Epistemic styles)** are ways of interacting with evidence that express aspects of a unified set of epistemic parameters. Their unity derives from the fact that they express the same psychological profile in such a way that knowing someone's epistemic style helps us understand and predict how they are disposed to interact with evidence in a particular context. (Flores 2021)

Knowing one's epistemic style allows us to understand why a person interacted with evidence as they did and predict how they will interact with evidence in future situations. The range of epistemic activities that fall under 'interactions with evidence' is rather broad. Examples include updating one's beliefs in light of the available evidence, understanding what the given evidence entails, assessing sources of evidence, etc (Flores 2023; Steglich-Petersen and Varga 2023). These are some examples of activities that help us illustrate the difference in particular kinds of interactions. However, what is actually expressed in these different activities is the particular configuration of epistemic parameters which has a direct consequence on the outcome of our interactions with evidence. Parameters such as evidential threshold across one's belief set (one's evidential policy), one's repertoire of go-to reasoning rules, the extent to which one values getting truth over avoiding

[1] A selection of approaches to analysing this particular idea can be found in (Riggle 2015; Robinson 1985; Wollheim 1987; Camp 2019)

falsity, how likely one is to trust reliable sources and testimony, risk-seeking with respect to various epistemic goods, and the weight one gives to already available evidence are the kinds of things with respect to which we say that persons can take up different epistemic styles (Flores 2021).

Flores' claim is not that variation in our interactions with evidence can always be explained by giving an account of the person's epistemic parameter setting. After all, there is no reason to suppose that epistemic parameters are an exclusive causal element in the story of how we interact with evidence. Beyond style, there exists a complex and wide casting net of the agent's general psychological profiles which, although partly accounted for by epistemic parameters, include extra-stylistic factors such as the person's mood, overall disposition and attended-to goals (Flores 2023). Using epistemic styles to describe why we sometimes interact with evidence differently shows great promise. Mainly because style captures widespread intuitions about the elements that may or may not have something to do with the ways we come to hold epistemic attitudes. Factors such as 'being gullible or lazy', 'being more sensitive to information from the community', 'having an unending thirst for knowledge' all seem to bear on how we update our beliefs, ask pertinent questions, and consider alternative explanations (Flores 2021; Steglich-Petersen and Varga 2023).

We can also say that epistemic styles are ways of setting epistemic parameters of the agent which have clearly identifiable roles in shaping one's epistemic standing on a particular issue. Not all, but most of the issues we might take different stands on often become a matter of disagreement, dissent, polarisation and alienation. Flores claims that epistemic styles allow us to evaluate an agent's interactions with evidence and therefore assess them, without presupposing that any particular interaction or agent as a whole is rational. Nor does it require us to be able to say that any instance of an attitude occasioned by the agent's epistemic parameter settings is justified in some specific epistemic sense (Flores 2021, p. 14). The relatively simple idea behind using epistemic styles to resolve issues of disagreement is that in order to elaborate on these issues we require a sufficiently systematic account of what it means, for an agent, to express psychological profiles by particular ways of setting their epistemic parameters.

At this point, we can single out two preliminary worries that require attention before any systematic description of epistemic styles may be endorsed. The first has to do with the fact that knowing which epistemic styles there are seems to require knowledge of a great deal of facts about which epistemic parameters and profiles are confirmed by psychological literature. This and similar worries trade on the idea that a systematic account of our epistemic nature cannot be given independently of scientific, psychological investigation. In other words, they doubt the success of *systematic* theories of epistemic styles. The second worry mirrors the first. Suppose we know enough about a person's profile to talk of their style; are we then justified in believing that exactly those parameters lead them to interact with evidence in any particular way. The way this worry seeps into the given account of epistemic styles is by questioning the relatively ambiguous supposition that the aspects of a person's psychology are sufficiently familiar to us and robust enough to find application in epistemology (Flores 2021, p. 10).

One general claim that seems to be implicitly endorsed by both personal and epistemic accounts of style is the following thesis. This thesis factors into explanations which rely on the kind of familiarity we would require in order to have at least some *prima facie* certainty that our epistemological views edge close to scientific knowledge.

> **(style is real)** Individual style is in the artist [person] who has it, and though, in the present state of knowledge, it must be a matter of speculation precisely how it is stored in the mind, style has psychological reality.[2]

This puts the person's psychological profile front and centre of style, and consequently introduces some doubts into the overall picture. These doubts may arise entirely as a natural consequence of aiming at a philosophical analysis of a largely psychological phenomenon. This complicates the matter of individual personal styles but, with some elaboration, it seems that epistemic styles can dispel this doubt. For one, as opposed to notions of selfhood and personality, the range of

[2]Something along these lines is explicitly stated in (Wollheim 1987; Flores 2021; Riggle 2015; Robinson 1985).

our epistemic activities seems easier to demarcate. Testing hypotheses, predicting, explaining, and narrating events are just some examples of what we usually mean by epistemic activities (Chang 2009, see fig. 4.1). They are distinct from other activities in virtue of being sufficiently understood with reference to epistemic parameter settings alone (Flores 2021, p. 14). Second, owing to the difficulty of giving a universal and systematic account of *being oneself*, it is hard to see what kind of psychological components in and of the agent the notion of a personal style may express.

This worry is further extended in the next section. For now, we can anticipate that a satisfactory answer ought to explain why our knowledge of an agent's style tends to be accompanied by a sense of expressive psychological features (Flores 2021, p. 14). Moreover, it ought to make clear how this explanation enters into arguments which claim that epistemic styles *capture* a lot of our epistemic nature before becoming subject to counterclaims from psychology[3]. The obvious goal (Flores 2023; Flores 2021) for this novel theory is that it ought to provide us with a way of understanding disagreement and strategizing in our interactions with other epistemic agents. Following the reasoning from the first, this objection doubts that the description of the relevant differences is adequate for developing a theory of evaluation. One avenue of argumentation may claim something to the effect that if epistemic styles express relevant psychological features and these features disclose some useful information about the agent, then we ought to be certain that it was these features that have led to this particular information and not some others.

The way that this worry enters into Flores' account has to do with the claim that epistemic styles put us in a better position to understand others as epistemic agents whose behaviour is "rationally intelligible" (Flores 2021, p. 14). To understand actions as rationally intelligible requires seeing what kind of reasons the person has for that action and ultimately whether the action was reasonable in

[3]In her account of epistemic styles, Flores does not broach any explicit scientific counterclaims. Whether there are any such claims and whether they disprove enough of our account to abandon the concept of epistemic styles is certainly interesting, but in a way posterior to my project here. What suffices to say whether epistemic styles are a useful tool for epistemologists is to see how much of our epistemic nature they describe before having to rely on scientific observation.

any particular sense of the word. Although Flores claims that we can use style to make genuine sense of behaviour without claiming that any particular way of behaving is rational, there is still a way in which the implied theory of assessment employs the concept of rationality.

It is not clear whether all aspects of our psychological makeup combine to form our epistemic styles at all times. For one, my favourite colour being green and my favourite pasta shape being linguine have very little to do with the psychological profile I express in choosing who to vote for in the upcoming elections. Therefore, the proper subject of epistemological concern is not a person as a whole, for example, me with all my aesthetic, dietary and political opinions and preferences, but rather an agent in a more narrow sense. However, the whole of our psychology, including those aspects explained by epistemic style, enters into assessment of our overall rationality. One simple distinction between epistemic and overall rationality has to do with the fact that epistemic rationality more often than not asks whether the person's attitudes aim at the goal of truth; whereas overall rationality aims at whatever might be good for the agent to do in a particular situation. The elaboration of the theory of rationality implied in Flores' account of epistemic styles continues through sections 2 and 3. In section 2, I show how endorsing the idea implicit in the original worry with style invites some uncomfortable sceptical objections, and I attempt to answer these objections in turn. In section 3, I evaluate the prospects of a theory of epistemic evaluation that takes epistemic styles seriously, yet intentionally falls short of making claims that any epistemic style is more or less rational.

The concluding section asks whether endorsing epistemic styles, namely describing our interactions with evidence in terms of psychological profiles and subjective parameter settings is worth it. More precisely, I ask whether the benefits of talking about epistemic styles warrant the theoretical import of relying on particular theories of epistemic capacities and accounts of epistemic evaluation. My intention in the following sections is not to argue that any existing account of style has the resources to neutralise both of our aforementioned worries or that such an account is even possible. What I wish to claim instead is that epistemic styles preserve a good part of their explanatory power even if we do not yet understand

everything that their account entails. To that end, the following sections show that the extent of explanatory power we assign to style depends substantially on which side we take with respect to some prominent debates in epistemology.

1.2 The spectrum of scepticism

Suppose that everyone, insofar as they are an epistemic agent, inhabits a plethora of profiles and takes up a range of epistemic styles. We have seen above that what we express in styles is actually a kind of psychological-epistemic profile (Flores 2021, p. 9). It is not clear whether using epistemic styles to do epistemology, namely asking questions about which of our beliefs count as knowledge or what is the ground of distinguishing between rational and irrational beliefs, requires them to really correspond to some concrete psychological state of the person. However, a particular style will always imply a particular psychological feature in and of the agent. It appears that this relationship leaves a lot of our usual ways of thinking in a somewhat undesirable position. Flores' account holds even if epistemic styles do not require an entirely novel descriptive theory because they only help focus attention on the kind of things we have in mind when we say that A may prefer X in situations S and X* in situations S*; or that A prefers X, while B prefers Y.

This picture seems somewhat naïve. For one, it makes two simplifying assumptions which leave us open to a worrying kind of sceptical objections. The first simplification takes up style in order to track the change of preference with respect to different situations. In other words, keeping the agent fixed, a change of preference can arise out of changes in situations. Second, many of us think that we ought to describe how, having fixed contexts, style tracks the change of preference with respect to different agents. The original picture is two-dimensional. The first says that agents can change preferences due to a change of context or situation, and the second, that two agents can have different preferences in the same situation. We also require a third dimension, on which epistemic styles ask a different kind of question. What happens to our tracking assumptions once we fix the situation and the agent? On the naïve view, we cannot say much. However, to fully understand how epistemic styles determine our interactions with evidence we ought to be able to say what the same agent would do in the same situation,

given different sets of preferences.

Until we find a good way of thinking about this latter kind of questions, our talk of epistemic styles will remain subject to a spectrum of sceptical objections, varying in strength and scope. The most basic kind of scepticism often found in discussions of all kinds of style, not just epistemic-personal, claims that style is nothing more than a hypothetical construct. In general, a style sceptic may claim that there are no actual instances of epistemic styles and therefore we ought not to presuppose them when assessing real-world agents. Sceptical claims often vary with respect to the importance of the element they try to undermine. The basic claims may aim to reinforce doubt about the reality of style in two ways. In either case, the particular application of the sceptical reasoning has an appealing nature, such that we immediately find it gripping (DeRose and Warfield 1999, chapter 1; Stroud 1984, chapter 2). For one, as we have seen above, the intuition that epistemic styles do not really express any relevant aspects of our psychology seems somewhat robust. A sceptic of this kind can simply say that our interactions with evidence vary too much, and that style only picks out hypothetically related elements of our overall psychology.

This objection appears the least troublesome. Taking style to be merely hypothetical does not necessarily defeat the project of coming up with a good descriptive theory of epistemic styles. What our theory ought to do in this case, is provide the basis for fitting the concept into an overarching theory of how epistemic agents interact with evidence. A proponent of sceptical intuitions may say something to the effect that similar to imagination, curiosity or creativity, the phenomenon of epistemic styles cannot be directly perceived but it can be observed and broached indirectly. What stylistic epistemologists busy themselves with does not consists in looking for imagination or curiosity in a psychological picture (or maybe even the brain). They merely observe patterns of epistemic behaviour and investigate whether any such pattern puts us in a better epistemic position, for example by disclosing some ground of distinguishing rational from irrational attitudes, or by showing whether there is any relation between style, curiosity or imagination, and epistemic justification (Steglich-Petersen and Varga 2023).

The second, more troublesome worry can be understood as undermining the

very idea of an epistemic parameter. The claim that we ought to be sceptical about the existence of epistemic parameters seems motivated by the lack of any concrete elaboration of what they consist in. At least one possible way of reinforcing this doubt will admit that style is a relevant concept, but that its endorsement is a matter of philosophical outlook and subject to much debate. At the same time, saying that epistemic styles are clusters of capacities indicative of psychological profiles that bear varied relevance to the epistemic assessment of interactions with evidence (Flores 2021) is long-winded and laden with undisclosed (philosophical) commitments. One commitment that we must make relates to the implicit requirement of control over aspects of our psychology and how they enter into our epistemic nature. Namely, such control cannot be merely circumstantial, it must be volitional and consistent. There are two good reasons for paying attention to the ideas of volition and consistency. First, epistemic styles are flexible, so people can and do shift styles (Flores 2021, p. 7). Therefore, we cannot assume that the same unified personality, expressed in the setting of epistemic parameters exists across all contexts. Secondly, epistemic styles determine what sort of attitudes (responses to evidence) a person will tend to have, and if we wish to look for the source of consistency among these attitudes, it will certainly have to do with what holds these various epistemic parameters together.

A brief answer to the second set of objections is to say that they appear to jump to conclusions. For one, The best account I can think of will very likely have something to do with the fact that epistemic agents are agents that, under normal circumstances, have a more or less consistent psychology which allows them to make consistent use of their psychological capabilities.[4] This is not to say they

[4]In what way do we have to commit to the idea that we have consistent voluntary control over which epistemic styles we take up? The sense of voluntary control I have in mind is the same one we use when we say things like: *I carefully considered your offer*, or *I wasn't sure which insurance plan to choose so I went for the cheapest one*, or *It's not clear if it will rain or not so I will stay at home*. Perhaps these seem more like preferences than actual things we control. I believe that there are good reasons for thinking these are the types of things we do have some control over, at least in the sense of having a say in whether they happen. If we assume that the psychological background of the agent on these occasions consists in some concoction of epistemic parameter settings and psychological profiles, we should expect that these actions could have turned out differently. Perhaps someone who really can't allow for control in these cases has a point in saying

ought to have full awareness of what goes on inside their minds, it only requires some familiarity with patterns of behaviour and acquaintance with some distinct psychological features. In other words, there is no reason to suppose that epistemic styles require any direct familiarity with constructs such as epistemic parameters, or psychological profiles. However, the second sceptical objection points to the core of what is at stake in allowing epistemic styles to enter into assessment of epistemic agents. Therefore, keeping this answer sketch in mind, it serves us well to unpack what exactly is at stake in saying that we do or do not have control over our epistemic parameters.

A sceptic may insist that there can be no consistent way of evaluating epistemic agents, in terms of their style, because there is no consistent way in which our epistemic parameters relate to that which is evaluated, namely the cause of variation in some behaviour (epistemic interaction). To that end, the ardent style sceptic may deny that evaluation should take up epistemic parameter settings because that would require some extent of voluntary control over these settings, when in fact we do not have such powers after all. Traditionally, similar views take up this issue in reference to belief. Namely, we cannot evaluate belief unless it is certain that we have some control over the attitudes we form (Alston 2005). Epistemic styles, however, aren't explicitly related to moments of forming a belief, they relate to activities we engage in (both wilfully and sometimes inadvertently) when we interact with evidence. Surely at least some of our interactions with evidence lead to instances of attitudes being formed, and among these instances, some are possibly those of straight-up belief. The original account (Flores 2021) does not say whether any particular style expresses a psychological profile that aims at true beliefs, but it does require there being epistemic parameters that may or may not have some weight on whether this goal can possibly be achieved. Consider for a

that control over these surface phenomena entails control over the parameters and profiles which contributed to it. If our ability to take up an epistemic style requires us to have direct control over these background aspects, our account of epistemic styles will be threatened by regress. For one could always doubt whether control over the surface aspect really follows from direct control over what realises that aspect. However, I do not think taking epistemic styles seriously requires such control in the strict sense.

moment the case of "the fleeing Jerry"[5].

> Suppose Jerry has found himself in a very precarious position with an uncertain outcome. Having stolen some money from the nearby shop, he escaped an angry mob chasing after him and the only thing keeping him from safety is the wide gap between the roof he managed to sneak onto, and the roof of a nearby train station. Suppose the gap is just wide enough to make Jerry lose perfect confidence in his athletic abilities. [He decides that all things considered it is still worth giving a try.] Jerry has a very important goal, namely, to jump and save his fate. Knowing that time is of the essence and having some acquaintance with his own psychological makeup, he initially starts to worry that if he focuses too much on the width of the gap, distance from the mob, and height of the building he may start to panic and give up altogether. After a brief reflection, Jerry manages to set the dangers aside, make the jump and run away with his loot.

Suppose further that somewhere in this picture there is a set of epistemic parameters[6] at work that are ultimately going to have a say in how Jerry interacts with evidence, namely whether he succumbs to the perils of the situation or succeeds in convincing himself that he can make the jump. The sceptic may now object that evaluating Jerry in terms of how he has interacted with evidence may lead us away from the evaluation that seems to fit best with his overall predicament. Namely that Jerry has fulfilled his important goal and that some relevant aspects of his psychology have contributed to this being the case. However, we saw earlier that epistemic styles do not explicitly commit us to the idea of control over what we believe in. Are we then forced to retract this claim and say that Jerry actually did have some control over what he believed?

[5]The case is adapted from (Pritchard 2018).

[6]The kind of parameters that may become most salient in this case would probably have to do with things like how much evidence Jerry usually requires to form a belief, whether he is more likely to "give it a go" when things seem unclear or if he is more likely to give up. Moreover, they also take stock of which kind and what amount of evidence Jerry considers at the moment, namely whether he prefers to go of his previous successes or take his time to scope things out. (Flores 2021)

The answer is yes, and no. Epistemic styles certainly commit us to the view that Jerry has set his epistemic parameters in a way that led him to the belief that he can make the jump. Suppose Jerry's immediate goal was to arrive at the belief that he will make the jump. Should we say that he had some control over the fact that he managed to convince himself? This notion of control is, at best, indirect because it only really requires Jerry to have control over which reasoning tools to consider, how high his evidential thresholds should be, how much trust he should place in reliable sources, and whether to be more risky or cautious with respect to the evidence he had at the moment. Flores' account of evaluation based on epistemic styles seems to endorse something similar to this type of *control*. The account requires it if we adhere to the idea that persons sometimes tend to shift styles as they change contexts and other circumstances, and to the view that styles inform our evaluation of interactions with evidence but make no general claims about what kind of behaviour is rational (Flores 2021, pp. 7–14; Flores 2023, p. 4).

The relationship between epistemic styles and rationality invites the most pressing sceptical worry. Namely, even if we had good reason to think that epistemic styles allow us to determine which interactions with evidence are rational, they do not, in all instances of agents interacting with evidence in varied ways, reference the real ground of rationality. Moreover, they do not say why, owing to their parameter settings, the agent's actions are rational in a way that extends beyond their evidence. The main aim of this objection is to undermine the idea that epistemic parameters are useful in explaining all rationally intelligible patterns of behaviour and not just the *epistemically* rational ones. In the case above, Jerry acted in a way that is rational in some general sense but was not rational in any narrowly epistemic sense. That is because if Jerry was perfectly epistemically rational, he would only believe what he was epistemically justified to believe. Which would likely lead to a belief that would have left Jerry averse to attempting the jump.

However, there is no reason why such worries should undermine all use of epistemic styles to explain what is going on with Jerry. For one, we can see that it obviously pays off to have epistemic parameters set sufficiently low so that

Jerry's interactions with evidence fail in the relevant epistemically praiseworthy way. This illustrates the possibility of *ignoring* one's go-to settings and keeping the relevant parameters as low as possible in order to fulfil a goal that is separate from the set of epistemic parameters that may even hinder our success. The sceptic may then admit that perhaps there is some benefit in using epistemic styles to say whether an agent is epistemically rational or irrational, yet he may also doubt that such evaluations elaborate on what we are more often concerned with, namely the person's overall rationality. As I show below, the condition of ignoring one's go to settings or some other generally attended to parameter becomes a prime feature in a description of epistemic styles

All of the aforementioned sceptical objections aim at a similar idea. That is, in cases like Jerry's, where we have good reasons to think his belief was good to have yet epistemically faulty, we are confronted with a simple assessment problem. On the one hand, we are pulled towards epistemic evaluation of his position because we naturally wonder whether his belief that he can make the jump was true and justified or supported by adequate evidence. On the other hand, we care very little about epistemic considerations and evaluate his belief positively with respect to his most important goal, namely to jump and save his fate. The idea is simply that these two ends correspond to different sets of rules or principles we pick from when evaluating epistemic agents.

1.3 Stylistic assessment

If we are interested in the variety of benefits the concept of style affords us, we should investigate patterns of behaviour observable in interactions with evidence and try to see if any such patterns put us in a better position.[7] This improvement

[7]Epistemic assessment must take into account the fact that agents often have both epistemic and non-epistemic goals. Epistemic goals make it so that we strive to have justified beliefs, true opinions, and accurate credences, but perhaps also to know something better than we did before. Many of our other goals are not epistemic. Sometimes we strive to jump over a stream to make our hike shorter, become financially independent, or convince sceptical palaeoanthropologists that pygmy humans used to exist. Being able to say whether subjective elements enter into our interactions with evidence is, I believe, a crucial part of the combined picture. Supposing these elements are actually epistemic parameter settings, there are two occasions to make use of them.

may be epistemic, in which case we should attribute it to settings of epistemic parameters, or it may be an overall improvement, where epistemic parameters matter only insofar as our non-epistemic goals require them being a certain way. The kind of epistemic benefits available to us here have to do with the idea that which attitude, belief, or credence a person ultimately ends up holding depends substantially on their epistemic parameter settings. The improvement then consists in being better able to tell what is beneficial in being accurate, knowing better, having a good credence, gaining certainty or otherwise becoming sure of what we believe. In the example above, this was the case because it was necessary for Jerry's thresholds and reasoning methods to fail in a specific way (Pritchard 2018), so that he did not arrive at the belief that the jump was deadly and that he should give up. This is not to say that Jerry's confidence leading him to ignore relevant evidence made it so that his belief was actually epistemically rational. That would contradict the nature of the evidence. It simply calls attention to the possibility of there being interesting patterns in how epistemic means serve various ends.

Sceptics may be at least partly right in objecting to any stylistic evaluation because they are not convinced that there is a consistent account of how action may be evaluated with respect to a definite set of epistemic parameter settings. However, the case of Jerry doing his best to ignore the worries that arise once he pays sufficient mind to his evidence shows that even a lack of epistemic parameter settings may contribute to the overall outcome of an action. The difficulty comes from the fact that we have good reasons to think that this contribution can go both ways, namely towards epistemically better or worse outcomes. In what way can we then claim to be in a better position if we understand how epistemic parameters shape our interactions with evidence? One possibility is that in interactions with evidence where an agent takes up some attitude, be it about dangerous jumps, classification of fossils, or the like, having the right set of epistemic parameters aimed at the right goal will sometimes contribute to our being *epistemically* justified in

First, these subjective elements, let's say our stylistic factors, have a say in whether a person's attitude qualifies for a positive epistemic assessment. In other words, they contribute towards the satisfaction of our epistemic goals. Second, insofar as some of our non-epistemic goals call for epistemic activities, these factors may enter into the status of our overall rationality, as well.

holding a particular attitude.

What we can assume is that any situation is epistemically better or worse depending on the extent of epistemic justification an agent has in that situation. We also assume that a good epistemic situation will never be the one where an agent lacks epistemic justification for their belief. Similarly, a situation where an agent has sufficient epistemic justification for a belief will always be epistemically better than a situation where an agent has less than sufficient or no epistemic justification. However, the case of Jerry shows we may be in a good situation overall, independently of being in a good or bad epistemic situation. The problem is that the lessons of epistemic styles seem to clash with the benefits of believing what your evidence supports. In other words, I think we should evaluate Jerry's belief that he will make the jump as a good state to be in, and the reasons for that have a lot to do with *epistemic* parameter settings and the ways Jerry interacted with evidence. There are those who disagree, and say that this way of going about it is surely not epistemic because it does not take into account the conditions for epistemic justification.

The thesis that describes conditions we must satisfy in order to speak of epistemically justified belief is evidentialism (Conee and Feldman 2004; McCain 2018). Evidentialism assumes that epistemic justification for a belief is determined by the quality of the evidence a person has for the belief. Traditionally, it has been understood as the thesis that a belief is justified just in case it is sufficiently supported by evidence. Moreover, in many cases, it implies a theory of assessing epistemic agents in terms of justified beliefs or attitudes. An evidentialist theory of epistemic assessment asks what an agent must do or believe in the circumstances he is in. An evidentialist answer to this question allows only one sort of belief to be epistemically justified, namely belief which is supported by the evidence the agent has available (Conee and Feldman 2004). There are three separate, but related reasons for thinking that an evidentialist theory of epistemic justification fits well into our account of epistemic styles.

First, evidentialism may seem an attractive option, because an evidentialist would claim that the notion of justification turns entirely on evidence, and that all cases of justified belief must be supported by adequate evidence (Conee and

Feldman 2004, p. 83). Recalling the sceptical worries coming from the lack of psychological certainty, evidentialists often begin by pointing out that under normal circumstances, sources of our basic perceptual beliefs are sufficiently supported by evidence to count as epistemically justified. Moreover, most cases where epistemic preferences enter the mix will involve beliefs and attitudes that are similarly well-supported (Titelbaum and Kopec forthcoming, p. 18; White 2014). Therefore, we shouldn't worry too much about whether to trust perceptual beliefs or not and, since even some of these beliefs arise due to preference settings, we shouldn't think epistemic styles generally lead our beliefs astray. The other two reasons why evidentialism is attractive have to do with the fact that since only evidence justifies belief there are two cases where evidence *necessitates* an attitude other than belief. For one, there are particular propositions belief in which is never justified, and only being neutral is always necessarily justified. For example, there is unlikely to be any evidence that would justify the belief that an odd number of ducks exist right now in the world. Another attitude that is necessitated in some cases is justified disbelief. (Conee and Feldman 2004) use the example of the proposition "sugar is sour" to illustrate that there are cases in which, if we have any experiential evidence that bears on the proposition, we cannot but disbelieve.

However, there is a problem. Evidentialism may be correct in saying that the attitude we ought to have is the one our evidence supports, and in listing some neat examples. Moreover, epistemic styles may as well be the best way of describing why that is the case.[8] Still, parameters pull both ways. When considering whether to jump, Jerry had to do something epistemically bad and forego his evidence bearing on whether he is going to make it. I am not sure whether any proponent of strong evidentialism would say that Jerry has taken up the attitude he ought to have, at least not while citing *evidential* reasons for what one ought to believe. The problem is that I think Jerry did what was best for him overall, and he therefore did everything that he ought to have. Recall that before, when considering the fax checker or the pair of palaeoanthropologists, we were not as divided. There,

[8]It is quite hard to conceive an epistemic style an agent should possess to come to the attitude that p – sugar is sour – is true or that – the number of ducks in the universe is currently an even number. On the other hand, it is quite easy to come up with many epistemic styles an agent could possess in order to disbelieve the former and remain neutral on the latter.

we were all quite happy thinking they both simply did what they ought to. What I think happened here is that something similar to the tension between mistaken and faultless disagreement sways the intuition towards the idea that when any two thinkers diverge in their beliefs, it is always because either one or both lack sufficient justification.

From now on, a lot of what I say presupposes that this is not the case. In at least some instances where agents interact with evidence, disagreement occurs without any warrant for introducing a necessary connection between the elements of justification (pieces of evidence) and the normative status of the two or more diverging (jointly inconsistent) beliefs. Something akin to this strong connection is the idea behind so-called Evidential Supervenience views (Conee and Feldman 2004; Titelbaum and Kopec forthcoming; Littlejohn 2012). Recall from the introduction that evidentialists often talk of evidence wholly determining whether a belief is *sufficiently* justified or not. The strength of this idea varies with how much faith we place in the notion of supervenience. If justification supervenes on the evidence two or more agents have, then it could not happen that there is no difference in evidence, while there exists as obvious of a difference in attitudes as belief in contradictory hypotheses. As strong a formulation as this cannot be made consistent with talk of epistemic preferences, parameters or styles. Think again of flipping a fair coin and your friend forming a belief about the outcome. The notion of evidential supervenience is the strongest in cases like this because it is clear to us what a rational agent ought to believe and that all of your rational friends should believe the same.

If you find the setup of a fair coin flip to be a convincing example of how we go about forming most of our opinions and attitudes, then you may also entertain the idea that two agents who share the same evidence, may never hold different attitudes. This idea motivates the so-called Uniqueness principle, which claims that given a body of evidence, there is at most one *unique* attitude that any agent with the same evidence is rationally permitted to take up (White 2005; White 2014; Feldman 2000; Titelbaum and Kopec forthcoming). Many philosophers take Uniqueness to follow naturally from strong Supervenience[9], and find equal concern

[9]See (Conee and Feldman 2004; Ballantyne and Coffman 2011; Littlejohn 2012; Titelbaum

in the tension it generates with at least some instances of disagreement. Uniqueness singles out a privileged standard of evidential support and is often read as arguing that there is only one way for a belief to gain positive epistemic status. Long story short, beginning with the cases presented in the following section we will be on the lookout for a general approach to denying the idea that it is always the case that two arbitrary agents with the same total evidence will have enough support to have the same attitude. If we suppose our thinkers share the same evidence, like our palaeoanthropologists, then one side has justification to believe something the other one has justification not to believe.

Before moving on to better, more general reasons why you should deny Uniqueness and other equally *strong* forms of evidentialism, it pays to begin with a relatively cheap and easy one. No formulation of Uniqueness (or evidentialism) mentions anything like epistemic parameters or styles, so we can exploit a well-known ambiguity in the principle (Meacham 2013; White 2014; Kelly 2014; Titelbaum and Kopec forthcoming) to argue against it. There are two general ways of parsing[10] the idea behind Uniqueness:

> **(Inter-personal Uniqueness)** For *any body of evidence*, there is a single way that rationality requires all agents to respond to that evidence. (White 2005; White 2014)

> **(Intra-personal Uniqueness)** For *any particular agent*, there is a way rationality requires them to respond to any particular package of evidence. (Kelly 2014)

The latter reading doesn't seem all that different from saying that given any particular thinker (of which we can freely assume some epistemic style) and some body of evidence, there is at most one way of rationally interacting with that evidence. Perhaps this is not in tension with saying there are such things as epistemic parameter settings. If you take up any style, some proposition about the

and Kopec forthcoming; Kopec and Titelbaum 2016; Schoenfield 2014)

[10]For accounts connecting the ambiguous nature of evidential support to the parsing problem associated with Uniqueness principles; see (Kelly 2014; Schoenfield 2014; Titelbaum and Kopec forthcoming; Daoust 2021; Jackson and LaFore 2024)

evidence will likely be justified for you; and should that be a proposition different from some other thinker with the same evidence, then we are still permitted to say different style has made it so. On the other hand, the former reading permits no such thing because it makes a claim that is supposed to hold entirely independently of any difference in epistemic parameters we may want to assume. That is because inter-personal Uniqueness makes a universal claim about the nature of evidential support, and says that there is only one attitude which any agent (irrespective of their preference) ought to take up with respect to a given package of evidence.

As stated before, (strong) evidentialism allows, for any particular proposition, only one sort of attitude to be justified, namely that which supervenes on (is *strongly* supported by) total available evidence. If we want to use epistemic styles to understand why different people interact with evidence in different ways, which we do, we are faced with a conundrum. It cannot be consistent with our assumption that there is a subjective and relative part of epistemic preferences, to hold that justification strongly supervenes on evidence. The strength of supervenience is most obvious in the implication of the Uniqueness principle. Moreover, even if we do not disagree with the takeaways of the latter reading, the former principle entails the latter, and we certainly ought to deny the former, i.e. stronger principle. That is because we are already committed to the idea that evidence only supports an attitude given the agent takes the right epistemic style. Then we cannot say both that any two rational agents can take up different sets of preferences with respect to the same total evidence, and also that these very agents are always rationally permitted to take up at most one and exactly the same attitude.

1.4 Commitments to (epistemic) styles

Consider the case of "Judge Judy" (Pritchard 2018):

> Judy is an experienced judge in a criminal court with an immaculate track record. She is currently deliberating based on the evidence presented to her and intends to decide whether the defendant is guilty of the alleged crime. If Judy is a good judge, and I see no reason for thinking she isn't, she will do her best to make sure her epistemic pa-

> rameters are set in a way that befits a judge. For example, her trust in a coin toss to decide who is guilty must be extremely low, and her willingness to weigh alternative explanations of the evidence very high, etc. Moreover, we may also require Judy, and in fact, all judges, to take up the particular style of a 'rational judge'. One that requires a very precise realisation of epistemic parameters, such that this setting alone guarantees that the style is rational and unless parameters are set in this way, we cannot really speak of that style.

The idea behind the epistemic style of a rational judge is a kind of uniqueness disguised as a principle of judicial fairness. Given any total body of evidence bearing on the defendant's guilt, there is a single way fairness and justice require all rational judges to respond to that evidence (Kopec and Titelbaum 2016, p. 194; White 2005, p. 447). If one says guilty, and the other not guilty, one of the verdicts is flawed. However, there is some reason to think that Judy can be a rational judge, yet sometimes interact with evidence so that she is permitted to believe something that other rational judges may not be permitted to believe. Consider which epistemic status you would ascribe to Judy's attitudes, should the following fictional scenario play out:

> Suppose that a top-secret international league of rational judges is in dire need of a new President, and they have been eyeing Judy as a possible recruit for several years and know that her track record has been meticulous. However, the current President is somewhat of a sceptic and wants to be absolutely sure that Judy's verdicts sufficiently match his own, before retiring and giving Judy such an honourable and powerful title. He instructs his assistants to visit Judy, explain to her the requirements of the job, and ask her to implant a chip that would transmit all the evidence Judy has to the twin chip in the President. This way, the President can make up his own mind, given all the same evidence and check whether Judy is a good candidate to take over his job. The next morning, Judy went off to work as usual keeping the stakes of her task in mind.

What can we predict about the way Judy and the President will make their judgements, given they will both share the same evidence? For one, both of them ought to reason very carefully. For example, rational judges are commended for their clear-headed and conscientious reasoning when forming a judgement in light of the evidence. If we can in any case be certain that some toxic parameter settings have entered the picture, such as blind trust, racial prejudice or lack of will, we may rightfully say that such a judge is irrational or that she is not a 'rational judge' at all (Pritchard 2018, p. 41). Since a lot is at stake, for Judy and the President alike, both ought to do their best not to let the latter happen and reason conscientiously. However, there is a problem. Although both of them recognize the importance of justice in the legal setting, and the wrong that would occur should a person be wrongly convicted, their stakes are still different. A scenario could occur, where Judy may be compelled to interact with the same evidence in a different light than she would in a courtroom.

> Judy is returning home after a long day, she enters her living room and finds her son, husband, and their dog standing in a circle around the remains of a broken vase. Who is guilty of this? she asks, only to find no one is ready to admit, and everyone has an excuse. The husband claims he just got here, the son claims the dog did it, and the dog stays silent. If we assume that Judy knows the vase was just an ordinary vase, and that indeed one of the three is solely responsible for the vase breaking, then Judy is in a dilemma. On the one hand, she knows full well anyone could have done it. Moreover, given the circumstances of her task, she has all the reason to interact with the evidence in a way a rational judge would because she knows the president will reason in exactly that way. And she doesn't want to risk the wrong verdict sabotaging her track record with the league. Judy is permitted to believe that one of the suspects is guilty, and she could do the necessary fact finding to single out the culprit.

The only way Judy can ensure a match with the President is to give the evidence a treatment in the epistemic style of a rational judge. Judy knows that all of her evidence is being transmitted and that the president is probably just about to

make a verdict. So naturally, it would only be rational for Judy to figure out who the culprit is and do so justly and fairly. The problem is with the intuition which says that Judy has equal if not *weightier* reasons not to believe the very same thing the president will eventually believe. The core of the matter is that among the things which may affect how Judy should interact with evidence and whether her belief is epistemically problematic, there are ample considerations to be made about the relationships Judy has with the three suspects. Relationships which, besides being something the chip does not transmit, change the stakes in answering the question of whether a belief that one of them is guilty is justified or good to have from an *epistemic* point of view.

> Judy is in a dilemma, and it is just a matter of time before the league notices something is off. Judy stands to gain a lot in either case, but she can only have one attitude. She has two options available. Given the benefits she stands to gain, and given her track record of good verdicts, she is surely permitted to interact with the evidence so that she believes it was her son (supposing that's what the evidence actually best explains and that the President thinks so as well) who broke the vase. But there are other benefits she gains by not accusing her son too hastily and potentially prosecuting her family members. Assuming they compare to the benefits of the first option, she is also permitted another attitude, namely to believe her son did not break the vase. If this kind of situation is plausible, it appears Judy is permitted a doxastic option the President does not have.

Perhaps the right way of thinking about the role epistemic styles play in determining which attitude any given body of evidence supports must include the idea that this support itself is permissive. Namely it allows for multiple, possibly diverging, attitudes to be supported by the evidence given some subject-relative factors. For one, insofar as two arbitrary agents interact with the same evidence, it is not impossible for the evidence to support different attitudes about the very same proposition. That is because evidence only supports a proposition given the agent has an epistemic parameter setting that makes this so. Furthermore, I assume two things true: that every person has some epistemic style, and that

any two given persons possibly have different epistemic styles.[11] Therefore, if our arbitrary agents do their best attempting a consensus, yet they still hold diverging views, then it is possible that neither of them is irrational.

Some epistemologists with stakes in the debate agree that if you find cases like this plausible, then you already have some motivation to deny the stronger Uniqueness principle (Kelly 2014; Kopec and Titelbaum 2016; Schoenfield 2014). Some also find occasion to extend the ambiguity in its scope in order to develop a nuanced view of permissive evidential support (Daoust 2021; Jackson and LaFore 2024). One way of going about this is to mirror the original parsing problem. Since permissivism is simply the denial of Uniqueness, and there are two ways of reading the latter, we get the following principles:

> **(Inter-personal permissivism)** Two arbitrary rational agents who share the same evidence may hold incompatible attitudes towards p. For example, A could be rationally permitted to believe p and B could be rationally permitted to believe not-p. (Daoust 2021)

> **(Intra-personal permissivism)** Relative to a body of evidence, one rational agent is permitted to take distinct incompatible attitudes towards p. For example, A could be rationally permitted to believe p and rationally permitted to believe not-p. (Daoust 2021)

One of the reasons for objecting to Uniqueness is that it does not mention epistemic styles. I take this objection to imply that the background assumptions of Uniqueness principles do not include enough of the idea that evidential support has subjective and relative elements. This is not a very good objection. For one, it does not take seriously the reasons there are in favour of at least the weaker Uniqueness principle which actually makes a claim independent of any stylistic concerns. In other words, it could be the case that any agent, even if we do not know what kind of style they currently have, only has one rational doxastic option available (Kelly 2014; Meacham 2013). Moreover, there is no reason to think that this particular feature of intra-personal Uniqueness did not develop owing to the subjective part of the support evidence offers (Schoenfield 2014). We should

[11] See section 1.1 above.

say more about all the possible ways of coming to terms with Uniqueness or permissivism as a potential answer to the nature of evidential support debate. The options are obvious and few: i. accept both inter and intra-personal Uniqueness, i.e. deny permissivism, ii. deny both inter and intra-personal Uniqueness, i.e. accept permissivism, iii. accept inter-personal permissivism, and deny intra-personal permissivism, iv. accept intra-personal permissivism, and deny inter-personal permissivism.

Both permissivism and Uniqueness describe views which express a pattern of relationships between justification, rationality or reasonableness, and evidence (Feldman 2007; White 2005; White 2014; Meacham 2013). Moreover, both sets of principles commit us to a particular view of evidential support, i.e. how evidence relates to justification, that is at least partly in tension with the other principles (Ballantyne and Coffman 2011). I am concerned here with the kind of compromise we can make between these positions if we assume that there are subjective elements to evidential support relations and that all agents have some elements others possibly lack. I will say more on this question in the following chapter, but for now, I want to point out a couple of interesting things about the four possible combinations.

> The first option is simply *Uniqueness*, i.e. denial of both permissive principles. This view is well-known and argued for throughout literature on the nature of evidential support (White 2005; White 2014; Horowitz 2017), and the epistemology of disagreement (Feldman 2007; Greco and Hedden 2016; Dogramaci and Horowitz 2016). The kind of argument against Uniqueness that is particularly interesting for our purposes here, proceeds on the assumption that different epistemic agents assign different weights to evidence owing to a kind of subjective epistemic/evidential standard (Goldman 2010; Meacham 2013; Titelbaum and Kopec forthcoming). Insofar as there are reasons to doubt that standards, parameters or preferences influence which attitude the evidence supports, this option is a serious contender.
>
> The second option is plain *permissivism*. It is a thesis about the nature of evidential support, which extends beyond discussions of ev-

idence, namely to claims about epistemic rationality (Daoust 2021; Titelbaum and Kopec forthcoming; Kelly 2014). Arguments in favour of permissivism are becoming increasingly diverse, and the kind I find particularly interesting boils down to providing good counterexamples to Uniqueness. For one, examples of disagreement about whether rock climbing is fun, disagreeing scientists, fleeing Jerry, and Judge Judy, provide us with a sort of permissive case basis which entails that epistemic rationality permits a range of possible doxastic attitudes (Ballantyne and Coffman 2011; White 2005, p. 447) on the same evidence. Permissivism is a serious contender too.

Standards permissivism is a kind of middle ground. It is always a categorical denial of inter-personal Uniqueness. Almost everyone who endorses evidential standards, prior probability functions, and perhaps even epistemic parameter settings falls on this side of the camp (Schoenfield 2014). It differs from the second option only in the status of the intra-personal reading, which is either to straight up accept intra-personal Uniqueness or to stay silent on whether any intra-personal reading of permissivism holds. Insofar as you have some reasons to doubt that the second permissive principle is correct, this option will be of interest to you.

The last option is problematically inconsistent. If a situation was possible where a single rational agent is permitted to take incompatible attitudes towards p, yet two arbitrary agents who share the same evidence are never permitted to hold incompatible attitudes, it would be a strange situation indeed. Every view on which intra-personal permissivism is true is also a view on which inter-personal permissivism is true. For this reason and for want of a better understanding of both views, a combination of intra-personal permissivism and inter-personal Uniqueness seems trivially false. (Daoust 2021; Meacham 2013; Kelly 2014)

As this list shows, we should allow for only three possible combinations. Moreover, if plain or standards permissivism ultimately prove correct, this is good news

for us because it shows that we're on the right track when we say there is a subjective and relative part to judging what the evidence supports. If both Uniqueness principles are correct, it does not matter whether or not there is such a part, because evidence would always support at most one, uniquely rational, doxastic option. How does this help us work around the host of issues surrounding cases where agents may be permitted to hold incompatible attitudes on the same evidence? In the following chapter, I discuss one way of arguing against Uniqueness that seems to generate disagreement among permissivists. Both sides of the permissivist camp agree that there are differences among epistemic agents which make it so that they are permitted different attitudes on the same evidence. However, the options come apart when it comes to saying whether the same evidence possibly permits different attitudes for the same agent. I mentioned that proponents of permissivism often propose counter-examples to Uniqueness (Greco and Hedden 2016; Titelbaum and Kopec forthcoming). What is interesting for my project here is that these counter-examples come in two flavours. The first aims to establish a denial of Uniqueness in general, whereas the second restricts the kind of cases offered to instances where intra-personal Uniqueness still holds.

If we assume that the cases pictured above explain something about the concept of an epistemic style, then it is the fact that people can vary in their interactions with evidence that we should focus on. Jerry jumped over the gap, but he could have easily decided not to risk it. In the same spirit, Judy could have been a bad judge and arrive at any number of her verdicts in some unreasonable way. Likewise, Judy the 'rational judge' could have been a bad mother and subjected her family to unnecessary judicial rigour. Is there anything concrete we are getting at when we say these characters were permitted to do and believe as they did? If we can assess all of these cases by pointing out that some interaction with evidence has gone a certain way, then we can use styles to aid this assessment. However, when attempting to show that epistemic styles make it so that all of us are sometimes permitted divergent doxastic options, a case could also be made for why epistemic styles always uniquely determine which attitude on evidence a single agent has. So what should we make of our options if our intuitions about cases tend to pull one way, and the lessons of the principles we commit ourselves to, the other way?

Chapter 2

Stylistic epistemic permissivism

2.1 Epistemic styles are permissive

Many of the notions we use to describe and explain things are controversial, and at best contestable. Ideas like *second nature*, *intelligence*, and *free will* tread a fine line between scientific and folk concepts. Some of these concepts are contestable because they are too mundane to withstand scrutiny, others are contestable because they are too technical, and some merely drop out of favour in other more or less interesting ways. The concept of style seems to have fallen out of favour in philosophy, and it is unclear what the reasons were. The definition of epistemic styles (Flores 2021) accounts for the assumption that they modify our interactions with evidence and that these interactions express unified ways of setting one's epistemic parameters. There is another side of the story that this definition does not make explicit, namely what must happen in the agent in order to say that she has taken up an epistemic style. Surely it is not enough to simply have some relevant parameters or engage in the right sort of interactions with evidence. Much more could be expressed in terms of style if we had a way to understand why people are inclined to some rather than other styles.

When epistemologists speak of evidential standards, 'priors', preferences or biases, they aim to capture something important about what I broadly call here the style of an epistemic agent.[1] Moreover, when it comes to questions about taking up

[1]Conceived as capacities to engage with evidence in stylised ways, epistemic parameters seem to fit a characterization in terms of dispositions. As Flores suggests, styles are ways of doing things, and taking up a style is a matter of having the dispositions to do things in those ways (Flores 2021, p. 8). In this sense, style really does seem to be about our individual dispositions, such that when someone does something in a particular style it must have been a disposition which led them to do it in that way. Moreover, there are good reasons to think the concept of

epistemic styles and criticizing agents for their style, we seem to run into worries already familiar to those who endorse standards, dispositions, or epistemic preferences. The First of these worries comes from the lack of a rigorous dispositional account of epistemic styles. Such an account would entail a substantial commitment to much broader philosophical theories. Although it is generally important to know whether it makes sense to speak of dispositions in explaining concurrence of mental happenings and actions, we are not forced to go all the way. Going all the way requires a lot of manoeuvring around often controversial views. For one, if you endorse a dispositional account of belief (Schoenfield 2014) or believing, having a style may really only require particular dispositions to interact with evidence in a particular way (Flores 2021, pp. 7, 16). However, what if you do not endorse a comprehensive view of what dispositions are, and how they exhaust the domain of our behaviour, and also beliefs; should you still say that taking up a style (acquiring a preference or a standard) is a matter of having the dispositions that *constitute* (Flores 2021, p. 8) that epistemic style (way of interacting with evidence)?[2]

Recall that we commend judges when they make conscientious and just ver-

style has been understood in terms of dispositions for a very long time, only under the guise of broader behavioural characteristics like manner, form, custom or habit (Ryle 1949, chapter 2). In any case, philosophers have moved on to speak of style in terms of other 'state of the art' concepts, like dispositions.

[2]As it turns out, those who ask similar questions often agree that these worries crystallize once we pay closer attention to our listed options for the preferred view of evidential support and epistemic rationality. One of the three options is probably correct, and I have given a few examples that should already sway you away from Uniqueness. As it turns out, talk of dispositions, standards and other stand-ins for what I prefer to call stylistic factors looms large among proponents of standards permissivism. Since the kind of argument against Uniqueness that this option relies on fits nicely with the way in which the issue of evidential support was raised above, we should give it more attention than the first two options. Below, I ask why some permissivists prefer standards permissivism over plain permissivism, and opt for the denial of intra-personal Uniqueness. I then take issue with this approach because it may make it seem as if talk of epistemic styles is just another way to support the trade-off between intra-personal Uniqueness and inter-personal Permissivism. Ultimately, what makes the difference in choosing either option is the ready availability of ways to dispel the worries which lead others away from option plain permissivism.

dicts, and flipping a coin, for example, is definitely not a good way to decide whether a suspect is guilty. One worry that permissivists face is with their opponents (uniquers) interpreting permissive cases as saying that the agents' reasons to prefer any of the options are about as good as if they were to flip a coin. On their reading, as soon as Judy realizes that both believing p and disbelieving p are rational for her, if she were to continue holding either, she would in effect be flipping a coin (White 2005).[3]. Therefore, either none of the options are permitted, or only one of them is uniquely so. White holds something along the lines of that it is indeed our psychological compulsion towards what we take to be a rational attitude which makes permissive situations seem strange. If we were to take two or more attitudes to be rational, this compulsion would divide itself arbitrarily or what's worse, randomly across candidate permissive options. Arbitrariness puzzles many[4], but what seems to ground a combined dialectical picture is the intent to solve the puzzle.

Two strategies stick out: a. find a way to convince uniquers that there is nothing arbitrary about having a certain preference or disposition that another agent lacks, and b. find a way to convince the uniquer that having an arbitrary set of options is not the same as having a random option, thus even if randomness is worrying, arbitrariness is less so. The first strategy is more popular with those who already find something about our formulation of permissivism strange. I understand proponents of standards permissivism as often engaging in type a. strategizing, namely they motivate the view that taking up dispositions to interact with evidence in a subject specific way is not arbitrary. Moreover, I tentatively propose that this way of going about it makes it seem as if permissivists cannot escape Uniqueness. Permissivism is the denial of the idea that for all bodies of evidence, there is a single way that rationality requires all agents to respond (White

[3]The other option is that Judy does not know she is in a permissive case, i.e. she is not aware that believing not-p is also permitted for her. White rightly points out that this option, if it is a kind of permissivism, is self-undermining. For then, in any number of cases, White claims, one would either have to go with an arbitrarily compelling permitted option or not know that other options are available, i.e. that she was in a permissive case (White 2005, pp. 450–454)

[4]For example, see (White 2005; Feldman 2007; Kelly 2014; Schoenfield 2014; Meacham 2021; Dandelet 2023).

2005). This view is enticing because it explains the nature of evidential support given the assumption that different epistemic agents interact with evidence in different ways. Moreover, given a particular way of understanding these differences, i.e. epistemic parameter settings, we can find good motivations for permissivism.

For example, (Schoenfield 2014; Kelly 2014; Meacham 2021; Rosen 2001) propose views akin to standards permissivism. They deny the idea that for all bodies of evidence, there is at most one rational attitude, but take different stances regarding the idea that a single agent is permitted more than one doxastic option on a single body of evidence. Many of them also take issue with worries related to arbitrariness, implied in the latter idea, as good reasons to think the intra-personal reading of Uniqueness is right. What is interesting for stylistic views, is that all of these authors endorse something akin to dispositions to interact with evidence. While this allows things like rules about belief formation, schemes of the form "given evidence (E), believe p", and prior probability functions (Schoenfield 2014; Meacham 2013) to vary between any number of given agents; their views about the options as a single agent sees them are more determined. When we speak of epistemic styles we want to take stock of all those things and more, yet in a sense, we are speaking past each other. It is one thing to claim permissive cases show that different agents may feel rationally compelled to different attitudes because some personal standard made it so. It is a whole other question whether these personal standards compel us in such a way that no other option is as rational or reasonable.

Standards permissivism can be hashed out in three claims which those in favour of type a. strategizing about arbitrariness would likely propose (Dandelet 2023; Schoenfield 2014; Kelly 2014, cf.). Their reasons for avoiding arbitrariness have a lot to do with the worry that it implies randomness, and a random process can be neither reliable, nor reasonable. The use of *standards* allows them to say that when Judy comes to hold a doxastic attitude that is different from the President, there is nothing arbitrary about it. The good news is, this implies that a kind of permissivism is true. The bad news is that it's the kind that is too friendly with uniquers' views. What kind of claims do they make?

1 Some bodies of evidence [possibly even the one that Judy has] are such that:

   1.1 If she were to take a standard S, it would recommend D

   1.2 If she were to take a standard S*, it would recommend D*

   1.3 Both S and S* are reasonable, yet D and D* cannot both be true

2 An epistemic standard that recommends incompatible doxastic attitudes on the same evidence is not reasonable.

3 A person is permitted to hold an attitude D about p just in case she feels compelled to D given her epistemic standard S, and her epistemic standard S is reasonable. (Dandelet 2023)

(1) is simply a denial of the original Uniqueness thesis we saw above (White 2005) and if we want to say that at least some permissive cases are possible we should endorse it too. However, the other two claims are less about the possibility of inter-personally permissive cases and more about arbitrariness-related worries. They jointly imply that the intra-personal reading of permissivism is false (Dandelet 2023, p. 111). I also take them to explain what is at stake in trading off intra-personal Uniqueness for inter-personal permissivism. If permissivism is motivated by supposing there are such things as standards which compel agents to a particular doxastic position, then these standards better not be arbitrary. A standard would be arbitrary if it were to do just what the second claim holds to be unreasonable. This commits uniquers to holding that a single (reasonable) agent is never permitted an option of two incompatible attitudes; because if they were, it would have to arise out of the same standard, and no contradicting standard is reasonable.

The second claim holds if there is no reasonable arbitrariness when it comes to doxastic states supported by evidence. This should be read as a condition stating what a good standard is like, rather than whether it is a good standard to take up. This other condition is the idea behind the final claim. A good epistemic standard for interacting with evidence is not random, namely, it never recommends an option with the likelihood of a reasonable outcome approximating a coin flip. Therefore,

when two equally rational agents take up different standards, there must be something about them which determinedly compels them to hold whichever attitude is the better option for them. What is peculiar to this way of going about things is that the last two conditions determine when an epistemic standard is rational. That is, just when the agent is compelled to what the standard recommends and the recommendation is *uniquely* compatible with the evidence. Intra-personal uniqueness, the idea that a single agent is determinedly compelled by her own standard, holds for what was defined above as a reasonable epistemic standard. One reason why this should turn us away from standards permissivism is that it leads to an unsatisfactory diagnosis in some permissive cases.

Recall that the first way to strategize about answering the puzzle relies on the idea that arbitrariness invites unwarranted randomness into the epistemic mix, and this randomness may infect our beliefs with a kind of unreasonableness. The prime example of unreasonableness would be a standard that warrants incompatible attitudes on the same evidence, for the same person (Schoenfield 2014, p. 200). A reasonable standard is one that never recommends more than one option because it will never recommend an arbitrary choice as reasonable. Given this way of going about it, what we should say about Judy is that she is actually in a kind of forced choice position whichever way she goes.[5] We assume that Judy is in an inter-personally permissive case and that once she realizes that there are two options on the table, in this case, belief and disbelief that her son broke the vase, she is considering an option that is not available to the President. If you choose to describe what causes this difference in terms of epistemic standards such as rules about belief formation, probability scores, or evidential thresholds, there are two ways of going about it. You may say that Judy is in a situation where there are actually two standards at play, and the good news for us is that neither is random.

[5]Before diagnosing Judy's situation I should say that given her obviously over-engineered predicament, her case is far from mundane. Namely, I have assumed that, as soon as she was made aware of how the chip works, she took herself to be disincentivised from suspending judgement, unless she was absolutely certain the President would suspend too. She also possibly took herself to be incentivised to be cautious, so that she minimizes the chance of a mistake. One thing Judy may or may not take herself to be prima facie incentivised for, is the care and concern for the emotional relationship she has with her family, but I assume she does nonetheless.

This means that Judy's indecisiveness comes from her weighing what she takes to be the benefit of going with either attitude against the disadvantage of spoiling her track record. In other words, she is choosing which standard to go with.

However, this is not the kind of permissive dilemma I take Judy to be in. This way of approaching the issue of whether Judy's decision is reasonable relies too heavily on Uniqueness about single agent's interactions with evidence. The only way for intra-personal permissivism to come out on top is to either warrant random changes in what is rational for one to believe, or to invite changes in the agent's evidence. Type b. strategizing comes up with a way to answer the original puzzle by denying that arbitrariness is too much of a problem.[6] It is surely a problem if our cognitive carpentry really works by decision mechanisms no more reliable than a coin flip, but the kind of arbitrariness that determines how we interact with evidence is far from random. It seems the options are that our interactions with evidence are either arbitrary in a problematic way or determinedly unique, from the perspective of a single agent. The way out of this puzzle is to say that intra-personally permissive cases are possible, and that some of these cases point toward a particular kind of choice. A choice between an attitude recommended by the demands of rationality, and a kind of attitude where more than one option *seems* reasonable or at least permitted (Jackson and LaFore 2024). We can call an optimal option the one that is recommended by the evidence, and a supererogatory option the one that is better than the optimal but not required. Moreover, the

[6]To say a bit more about why this terminates the arbitrariness worry I will note that something like the reasoning room example in (Titelbaum and Kopec 2019) illustrates nicely what the strategy says (ibid fn. 28). Suppose there are one hundred independent research institutions working around the globe on an important issue like climate change. Suppose further that each institution takes up an aggregated epistemic standard different from the others. In time, their results may disagree even though they are working with more or less the same evidence; but their reliability seldom varies owing to this fact. In fact, each standard is possibly just as reliable as any other rational standard. Admittedly, the authors conclude on a note more conducive to intra-personal uniqueness (ibid pp. 23-24), because they hold that merely taking up any of these standards will make at most one attitude compelling for that agent. Nevertheless, their example goes in favour of our view that a choice of any such standard is far from random, because it is always compelling; but not too far from arbitrary, given there are one hundred equally rational candidate options.

presence of both options is sensitive to subject-relative factors, because it does not always hold that for different agents the same option will be both permitted and better than the optimal, while neither is uniquely required nor forbidden.

Intra-personal permissivism says that sometimes more than one doxastic option is available for a single agent given a single body of evidence. The second option is then to go with the other strategy. This implies that Judy's epistemic situation changes once she has a kind of primed insight into what the evidence supports, only not because she switched standards. Here I follow (Jackson 2021; McElwee 2017; Li 2019) and rely on the doxastic counterpart of morally supererogatory acts.[7] If the attitudes we take up on evidence stand for actions we feel morally compelled to, then Judy's belief that her son did not break the vase is good, but not required by the demands of rationality, i.e. in this case the standards of rational judges. Similar to how having a sudden moral insight may compel you to donate more than you can make without, Judy's compassionate insight compelled her to disbelieve p, that her son was "guilty". Supererogatory doxastic attitudes are good to take up given the evidence, yet they are not rationally required in the same way that believing 1+1=2 or suspending on a coin flip is required. In the next section, I show how considerations of epistemically supererogatory doxastic options (Li 2018; McElwee 2017) enter into arguments for permissivism (Jackson 2021), and how this strategy coheres with taking up different epistemic parameter settings.

2.2 Epistemic styles as *Jamesian* parameter settings

We should say a bit more about what our permitted doxastic options can be like if we allow supererogatory attitudes into the epistemic mix. A supererogatory

[7] I do not take supererogatory doxastic options to be analogous to a choice between supererogatory actions (see section 2.3 below). Theories of supererogatory epistemic actions are separate from supererogatory epistemic attitudes. The former often see the agent as undergoing a change of evidence, for example, by checking your PIN code before withdrawing money from an ATM, or insisting on reading an extra article or doing your own research; whereas with the latter we may continue talking about evidence in a static register (Hedberg 2014; McElwee 2017). (McElwee 2017; Hedberg 2014) have an account of supererogatory epistemic actions, whereas (Jackson 2021; Li 2019; Li 2018) focus either on attitudes alone or distinguish between them in theory.

option is just a choice between two permitted attitudes, where one is obviously better than the other, yet neither is explicitly required nor forbidden (Li 2018; McElwee 2017). Otherwise, options can appear to us as equally good or tied, and they may also fail to compare, meaning that neither can be recommended as better or equal to the other. One of the benefits we get by talking about epistemic styles is that we can describe why different people see the same evidence in different lights and may be compelled to endorse different hypotheses. How the evidence appears to an agent is not something we can fully understand by looking at the evidence alone. What is not as obvious is that we can understand anything at all about what ultimately causes different agents to see the same things differently. Here I pay more attention the role of supererogatory doxastic options in our ways of thinking about epistemic situations where two options are equally epistemically rational. The advantage of the following approach is that it does not rely on the idea that withholding belief is the most rational, or even a good option in these situations. The reasons for this have a lot to do with the fact that we positively evaluate supererogatory belief.

The upshot of the approach is not that supererogatory options are somehow similar to equally good, or tied options. The former are by definition better than any other option. However, there is an interesting way to think about supererogatory options that takes into account the agent's psychological constitution. The common sense view of ties is that withholding belief is the best option for rational agents. The motivation for this comes from arbitrariness because, if standards are tied, an agent can rationally move back and forth or *toggle* between them; which actually turns out to be irrational (because it is inconsistent). Here, I try to make sense of what it would take to say that epistemic styles make it so that an agent is permitted to break a tie or weigh one side more heavily. Analogously to supererogatory doxastic options, I show why being partial to one over other equally good options sometimes is a good way to form an attitude.

In the previous chapter, I mentioned some ideas about why people vary in their interactions with evidence that are too liable to common sceptical objections. The objections often champion reasons to doubt that psychological profiles and epistemic parameter settings have a place in epistemology without any empirical

work backing it up. What makes naïve views about style particularly susceptible to these doubts is that they present stylistic variation as two dimensional.[8] The first dimension accounts for similar agents who disagree because they have different evidence. The second says that different preferences may cause different agents to disagree, even if they share the same evidence. In this section, I ask what it would take to say that if we fix the agent and the evidence, these subjective profiles will affect how the agent sees her epistemic position. This can be a misleading question. It fronts the same kind of thinking as the first two dimensions, that is investigation into the descriptive sense of style.

Instead, the question aims at a way of talking about the relationship between *seeing* one's epistemic position a certain way, and the idea that our preferences affect what we take our epistemic duties to recommend given the evidence. Epistemic duties are not explicitly concerned with all the ways in which people can vary in their interactions with evidence. Duties only really enter the picture once there is talk of some attitude being obligatory or required given some set of background factors. For example, if the kind of attitude Judy is compelled to is neither forbidden nor required, it is unclear how it compares to other options that are normatively straightforward. A normatively straightforward option is either explicitly forbidden or required, or it is permitted but comparable in some way to other permitted options. On the flip side, there are options which are simply undecidable and therefore never straightforward. The undecidable options that should be of interest to permissivists are the ones where a choice is not straightforward because there is either equal and balanced evidence for the candidate attitudes, or there is some favourable evidence but it seems to the agent insufficient at the moment. One reason why more permissivists should think about undecidable and supererogatory doxastic options is that they can be made into a puzzle for uniquers who hold that given any body of evidence, every rational agent will have at most one compelling option.

The earliest example of a similar idea is William James' account of the *Will*

[8]The first dimension assumes that similar preferences cause agents to have similar attitudes on similar evidence, or that an agent doesn't stray too far from her preference as she interacts with evidence. The second dimension says that different agents may have different preferences, and take up different attitudes on the same evidence (see section 1.2 above).

to believe doctrine (James 1896; Aikin 2014). Despite often sharing a similar pragmatist emphasis on the role of belief in daily life, James disagreed with many of the universal norms governing responsible belief that his contemporaries proposed. Epistemic duties of the form "it is always wrong to believe on insufficient evidence" endorsed by (Clifford 1887) and other evidentialists seemed to James obviously false, similar to how Uniqueness does to permissivists nowadays. The Jamesian doctrine can be read out of this famous paragraph from (James 1896, p. 20):

> Our *passional nature* not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, "Do not decide, but leave the question open," is itself a *passional decision*—just like deciding yes or no — and it is attended with the same *risk of losing the truth.*

Often described as a kind of permissivism about epistemic values (Horowitz 2017), the view summarized above says that it cannot always be wrong to decide on insufficient evidence if the evidence sometimes supports more than one rational attitude for agents with different epistemic values. This is more or less in line with permissive options we saw before. However, talk of passional natures, passional decisions, and the risk of losing the truth is ambiguous and out of fashion. Some have recently taken up the task to see whether a part of this talk can be adapted into decision rules for agents who may be permitted some but not other options. And how good or bad these options generally get given different *passional natures* (Pettigrew 2016). The upshot is that we aren't explicitly obliged to discriminate between any precise values of epistemic parameters, evidential thresholds, standards etc. in order to compare how different epistemic styles cause agents to make varied *passional decisions*, i.e. choices of attitudes, prompted by evidence.

It turns out that if we allow ourselves some precision about what styles actually express, rather than using generic concepts like dispositions or profiles, we can understand what kind of recommendations different styles offer. That is, if we assume that there is a uniform goal, and a way to rank epistemic attitudes it is easier to see what effect different ways of seeing the goal may have on them. A Jamesian style is shorthand for talking about passional natures one can take with

respect to the uniform goal of our doxastic attitudes, namely true belief or disbelief. This is too restrictive because it goes against the variety of epistemic goals that are often related to having true beliefs, but also include things like jumping over buildings, coming up with a good hypothesis, making a just verdict, etc. On the other hand, the benefits of a unified goal come from having a more clear-cut way of weighing different styles. The following passage describes the main idea quite well:

> There are two ways of looking at our duty in the matter of opinion [...]. *We must know the truth*; *and we must avoid error* [...]. Believe truth! Shun error! – these, we see, are two materially different laws; and by choosing between them we may end colouring differently our whole intellectual life. (James 1896, section 7)

An example of one approach to weighing these two laws comes from (Pettigrew 2016). On this view, the epistemic status (i.e. rational or irrational, good or worse) of the attitude you end up with after interacting with evidence depends on how conducive the attitude is to obtaining epistemic utility. The notion of epistemic utility used here is quite rigid but since we already restricted our notion of what styles are when we assumed that they consist in *Jamesian* commitments this doesn't seem too strange either. Utility is then determined solely by the question of how accurate are the attitudes, and perhaps also by knowing something about how the agent sees the rewards of going with either *law*. I say more about this approach and how it fares with the puzzles troubling permissive views in the next section. For now, it helps to say more about how agents may take up different Jamesian styles and what effect they have on their interactions with evidence.

> Suppose Alice and Bob are expert palaeoanthropologists who, besides disagreeing about the status of rock climbing, disagree about the taxonomic status of bones of a small hominin found in a cave off the coast of Indonesia. We again assume that they have the same evidence, but also that they share similar competence attested to by their friendship and collaboration. Unbeknownst to them and luckily for us, their

> intellectual lives have been coloured by Jamesian styles, so that Alice passionately avoids error, and Bob passionately seeks truth. This difference between them has never been an explicit problem until now.

To give their predicament a more precise treatment we should take note of their attitudes. Let's say Bob thinks the hypothesis which claims p, that the fossils belong to an unknown species of small bodied humans, is the best explanation of the evidence. Alice disbelieves p, and ends up denying the hypothesis. I am not really interested in which evidence they have; so I will focus on how they use their individual belief policies to balance out Jamesian commitments to the accuracy of their beliefs. For the sake of the example, we can take Bob as a Jamesian model truth seeker, and Alice as a model falsity avoider. To note, we do not assume these are written in stone, it just so happens that in matters of their discipline, they weigh these duties in such a way. They are both equally reputable scientists who find themselves compelled to do different things with the evidence; they interpret it differently, set different wheels in motion, and have different ideas. All to the result that for Bob the evidence shows a sensational new discovery, whereas Alice sees just another footnote in the records.

There are two variables to consider; the weight of advantages linked to acquiring true beliefs, and the related benefit of avoiding false one. All Jamesian agents take up a style that amounts to having a set value of these variables. Following (Pettigrew 2016), we take the value an agent assigns to getting it right to be R, and W the value an agent assigns to (dis)advantages of getting it wrong. The former is most often a positive value, and the latter negative. Bob is an example of weighing R more heavily than W, and Alice is an example of the converse. They take up different jointly incompatible preferences regarding the two epistemic goals. We can read this as the idea behind our varied passional natures. Since Bob weighs R>W, he is compelled to believe the hypothesis because he sees the disadvantage of missing out on a true belief as greater than the converse disadvantage of believing some falsehoods. So he is in a different epistemic position from Alice, at least with respect to the hypothesis p. Alice sees greater rewards insofar as she keeps W>R, because believing falsely seems to her a greater disadvantage than disbelieving something that is true (Pettigrew 2016, pp. 255–257).

The takeaway is that these two rival weightings lead our palaeoanthropologists to see things differently. Bob takes up a way of interacting with evidence which expresses his passion for giving belief a chance even if it puts him at obvious risk of believing a falsehood and losing the truth. Alice takes up the rival commitment which compels her to avoid this risk at all costs even if it also shuts her away from the truth. Admittedly, the reasons why Alice and Bob have that particular setting and not some other are not something this picture finds particulalry important. With this approach, we compare rather than measure how conducive (good or bad) Jamesian passional natures, and by extension epistemic styles, are at reaching good epistemic status for the beliefs of its holders. Given that the evidence does not rule out the possibility of different passions, it also does not rule out the possibility of Alice and Bob interacting with evidence so that they come up with different equally rational attitudes. The better attitude will always be the one that turns out to be the correct one, but given what we know about different takes on the risks associated with being rash or cautious in epistemic affairs, the better attitude is not always more justified or better supported by evidence. I don't think we should say that Alice and Bob are epistemically tied for the position of the would-be winner in their disagreement. Both of their attitudes are reasonable but I can't really say for sure that they are equally good to have given the demands of the whole discipline of palaeoanthropology.[9] What we can say about their ways of choosing between the options is that they both have a robust way of making up their own minds. In the next section, I pay more attention to the question of whether we can say that any of them made up their own mind better than the other one.

2.3 Stylistic assessment, again

I mentioned earlier that evidentialism, or the view that doxastic attitudes toward the evidence are justified by evidence alone, should be interpreted less strictly than is typically the case. While uniquers hold that evidentialism is incompatible with cases of two reasonable attitudes being supported by the same evidence, I take the

[9]Moreover, a quick Google search seems to suggest Bob was actually right, given some of the evidence available on Wikipedia in 2024.

cases described above to show why evidentialism may occasionally be lax when it comes to which attitudes the evidence supports. Strong Evidential Supervenience, or the view on which only a difference in evidence supports a reasonable difference in attitudes is quite controversial and suggests much more than the idea that only evidence counts for epistemic justification. A permissivist can deny supervenience by appealing to the possibility of less than straightforward normative options for agents who are justified in choosing either of them. Traditionally, evidentialism has been presented on the basis of relatively straightforward cases. Think of Ciceronian cases where not following one's duties with respect to the evidence amounts to a fault or even criminal culpability. Cases where a ship capsizes, because those responsible did not form their belief that it was safe on the right evidence, are instances of obvious failures to follow our *duties to believe* what the evidence supports (Clifford 1887). Moreover, from an epistemic point of view, it really does not matter whether the ship was carrying passengers or cargo, because what is judged in either case is the faultiness of the doxastic attitude.

However, there are also cases where we cannot judge things so quickly. In the earlier sections, I mentioned situations where our options are less than straightforward with respect to which one of them is better, required, or forbidden, let alone faulty or incorrect. For example, cases of tied and supererogatory attitudes are not straightforward because in these cases we should not take ourselves to be concerned with assessing fault or faultlessness in epistemic matters. For one, some instances where we do not fulfil our epistemic duties do not involve costly oversight or malicious undertones.[10] Think of someone like Jerry who bravely ignores available evidence. Epistemic assessment is strict about his reasoning because he went beyond, or beneath the evidence in order to fulfil a non-epistemic goal. Overall or pragmatic assessment is laxer because it takes into account the idea that going beyond evidence sometimes is a good thing to do. We could assess Jerry's situation as one where his evidence doesn't clearly support p, *the jump is safe!* nor the

[10]Clifford's *shipowner* and *island* cases are related by the idea that psychological and personality traits sometimes "defraud" epistemic duties. In most of these cases, a gullible or lazy agent foregoes either checking for available evidence or paying sufficient mind to evidence. In either case, the wrong is with the agent being motivated to form an attitude which satisfies his convenient practical goals, but also demotivates him from avoiding falsity.

contradictory *it's not safe!*. On the one hand, some evidentialists explicitly hold that in such cases the only permitted option is to suspend; similar to the intuition from the coin flip example (Feldman 2000, p. 680; Feldman 2000, p. 72). On the other hand, we can say that believing either propositions but also suspending is possibly a faultless option; depending on how Jerry set his epistemic parameters but also on what the evidence supports given his setting.

In this latter approach, Jerry's options are tied with respect to their evidential support, and ultimately the decision comes down to a tiebreaker. For Jerry, the deciding factor was a function of his goals but also his ability to ignore the evidence. This suggests that someone less confident or courageous than Jerry could have thought equally hard yet rationally decided that the same jump is not safe. The attitude Jerry ends up with then directly relates to factors like his confidence, courage, and willingness to risk being wrong, because what ultimately determines which of the permitted options he chooses comes down to how he sees the evidence. Recall judge Judy's compassionate insight which led her to believe her son isn't guilty of breaking the vase, despite being aware that the President is unlikely to suspend belief, probably equally unlikely to agree with Judy, and most likely to believe that her son is guilty. The two cases aren't too dissimilar, although they have interesting differences. An important difference is that Jerry only has to choose between giving it a shot or giving it up. So his case is one where things like *which evidence he went off of*, *how high his thresholds were*, and *how risk averse he is* have the final say in which way he ends up leaning. Judy has a more elaborate set of options, and what causes her to decide is something going beyond her evidence.

Some permissive cases are instances of disagreements where one agent is permitted a supererogatory attitude. This has consequences for how we should evaluate permissive cases or evidential circumstances where more than one attitude is epistemically rational. The main idea is that permissive cases ought to be assessed differently from impermissive ones. Supererogatory attitudes are less straightforward in this respect, both in terms of describing what they are and whether they are epistemically rational. Some often cited examples include situations where a brilliant scientist comes up with a truly innovative theory, and therefore has the

doxastic option to justifiably believe that a proposition is true which may seem obviously false to his contemporaries. Or various cases of eccentric detectives coming up with brilliant unpredictable explanations given trivial signs and clues (Li 2018; Li 2019). Not every scientist or detective has these options, so surely they could never be universally required of them or anyone else. If some cases like these are conceivable, then permissivism must be an option. Then, even if two people share the same evidence and almost identical parameter settings, they could be without fault in going with more than one of the options because some attitudes could be supererogatory, hence intra-personally permissive, for them (Jackson 2021).

In chapter one, I concluded with a set of options for a permissive view of interactions with evidence. In this chapter, I said a bit more about why choosing between them boils down to choosing between talking about epistemic standards or epistemic styles. If you feel more inclined to say that individuals with supererogatory options have a higher standard than is usually required, then you may opt for permissivism with some restraint in denying intra-personal Uniqueness. This makes sense, if agents like Sherlock Holmes or Albert Einstein (Li 2018) take up any evidential standard, it is probably a lot higher than what could be expected of most people. Moreover, it could be that given their standard they could not but believe at most one extraordinary thing. I mentioned earlier that proponents of this option often motivate their views by citing worries associated with arbitrariness. I then said a bit more about why epistemic styles may help us see arbitrariness as less of a problem. Supererogation is an interesting element in this picture. It hints at an attitude that is neither required nor forbidden, so universally permitted. Therefore, if cases of disagreement about what the evidence supports are such that they always allow for faultless suspension, but sometimes also for faultless tiebreaks, then permissivism is attractive regardless of whether the subjective factors in the picture function similarly to standards, hence intra-personally Unique, or styles, hence permissive.

In the previous section I made the assumption that we can stop talking about epistemic styles as expressing individual psychological profiles and suppose that they actually express Jamesian *passional natures*. Even though there is likely much more that can be expressed by style other than our risk preference regarding

true beliefs, those who take up a more narrow approach often find great benefit in it (Pettigrew 2016). I find this way of thinking about a theory of epistemic styles more conducive to productive recommendations for the already existing debates on options for permissive views. Take for instance the arbitrariness worry which threatens the prospects of plain permissivism (White 2005; Kelly 2014), and motivations for instances of epistemic ties and supererogatory attitudes which threaten Uniqueness (Jackson 2021; Li 2018). Once we've already taken up the tool, we should be warranted some leeway in how to apply it to novel and less than straightforward problems. Now if we can also show that there are epistemic situations where this attitude is not the only permitted option, we have a solid motivation for plain permissivism.

If we accept that supererogatory attitudes and epistemic ties sometimes warrant positive epistemic assessment; then Uniqueness about interactions with evidence would no longer be universally valid, and some form of permissivism would be true. Moreover, those who prefer traditional ways of stating evidentialist views would have to explain why in some cases evidence strictly determines what is rational, whereas in other cases some other factors compel us stronger and out of equally rational concerns. Among other things, this explanation would have to allow for at least some instances of interactions with evidence where evidence supports more than one proposition, and suspension is not the *only* faultless option. Consider Bob and Alice again; they are both good scientists so they must have seen the availability of a neutral option, that is, to suspend entirely and focus on something else. Perhaps we should also be ready to allow for suspension to be the *most* risk-neutral option because the risk of suspending when a hypothesis is true is the same as when it is false (Pettigrew 2016, p. 255). However, their Jamesian passions made it so that they both saw greater benefit in going with options that are neither explicitly forbidden nor required, even if they thereby risked more than with the neutral option. A lot of what has been said here anticipates that this is a mark of a good scientist, or better yet a good epistemic agent.

If suspending is the uniquely rational option in non-straightforward cases such as epistemic ties, then agents should find themselves demotivated from giving any hypothesis a shot even if they feel compelled to make their minds up. This seems

like advice to disregard a lot of our intuitions, emotions, or passions about the evidence for no reason other than the narrow demands of what evidentialists traditionally took to be a natural way of thinking about the role of evidence. For this reason, it doesn't seem like an attractive universally applicable scheme. Likewise, Strong Evidential Supervenience and the underlying Uniqueness principles seem equally high-handed when it comes to the idea that only evidential concerns are relevant to the question of which permitted options are epistemically appropriate. When we say that Uniqueness is necessary, or that it is necessary that there is at most one rational doxastic attitude on a given body of evidence that an agent can take up, we mean to say that it is inconceivable for it not to hold. It is not uncommon for things we deem necessary to be used as support for a kind of policy for dealing with them.

A Uniqueness policy would have us evaluate all instances of disagreements on shared evidence as a prize question where only one answer wins and the rest lose. Above, I have attempted to deny Uniqueness, which I had to do in order to claim that there are possible cases where different epistemic agents set their epistemic parameters differently which, in turn, affect whether they take up a particular belief or not. Take for example disagreement about taste. Uniqueness about taste should seem obviously false, because most disagreements about taste are *prima facie* faultless, i.e. there are no winners or losers. Many other disagreements are definitely not faultless, so we rely on things like shared epistemic standards, norms, and duties to say what is correct and better to believe from an epistemic point of view. For one, taking epistemic standards and assigning to them a kind of Uniqueness policy implies that for an agent given a body of evidence there is at most one rational standard she should take up. This is less trivial and less straightforward than the idea that in these cases at most one proposition about the evidence is correct or true. The answer styles afford us says that we may have different epistemic preferences, which in turn describes why evidence from science, religion, and morality, for example, sometimes supports multiple diverging attitudes towards a proposition.

Conclusion

The main aim of this paper was to showcase epistemic styles as a good tool to do epistemology with. For this to be the case, the concept ought to at least describe some interesting epistemic phenomena. Even better if it made some already existing debates easier to navigate. More precisely, epistemic styles allow us to come up with promising ways to argue that different people may interact with evidence in different ways, and that these factors sometimes contribute to instances of disagreements. The benefits proposed by Flores crystallize when thinking about novel strategies to assess our interactions with evidence (Flores 2021; Flores 2023; Steglich-Petersen and Varga 2023). The main idea is that some instances of disagreements seem to be sustained by differences in epistemic parameter settings. Although interesting in its own right, this idea also makes us wonder whether we can somehow use styles to distinguish between different types of disagreements. In chapter one, I described why the notion of an *epistemic* style has a wide range of interesting uses and how it can inform debates broader than just the status of disagreement in epistemology. The ones that attract attention concern things like the nature of evidence, epistemic rationality, and the role of free will in organizing our doxastic lives. This first set of benefits is restricted to the import that permissive views of interactions with evidence have for the mentioned debates. The debates about principles like Uniqueness, which claims that interactions with evidence are not permissive and Strong Evidential Supervenience, which holds that only a difference in evidence justifies a difference in attitudes, stand out the most.

For this reason, they call for more attention. If Uniqueness principles were true, epistemic styles would explain very little and have much less to offer by way of describing why some disagreements do not warrant equal status. That is, all of our interactions with evidence would be subject to the kind of troubleshooting that we saw in the fax machine metaphor and the coin-flip example. Otherwise, if permissivism is true, it is almost impossible to evaluate or even describe interactions with evidence without something like an epistemic style of an agent to

tie them to. What I propose here as the benefit of epistemic styles in answering questions surrounding disagreement about shared evidence is an extension of the former kind of benefits associated with the broader debates. Namely, that taking them up requires commitments to the possibility of disagreements where neither of the disagreeing agents is at fault, even if their doxastic options differ and may be jointly inconsistent. This is in contrast to those proponents of evidentialism who take Uniqueness to be its main motivation. Disagreement is a fantastically varied phenomenon, and what accounts for this variation is the idea that we often disagree because we interact with evidence in different ways but also that sometimes, when we interact with evidence, we see and understand things differently. The task we were faced with was to see how the reasons for endorsing Uniqueness compare to some of the reasons motivating epistemic permissivism.

What Uniqueness claims is that if two agents have different attitudes and they share all of the relevant evidence, then one of them is necessarily mistaken. Theories of evidential support and epistemic rationality which take up the Uniqueness thesis, often disallow cases of faultless disagreements for this very reason. Epistemic styles require a laxer approach, on which factors besides evidence sometimes affect how we interact with evidence. To that end, style is just one way to hash out some compelling intuitions about why that is the case. It may be that when you think about style, you have in mind something different and that epistemic parameters are entirely alien to your intuitive picture. You then probably have good reasons not to commit to anything as abstract as evidential thresholds, Jamesian sentiments, or permissive styles.

Yet, there is a sense in which epistemic styles understood as tools we use to explain why we sometimes interact with evidence differently may be compelling to everyone with any intuitions about style at all. For one, our abstract commitments are mostly just ways to keep talk of relatively common cases in check. After all, our goal was to understand what gives in everyday situations of disagreements without any obvious mistakes. Therefore, even if you're skeptical about the theoretical import of epistemic styles, there is a certain sense in which you should take them into account when thinking about epistemic questions. That is, insofar as you have any intuitions that can be cashed out in terms of subject-relative epistemic

factors, there are good reasons for you to take them into account when deciding whether a judgement, knowledge ascription or a belief assertion is *epistemically* appropriate.

At the beginning, I asked what can be said about the relationship between varied sets of epistemic preferences and disagreements where two or more agents take up divergent opinions about what the evidence best supports. To make matters more precise, In this paper I argued against those who hold that this relationship can be exhausted by endorsing a combination of inter-personal and intra-personal Uniqueness principles (White 2005; Feldman 2007; Greco and Hedden 2016; Matheson 2011). Next, I returned to the issue of faultless disagreement as a kind of permissive scheme. If a disagreement is faultless, then it can be traced to a difference in epistemic parameter settings. Therefore, if two agents hold different attitudes on the same evidence and neither is *obviously* irrational in doing so, then they likely take up different sentiments toward what the evidence supports for them. In a similar vein, if two agents differ only in their psychological makeup then if they come to disagree, they may both be rational (James 1896; Pettigrew 2016). Perhaps the right way of thinking about the role epistemic styles play in determining which attitude any given body of evidence supports must include the idea that this support itself is permissive. Namely it sometimes allows for multiple, possibly diverging, attitudes to be supported by the evidence, given the *relevant* subject-relative factors.

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Abstract

People often disagree about which propositions their evidence supports. Propositions we disagree about sometimes express things like our tastes and aesthetic preferences, whereas other times they denote our opinions about science, religion, and morality. Disagreement is interesting because we can represent it by the following schema: If two thinkers consider the same proposition p, yet one thinks p, and the other thinks not-p, then the two disagree on p (Kölbel 2004). Not all disagreements are equally interesting in this respect. If two thinkers disagree about p, and they have totally different evidence, our explanation of disagreement will always take this difference into account. In this paper, I ask what kind of differences we must take into account in order to explain situations where agents disagree when they have the same evidence. More precisely, I argue that differences in preferences related to the evidential thresholds, preferred source of testimony, and methods of reasoning make agents disagree even if their evidence is the same.

Epistemic styles are ways of setting one's epistemic parameters that express unified sets of such preferences (Flores 2021). These parameters take stock of subject-relative values for variables related to evidential thresholds, prior probability distributions, go-to reasoning methods and others. The aim of this paper is to show that epistemic styles have a double benefit. On the one hand, they provide us with (a) some options for a view describing how our *interactions with evidence* may result in disagreements, (b) reasons why not all disagreements caused by a *difference of epistemic style* imply that one of the attitudes is not justified, and (c) a way to describe instances of the above schema which originate in divergent epistemic parameter settings.

On the other hand, these answers bear on the debate about how we come to hold doxastic attitudes and which attitudes are epistemically justified. To have an attitude about a proposition is to believe, disbelieve or withhold its truth, and traditionally an attitude counts as epistemically justified just in case it is supported by evidence (Conee and Feldman 2004). Many have taken this idea to imply that if

two people interact with the same evidence and they hold contradictory attitudes, then either one or both have made a mistake. Here, I show that sometimes two persons can interact with the same evidence, take up different attitudes, and both be justified. To that end, I use the notion of an epistemic style in order to pay closer attention to often neglected factors that contribute to the formation of our attitudes by having a say in how we interact with evidence.

Word count: 20797