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Dissertation Summary

My dissertation is composed of three papers:

**Conciliation, Demotion, and Controversy:** Each of us holds views that are subject to persistent, widespread controversy, but we typically see no problem thinking we are most likely right while also admitting that many who disagree are our equals or superiors in intellectual virtue. I uncover problems with thinking this combination of attitudes is consistent.

I start with standard cases where the relevant evidence is shared and disagreement may arise only if someone made a mistake while assessing that evidence. I argue that here you may retain confidence in your own view if and only if you demote your opponents, concluding they are more likely than yourself to make a mistake in their assessment of the evidence. I then defend the soundness of this counterfactual test: after learning of a disagreement with someone you’re counting as a peer, imagine his conclusion is right and consider the sorts of mistakes that might have led you to your (now assumed to be) mistaken conclusion. You are rationally permitted and required to demote him if and only if your rational confidence that you can rule out all of these possible mistakes is higher than your rational confidence that you should count him as your peer. I then argue that when disagreement is persistent and widespread, it becomes very unlikely that demotion will be permitted.

I then turn to possible cases where disagreement arises even if evidence is shared and nobody makes mistakes in their assessment of evidence. Here, I assume epistemic permissiveness: people may fully rationally draw conflicting conclusions from a single body of relevant evidence. It can seem this yields the result we seek: if our own conclusions are fully rational, we have no reason to modify them. And if our opposition’s conclusions are also fully rational, we have no reason to demote them. But a dilemma arises when we ask whether we think our view is more likely than our opponent’s to be true. If no, we are no longer retaining confidence in our view, so we have conciliated. If yes, then I argue this amounts to demoting them.

**Reciprocity and Climate Change:** I develop a theory of our moral obligation regarding climate change that is based on the principle of intergenerational reciprocity: each generation has obligation to bequeath conditions of life no worse than those which it inherited. I derive
this principle from a more basic principle of individual reciprocity (which I do not attempt to defend): a person who receives and accepts some benefit thereby incurs obligation to return, either to the benefactor or to someone else, an equal benefit. I then discuss conditions under which a generation would lack obligation to bequeath conditions that are improved from those it inherited, and I suggest that those conditions apply to our current situation. Finally, I discuss the obligations we have to far future generations. A generation has obligations of reciprocity only to the next generation, but this includes obligation to help the next generation fulfil its own obligations of reciprocity. Iterating this logic delivers our obligations to far future generations, and thereby our obligations to address climate change. On this view, each generation which depletes the environment must counterbalance any resultant burdens on future generations by increases in some other sort of benefit (medicine, nutrition, education, technology, etc.) for those generations.

**Tolerance and Religious Diversity:** I argue that religious diversity generates epistemic reasons for religious toleration *without* also weakening religious devotion. Following the considerations of Chapter 1, I argue that persistent widespread disagreement within a domain indicates that humans, on average, lack the cognitive capability to reliably answer questions in the domain. But this conclusion about the typical human does not make it extremely unlikely that questions in the domain are beyond any particular individual’s cognitive abilities. This makes possible a version of strong epistemic permissivism that escapes the dilemma for permissivists I posed at the end of Chapter 1. I develop a theory on which persons on both sides of a persistent controversy are rationally permitted to trust their cognitive capacities, to set aside doubt about the correctness of their disputed view, and to execute a research programme which presupposes that view. Applying this theory to the religious case gives the majority of religious adherents entitlement to be *fully engaged* in their religious devotion, with the requirement that they understand their entitlement to their religious commitments comes in the form of a risky wager. I conclude by showing how toleration follows from this picture.