**Permissivism and the Truth-Connection**

Forthcoming in *Erkenntnis*

Michele Palmira

Complutense University of Madrid

Penultimate Draft

Please refer to the published version: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10670-020-00373-7

*Abstract*

Permissivism is the view that, sometimes, there is more than one doxastic attitude that is perfectly rationalised by the evidence. Impermissivism is the denial of Permissivism. Several philosophers, with the aim to defend either Impermissivism or Permissivism, have recently discussed the value of (im)permissive rationality. This paper focuses on one kind of value-conferring considerations, stemming from the so-called “truth-connection” enjoyed by rational doxastic attitudes. The paper vindicates the truth-connected value of permissive rationality by pursuing a novel strategy which rests on two main planks: first, there is a distinction between a fine-grained and a coarse-grained type-individuation of belief-forming methods. Secondly, different kinds of decision-theoretic reasoning, i.e. expected-accuracy reasoning and accuracy-domination reasoning, must be paired with a fine-grained and a coarse-grained type-individuation of methods, respectively. I argue that while the first pair is wholly irrelevant to the question of the truth-connection, the second affords the means to a permissivist explanation of the truth-connected value of rationality.

**1 Introduction**

*Permissive* and *Impermissive* theories of epistemic rationality give incompatible answers to the question of whether evidence always uniquely settles what to believe. Permissivism is the view that, sometimes, there is more than one doxastic attitude that is perfectly rationalised by the evidence. Impermissivism denies that.

The question of whether evidence is permissive or not has been held to have very far-reaching epistemological implications. Settling this question one way or another provides us with a distinctive kind of consideration in favour or against specific theories of rationality that are committed to regarding evidence as (im)permissive⎯views such as Subjective Bayesianism and Conservatism on the one hand, and Objective Bayesianism and certain forms of Evidentialism (such as Williamson’s “knowledge-first” Evidentialism) on the other, carry a commitment to Permissivism and Impermissivism, respectively. It has also been maintained that so-called steadfast responses to peer disagreement rest on the truth of Permissivism, whereas Impermissivism chimes well with so-called conciliationism. Moreover, the (im)permissive nature of evidence has a crucial bearing on the epistemologies of trust and friendship.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Several philosophers, with the aim to defend either Impermissivism (Dogramaci and Horowitz 2016 *PhilIssues*, Greco and Hedden 2016 *JPhil,* Horowitz 2019 *JPhil*) or Permissivism (Schoenfield 2019 *PPR,* Thorstad 2019 *Mind*), have recently discussed the value of (im)permissive rationality. In this paper, I will look closely at one way whereby value-conferring considerations could help us make progress with the Permissivism vs. Impermissivism debate: I will focus on the question of how to explain the so-called “truth-connection”, namely the idea that having epistemically rational beliefs is valuable since it secures a strong connection to the truth (see Horowitz 2019 and Schoenfield 2019).

The aim of this paper is to offer a novel strategy for vindicating the value of permissive rationality. Operating under the widespread characterisation of Permissivism as the view that, sometimes, different belief-forming methods (or rules) yield incompatible and equally perfectly rational doxastic attitudes in the light of the same evidence, I first disentangle a fine-grained and a coarse-grained type-individuation of belief-forming methods. Briefly put, a belief-forming method is a way of examining evidence to draw conclusions about various matters. On a fine-grained type-individuation, methods include each subject’s specific take on the support relations between the evidence and the relevant proposition. So, if a subject S1 thinks that a certain body of evidence has a certain high probative force and another subject S2 thinks that the same body of evidence has a certain low probative force, S1 and S2 will count as having different belief-forming methods. On a coarse-grained type-individuation, on the contrary, methods do not include each subject’s specific take on the confirmational import of the evidence. I then maintain that different kinds of decision-theoretic reasoning, i.e. expected-accuracy reasoning and accuracy-domination reasoning, must be paired with a fine-grained and a coarse-grained type-individuation of methods, respectively. I argue that while the first pair is wholly irrelevant to the question of the truth-connection, the second affords the means to a permissivist explanation of the truth-connected value of rationality.

**2 The Endorsement Argument**

One of the central tenets of epistemology is that having epistemically rational beliefs is valuable since it secures a strong connection to the truth. The ability to explain the truth-connection is one of the yardsticks with which we adjudicate between different theories of epistemic rationality.In recent works, Miriam Schoenfield (2019) and Sophie Horowitz (2019) have debated over whether, and how, Permissivism can explain the truth-connection.[[2]](#footnote-2) I will use their debate as a foil, for two main reasons. For one thing, while Permissivists have already replied in a forceful way to other value-conferring considerations mustered by Impermissivists,[[3]](#footnote-3) they have not yet taken Horowitz’s Impermissivist-friendly considerations on the truth-connected value of rationality head on.[[4]](#footnote-4) For another, the Horowitz-Schoenfield debate has wide epistemological significance: as it will emerge in due course, that debate is an excellent entry point to the important question of which decision-theoretic reasoning is relevant to determining what is rational to believe.[[5]](#footnote-5).[[6]](#footnote-6)

Let’s turn to the Horowitz-Schoenfield debate.[[7]](#footnote-7) Horowitz (2019) constructs the debate around what she calls an “Endorsement Argument”, which she elicits from Schoenfield (2019). Let’s take the following two alleged data points as input (Horowitz 2019: 239-40): first, we endorse certain belief-forming methods (or rules), such as the method of forming beliefs on the basis of perception. Secondly, sometimes these methods leave it open what to believe. Relying on these data, the Endorsement Argument consists in the following reasoning (*ibid.*):[[8]](#footnote-8)

(1) If S endorses a belief-forming method M, then S regards M as truth-conducive.

(2) If S regards M as rational, then S endorses M.

Therefore:

(C) If S regards M as rational, then S regards M as truth-conducive.

Since the belief-forming methods we take to be rational are the ones we take to be truth-conducive, the Endorsement Argument aims to establish a strong link between rationality and regarding rationality as truth-conducive. If successful, the Endorsement Argument secures this link even in cases where the belief-forming methods we endorse allow some leeway in what to believe.

It’s important to notice that, thus presented, the Endorsement Argument is a schema, and without working out the precise meaning of its premises we can’t establish whether it succeeds or not. Let’s begin with premise (2): the idea is that whatever S takes to be rational is what S takes to be compatible with or issued by the belief-forming methods S endorses. Horowitz (2019: 240) notes that this basic thought chimes well with metaepistemological expressivism, a view which Schoenfield seems to have some affinity with. Be that as it may, I henceforth grant premise (2) of the Endorsement Argument and focus exclusively on premise (1).[[9]](#footnote-9) Working out the content of premise (1) requires specifying how to think of belief-forming methods and what it is to regard such methods as truth-conducive. I turn to this task in the next section.

**3 Belief-forming methods and their truth-conduciveness**

To have a better a take on belief-forming methods, I will look at a theory of permissive rationality to establish what belief-forming method underwrites it. The theory of permissive rationality I focus on is Subjective Bayesianism, [[10]](#footnote-10) namely the view that the rationality of S’s credence C depends on S’s total evidence as well as S’s initial credence function (that is, S’s prior unconditional and conditional credences or “priors”). S’s C is rational only if S’s priors cohere with the axioms of probability calculus (call this *Probabilism*)[[11]](#footnote-11) and C evolves by following the principle of conditionalisation (call this *Conditionalisation*).[[12]](#footnote-12) As a Subjective Bayesian, S is a Permissive agent: S acknowledges that even if S’s own priors cohere with the axioms of probability calculus and evolve by following the principle of conditionalisation, other priors can do that too.

One might worry that we cannot really extract a belief-forming method from a theory of ideal rationality such as Subjective Bayesianism. While it is true that most philosophers regard Subjective Bayesianism as a theory of rationality for ideal agents,[[13]](#footnote-13) this does not hamper my attempt at distilling a belief-forming method from it: we can take the belief-forming method that underwrites the pattern of belief formation of an ideal epistemic agent as a description of the method we would use were our cognitive powers extended in the required way to allow for logical omniscience. Other authors, though, offer more or less radical departures from the letter of Subjective Bayesianism which, by dispensing us with logical omniscience, constitute non-ideal theories of rationality from which to extract belief-forming methods that agents like us can adopt.[[14]](#footnote-14) While I will henceforth focus on the standard version of Subjective Bayesianism I have just presented, I believe (but don’t have the space to argue) that my arguments carry over to those alternative Bayesian views. Finally, let me note that Horowitz (2019: 246) explicitly takes Subjective Bayesianism to be a belief-forming method – she uses the term “Personal Rules” to refer to those methods/rules that are interpersonal permissive; this ensures that my move does not beg the question against my opponent.

The Subjective Bayesian belief-forming method roughly tells you: have credence C in *p* only if C coheres with the axioms of probability calculus and whenever you have evidence of *p* being the case, revise C by conditionalising on that evidence. On closer inspection, however, this rough idea can be made more precise in two ways, giving rise to either a fine-grained or a coarse-grained type-individuation of the method:

**Fine-grained type-individuation of the Subjective Bayesian belief-forming method**

Make Pryou cohere with the axioms of the probability calculus and, whenever you have evidence about *p*, update Pryou by conditionalising on that evidence so as to have posteriorsPoyou.

**Coarse-grained type-individuation of the Subjective Bayesian belief-forming method**

For any set of priors Prgen in *p*, make Prgen cohere with the axioms of the probability calculus and, whenever there’s new evidence about *p*, update Prgen by conditionalising on that evidence so as to have posteriorsPogen.

According to the former, if S1 assigns .7 prior probability to *p* and S2 assigns .8 prior probability to *p*, then S1 and S2 count as following different belief-forming methods. To generalise: to each different set of priors held by distinct agents it corresponds a different belief-forming method. This makes the type-individuation of methods fine-grained. According to the latter, if S1 assigns .7 prior probability to *p* and S2 assigns .8 prior probability to *p*, then S1 and S2 count as following the same belief-forming method. To generalise: distinct agents whose different priors cohere with the axioms of the probability calculus and evolve via conditionalisation follow the same belief-forming method. This makes the type-individuation of methods coarse-grained.

The central difference between a fine-grained and a coarse-grained type-individuation of the Subjective Bayesian belief-forming method can be put like this. Prior probabilities encode one’s take on the confirmational import of the evidence, that is, one’s judgements about the support relations between the evidence and the relevant proposition (Roughly put, the higher one’s priors in *p*, the more a new piece of evidence confirms *p*, thereby rationalising a suitably high final credence in its truth.) So, if a belief-forming method is individuated finely, then that method does include one’s own confirmation commitments. By contrast, if a belief-forming method is individuated coarsely, then that method does not include one’s own specific confirmation commitments.

Let us turn now to the question of what it means to regard a belief-forming method as truth-conducive. Since we’re operating within the framework of epistemic decision theory, I will here focus on the two types of decision-theoretic reasoning: *maximisation of expected accuracy* reasoning and *avoidance of accuracy domination reasoning*. To my mind, if the argument from the truth-connection against Permissivism could not be made to work once we use the decision rules *Maximise expected accuracy!* and *Avoid accuracy domination!* to make sense of the notion of regarding a belief-forming method as truth-conducive, the argument would lose much of its bite, as these are the best-known and most-used decision rules in epistemology.[[15]](#footnote-15) Let me illustrate both types of decision-theoretic reasoning.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Let the expectedutility of a credence be the average of the accuracy scores the credence would get in cases where *p* is true and in cases where it is false, weighted by the probability that the state of the world in which *p* is true and the state of the world in which *p* is false obtain. So, if S holds a probabilistic credence function C\*, S can determine how accurate S expects a credence C to be relative to C\*. Extending this idea beyond S’s current credences to their belief-forming method – in agreement with Horowitz (2019: 241) – this gives rise to:

**Maximisation of expected accuracy conception**

If S regards a belief-forming method as truth-conducive, then S regards it as maximising expected accuracy.

Now, let a set of credences C be accuracy dominated only if there is another set of credences C\* which is guaranteed to have higher epistemic utility, i.e. C\* guaranteed to be closer to the truth than C; and, for any set of credences C\*, there is no alternative set of credences C\*\* (about all and only the same propositions) that is at least as accurate in all possible worlds and more accurate in some such worlds. So, we have:

**Accuracy domination avoidance conception**

If S regards a belief-forming method as truth-conducive, then S regards it as avoiding accuracy domination.

A key difference between the two decision-theoretic properties of expected accuracy maximisation and non-accuracy domination is this. Expected accuracy maximisation is a property that credences have relative to a given probability credence function, i.e. the probability function which weights C’s accuracy scores. By contrast, non-accuracy domination is a property that credences have *objectively*, as opposed to *relative* to a given probability credence function.

In light of the foregoing, one might wonder which way of type-individuating a belief-forming method and which conception of regarding a belief-forming method as truth-conducive are the right ones. Fortunately, I won’t have to answer these difficult questions here. My line of reasoning will instead take the following structure: I first argue that the fine-grained type-individuation of belief-forming methods must be paired with the maximisation of expected accuracy conception of regarding a method as truth-conducive, whereas the coarse-grained type-individuation of belief-forming methods must be paired with the accuracy domination avoidance conception of regarding a method as truth-conducive. These pairings give rise to two disambiguations of the Endorsement Argument. I then move on to argue that while one disambiguation of the Endorsement Argument makes it wholly irrelevant to the question of the truth-connection, the other shows that Permissivism can harness that pattern of reasoning to account for the truth-connection.

**4 Pairing individuations of methods and conceptions of truth-conduciveness**

The Horowitz-Schoenfield debate does not distinguish between a fine-grained and a coarse-grained type-individuation of belief-forming methods. Yet, that debate does take a stance on what it takes to regard a method as truth-conducive. Here’s a telling quote from Horowitz (2019: 241):

*Holding* some doxastic attitude necessarily involves regarding that attitude as more accurate than the alternatives. […] Extending this thought beyond an agent’s current credences to her epistemic rules or plans, rational agents will also expect their responses to various bodies of evidence (assuming those conform to their plans) to maximize expected accuracy, given the evidence.

Horowitz reconstructs her debate with Schoenfield as hinging on the idea that regarding a belief-forming method as truth-conducive is to regard it as maximising expected accuracy, given the evidence.[[17]](#footnote-17) Horowitz’s rationale for the maximisation of expected accuracy conception lies in the following principle:[[18]](#footnote-18)

**Immodesty**

It is required of S that: if S holds a given set of credences C, then S regards C as maximising expected accuracy.

Immodesty claims that when C assesses its expected accuracy relative to itself, C should regard itself as maximising expected accuracy. Note that a *modest* S can hold Moore-paradoxical attitudes such as: “I assign credence C to p, but C\* is more accurate than C”. However if S is highly confident that C\* is more expectedly accurate than C while, at the same time, holding C, S exhibits a form of incoherence between the first-order level of holding C and the higher-order level of assessing C for its accuracy. So, S had better be immodest to avoid inter-level incoherence.

I’ll now assume Immodesty and argue that it motivates the maximisation of expected accuracy conception *only if* methods are type-individuated finely.[[19]](#footnote-19) Note that Immodesty is a claim about S’s own credences: if S sticks to them, then they are required to regard them as maximising expected accuracy. Let us assume that S is inter-level coherent. This means that S regards their own prior probabilities and their evolution into posterior probabilities via conditionalisation as maximising expected accuracy. Extending this thought from S’s attitudes to their belief-forming method, we have that if we type-individuate belief-forming methods finely, Mfine explicitly ranges over S’s own credences only: so, for S to regard Mfine as maximising expected accuracy is for them to regard S’s own credences as maximising expected accuracy, per Immodesty.

However, if we pair the maximisation of expected accuracy conception with the coarse-grained type-individuation of belief-forming methods, Immodesty no longer warrants the move from regarding one’s own credences as maxisimising expected accuracy to regarding the method Mcoarse one endorses as having that same property. Bear in mind that Mcoarse – unlike Mfine – does not feature S’s own credences, for Mcoarse says something about any set of priors whatsoever. So, if we paired the maximisation of expected accuracy conception with the coarse-grained type-individuation of belief-forming methods, we would have that S regards any set of credences as maximising expected accuracy. And yet, this latter claim can’t be warranted by appealing to Immodesty, which *only* enjoys S to regard S’s own credences as maximising expected accuracy. It bears reminding that Immodesty is a coherence requirement which only says how S should treat their own credences and is silent on how S should regard someone else’s credences. So, we cannot use Immodesty to warrant pairing the maximisation of expected accuracy conception with the coarse-grained type-individuation of belief-forming methods. This shows that if we take the maximisation of expected accuracy conception to be motivated by Immodesty, then that conception must be paired with a fine-grained type-individuation of belief-forming methods only. What about the coarse-grained type-individuation of methods then?

For one thing, the foregoing argument gives us reason not to pair the coarse-grained type-individuation of methods with the maximisation of expected accuracy conception. For another, we only have two plausible candidates here: the maximisation of expected accuracy conception and the accuracy domination avoidance conception. But there’s more: on closer inspection, the coarse-grained type-individuation of belief-forming methods tallies quite well with the accuracy domination avoidance conception of regarding a belief-forming method as truth-conducive. To see why, bear in mind that in order to determine whether a set of credences C is accuracy dominated we need not weigh C by our own credences C\*. That is to say, our C\* do not (even partly) determine whether or not C is accuracy dominated (in fact, we can assess whether C is accuracy dominated or not even if we have never thought about the question at stake and has no opinion about it). This is tantamount to saying that the property of accuracy domination could be predicated of any set of credences whatsoever.[[20]](#footnote-20) Just like we did before, let us extend these considerations from attitudes to belief-forming methods. If we type-individuate belief-forming methods coarsely, then Mcoarse ranges over any set of priors and posteriors. Thus, for S to regard Mcoarse as avoiding accuracy domination is for S to accept that, for any set of priors Prgen which cohere with the axioms of the probability calculus and evolve into Pogen via conditionalisation, there is no alternative set Po\*gen, which is closer to the truth than Pogen. All things considered, then, we must pair the coarse-grained type-individuation of belief-forming methods with the accuracy domination avoidance conception of regarding a method as truth-conducive.[[21]](#footnote-21)

The foregoing discussion tells us that we can disambiguate the Endorsement Argument in two ways: on the one hand, we must pair the fine-grained type-individuation of belief-forming methods with the maximisation of expected accuracy conception of regarding a method as truth-conducive; on the other hand, we must pair the coarse-grained type-individuation of belief-forming methods with the accuracy domination avoidance conception of regarding a method as truth-conducive. In the next section I lay out the two different Endorsement Arguments and bring them to bear on the question of the truth-connection.

**5 Endorsement Arguments and Truth Problems**

We can now put two Endorsement Arguments on the table:

*Endorsement Argumentmaxi-fine*

(1mf) If S endorses Mfine, then S regards Mfine as maximising expected accuracy.

(2mf) If S regards Mfine as rational, then S endorses Mfine.

Therefore:

(Cmf) If S regards Mfine as rational, then S regards Mfine as maximising expected accuracy.

*Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse*

(1dc) If S endorses Mcoarse, then S regards Mcoarse as avoiding accuracy domination.

(2dc) If S regards Mcoarse as rational, then S endorses Mcoarse.

Therefore:

(Cdc) If S regards Mcoarse as rational, then S regards Mcoarse as avoiding accuracy domination.

Let us turn to assess which, if any, of these Endorsement Arguments deliver an account of the truth-connection. To this end, I will examine Horowitz’s two “truth problems” for Permissivism. The first truth problem has it that, in certain scenarios, S will be bound to regard a permissively rational belief-forming method as less truth-conducive than an irrational one (Horowitz 2019: 243). The second truth problem focuses on “acknowledged permissive cases”, that is, cases in which a rational agent can judge that their doxastic attitude is just one of the several permissible ones. Horowitz claims that there is dilemma (Horowitz 2019: 246): either Permissivism accounts for acknowledged permissive cases but foregoes the Endorsement Argument, or *vice versa*. Let us take both problems in turn.

Horowitz’s first truth problem arises from scenarios like the following (Horowitz 2019: 243-4). Start with S1, who endorses Subjective Bayesianism, is in a permissive state and is immodest. Suppose that S1 has to assess S2’s and S3’s credences: S2 complies with Probabilism and Conditionalisation but has very different credences from S1; by contrast, S3’s credences are much closer to S1’s, despite being mildly probabilistically incoherent. Horowitz argues that, in such a case, S1 will regard S3’s credences as more expectedly accurate than S2’s: from the point of view of S1’s credences, the difference in expected accuracy between S1’s credences and S2’s credences is greater than the difference in expected accuracy between S1’s and S3’s. And yet, given that S2 complies with the rational requirements of Subjective Bayesianism whereas S3 does not, it follows S1 will regard the credences held by the irrational S3 as offering a better epistemic bet than the ones held by the rational S2 (given S1’s perspective).

Horowitz maintains that this scenario shows that permissive rationality does not secure a strong connection to the truth, for S3’s irrational credences are regarded by S1 as being more expectedly accurate than S2’s rational ones. To my mind, however, this conclusion is too hasty: we should first specify how methods are type-individuated, and then derive conclusions – by means of the appropriate kind of decision-theoretic reasoning – about the envisaged scenario.

If S1 type-individuates methods finely, then it follows that S1 and S2 endorse distinct belief-forming methods. And yet, Horowitz’s conclusion does require that S1 and S2 endorse the same belief-forming method. Recall that Horowitz has premise (2) of the Endorsement Argument in mind, and that premise says that if one regards a method as rational, then one endorses it. So, the scenario envisaged by Horowitz is meant to show that even if S1 and S2 endorse the same belief-forming method and S1 regards that method as rational, S1 is bound to regard S3’s irrational credence as more truth-conducive than S2’s rational ones since the former are more similar to the credences that maximise expected accuracy than the latter. And yet, if methods are type-individuated finely, from the fact that S1 and S2 begin with different priors it follows that they endorse distinct methods. This shows that Horowitz’s first truth problem can’t target Endorsement Argumentmaxi-fine. Rather, the problem should be constructed by adopting a coarse-grained type-individuation of belief-forming methods. Thus, Horowitz’s first truth problem should target the Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse, to which we now turn.

If S1 type-individuates methods coarsely, S1 no longer assesses belief-forming methods depending on whether the outputs of such methods either maximise expected accuracy or are similar to the maximally expected accurate ones (i.e. S1’s own). Instead, S1 assesses belief-forming methods on the basis of dominance reasoning. I now argue that once S1 does that, they’ll regard S2’s rational credences as more conducive to the truth than S3’s irrational ones. To do so, I need to briefly introduce James M. Joyce (1998, 2009)’s accuracy-based argument in favour of Probabilism. The main gist of Joyce’s argument is the following. Any set of credences that is not probabilistically coherent will be accuracy dominated by an alternative set of credences: if S holds an incoherent set credences C, then there is another set of credences C\* which is guaranteed to have higher epistemic utility, i.e. C\* guaranteed to be closer to the truth than C; and, for any coherent set of credences C\*, there is no alternative set of credences C\*\* (about all and only the same propositions) that is at least as accurate in all possible worlds and more accurate in some such worlds. Deploying dominance reasoning, Joyce notes that it is irrational for S to hold C. Since C is probabilistically incoherent, it follows that probabilistic incoherence is irrational. Following the lead of Joyce, Briggs and Pettigrew (2020) have recently offered an accuracy-dominance argument in favour of Conditionalisation. So, dominance reasoning is at the heart of the accuracy-based argument in favour of Subjective Bayesianism. Importantly, the accuracy-based argument in favour of Subjective Bayesianism does assume that credences are immodest.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The accuracy-based argument in favour of Subjective Bayesianism reveals that S1 is in a position to make the following evaluation of S2’sand S3’s epistemic positions: S3 is doing pretty bad *objectively* (and not only relative to a given probability function), for it is guaranteed that, for any possible world, there’s a set of credences which is more accurate than the ones held by S3. The same does not apply to S2, for S2’s credences are not accuracy dominated: there indeed is no set of credences differing from S2’s that is at least as accurate in all possible worlds and more accurate in some such worlds.

This allows us to see that Horowitz’s scenario fails to undermine the Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse: since S1 regards any set of probabilistically incoherent credences as accuracy dominated and they regard any set of probabilistically coherent credences as non-accuracy dominated, it follows that S1 regards the method Mcoarse followed by S2 as more truth-conducive than the method M\*coarse followed by S3. Given that S2’s credences are rational whereas S3’s are not, the foregoing explains why having rational credences leads to having accurate credences even when evidence is permissive: irrational credences are guaranteed to be more distant from the truth than rational ones. So, Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse allows the Permissivist to vindicate the truth-connection. This completes my examination of Horowitz’s first-truth problem. Let us now turn to the second truth problem.

Let’s assume that Permissivism had better make room for the possibility that a permissive S is able to acknowledge that they are in a permissive situation.[[23]](#footnote-23) Horowitz argues at length (section II.2, 2019) that Permissivism faces a dilemma: either it accounts for this possibility but foregoes the Endorsement Argument, or it retains the Endorsement Argument but falls short of making room for acknowledged permissive cases.

The first step in Horowitz’s argument for the dilemma is the following explanation of acknowledged permissive cases (2019: 246-7). If S’s credence C is rational, then C is the output of the belief-forming method M endorsed by S. Given Immodesty, S should regard C as maximising expected accuracy. However, since S is in a permissive situation, S’s method M does not rationally mandate C. If S is in a position to acknowledge this latter fact, then S is in a position to acknowledge that holding C is rationally permissible, but it is rationally permissible to hold a different credence C\* too.

Given this explanation of acknowledged permissive cases, Horowitz goes on to argue for the dilemma as follows. As noticed above, Horowitz subscribes to the maximisation of expected accuracy conception of regarding a method as truth-conducive. Now, supposing that S holds a credence C in *p* and given that – by stipulation – S is immodest, it follows that S does not endorse M when M yields C\*, where C\* ≠ C. So, Horowitz’s account of acknowledged permissive cases requires foregoing the Endorsement Argument, or so Horowitz thinks.

Stated as it is, however, this dilemma is hard to parse, for the issue of how S type-individuates M is left unspecified. I turn now to show that once we specify that, the dilemma vanishes.

Suppose S type-individuates methods finely: if S endorses Mfine, then S regards Mfine as maximising expected accuracy. Since S is enjoined by Immodesty to regard C as maximising expected accuracy, a credence C\* will have to be regarded as issued by a different belief-forming method M\*fine. And yet, the dilemma arises only if C\* is issued by the same belief-forming method issuing C. Thus, just like Horowitz’s first truth problem can’t target the Endorsement Argumentmaxi-fine, Horowitz’s second truth problem shouldn’t be constructed by taking the Endorsement Argumentmaxi-fine as one of the two horns of the dilemma.

Let us then suppose that S type-individuates methods coarsely. Keep in mind that if S endorses Mcoarse, then S regards Mcoarse as avoiding accuracy domination. Surely S will regard their credence C as avoiding accuracy domination; but this in no way prevents S from recognising that a different credence C\* avoids accuracy domination. So, it follows that S endorses Mcoarse irrespective of which output, C and C\*, of Mcoarse we consider. This puts S in a position to acknowledge that certain scenarios are such that Mcoarse yield more than one perfectly rational doxastic attitude. Thus, once Horowitz’s second truth problem is constructed by targeting the Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse, the Permissivist shouldn’t face any dilemma between Horowitz’s explanation of acknowledged permissive cases and the Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse, for the former is in fact compatible with the latter.

**6 Concluding Discussion**

Looking at both the Endorsement Argumentmaxi-fine and the Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse, I’ve argued that the former is irrelevant to the question of how to explain the truth-connection, whereas the latter succeeds at explaining it. I want now to position the foregoing discussion in the wider dialectic surrounding the Permissivism vs. Impermissivism debate. To begin with, one might observe that the Permissivist account of the truth-connection on offer employs Subjective Bayesianism as a background theory of rationality. Yet, one might worry that the Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse is *committed to* Subjective Bayesianism, and this would be a problem: Subjective Bayesianism is an extreme version of Permissivism, and very few Permissivists would be happy to embrace it. In reply, let me first note that I needed a background theory of permissive rationality to exemplify my pairs of distinctions concerning type-individuations of belief-forming methods and conceptions of truth-conduciveness. Since Subjective Bayesianism is the simplest and best-known formal theory of permissive rationality, this makes its adoption presentationally convenient here. However, we should not mistake presentational convenience for theoretical commitment: while I cannot develop a detailed generalisation of the Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse in the space of a single paper and I do acknowledge that such a generalisation is far from trivial, there’s reason to think that the considerations offered above carry over, *mutatis mutandis*, to at least some less extreme version of Permissivism. Take, for instance, versions of Permissivism that subscribe to chance-credence principles, such as Lewis’s *Principal Principle*, Hall’s *New Principle*, and Ismael’s *Generalised Principal Principle*. Pettigrew (2016: Part II) argues that pursuing accuracy by complying with these principles also allows S to avoid accuracy domination. This ensures that the key move at the heart of the Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse, namely to understand S’s endorsement of a belief-forming method in terms of S’s regarding the method as avoiding accuracy domination, can in principle be extended to such less extreme Permissive theories of rationality. Hence, the Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse is not irremediably wedded to Subjective Bayesianism.

Keeping our focus on the question of the actual constituency for the Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse, one might note that Schoenfield (2019) ⎯the most strenuous defender of Permissivism⎯is friendly to the idea of using expected-accuracy reasoning to establish the value of permissive rationality. If I am correct, however, the previous discussion shows that expected-accuracy reasoning is not a commitment of Schoenfield’s distinctively permissivist insight of there being different belief-forming methods whereby we can reach distinct and equally rational doxastic attitudes. So, I believe that a supporter of the brand of Permissivism defended by Schoenfield should also welcome the Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse.

Finally, and most importantly, there’s reason to think that the Permissivism-*cum*-Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse explanation of the truth-connection is superior to the Impermissivist one offered by Horowitz. Horowitz (2019: 254-5)’s Impermissivist account rests on the idea that rational credences maximise expected accuracy. However, as pointed out by Thorstad (2019: 911), such an explanation might be circular. The problem is this: the Impermissivist explains why holding rational credences is T-valuable (where “T” refers to the truth-connection) by saying that such credences maximise expected accuracy, modulo S’s immodesty. Suppose now we ask why having credences is Z-valuable (where “Z” refers to any property we can predicate of credences): S’s Z-valuable credences also maximise expected accuracy. And yet, this doesn’t *ipso facto* give S a reason to hold Z-valuable credences. Thus, it seems that we are assuming that, and not explaining why, rational credences are valuable.

Fortunately, however, The Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse doesn’t threaten circularity. Note that Immodesty does not guarantee that S’s credences avoid accuracy domination: so, even if S’s immodesty ensures that S’s rational T-valuable credences and S’s Z-valuable credences both maximise expected accuracy, from the fact that S’s Z-valuable credences maximise expected accuracy we can’t conclude that they avoid accuracy domination. By contrast, that conclusion is guaranteed to follow from the rationality of S’s T-valuable credences. Thus, the Endorsement Argumentdomi-coarse offers a non-circular explanation of the truth-connected value of permissive rationality.

The strategy pursued in this paper has two further virtues. First, it enables us to vindicate the truth-connected value of permissive rationality head on (cf. Thorstad 2019). Secondly, it suggests that the central question of which decision-theoretic considerations matter in epistemology should be answered by looking at how we individuate the methods we use to form our doxastic attitudes.

**Acknowledgements**

Many thanks to the members of the LOGOS 2019 Epistemology Reading Group and to Hichem Naar for detailed comments on a previous draft of this paper. Special thanks go to Sven Rosenkranz. Work on this article has received funding from the Spanish Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovacion y Universidades under grant agreements RTI-2018-096225-J-100 and RYC2018-024624-I.

**References**

Briggs, Ray and Pettigrew, Richard (2020) “An Accuracy-Dominance Argument for Conditionalization”, *Noûs* 54(1): 162-181.

Christensen, David (2004) *Putting Logic in Its Place*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Christensen, David (2013) “Epistemic Modesty Defended”, in D. Christensen & J. Lackey (eds.), *The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays*, pp. 77-97, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cohen, Stewart (2013) “A Defense of the (Almost) Equal Weight View”, in D. Christensen & J. Lackey (eds.), *The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays*, pp. 98-117, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Daoust, Marc-Kevin (2017) “Epistemic Uniqueness and the Practical Relevance of Epistemic Practices”, *Philosophia* 45(4): 1721-1733.

DiPaolo, Joshua (2019) “Second Best Epistemology: Fallibility and Normativity”, *Philosophical Studies* 176(8): 2043-2066.

Dogramaci, Sinan (2012) “Reverse Engineering Epistemic Evaluations”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 84: 513-530.

Dogramaci, Sinan and Horowitz, Sophie (2016) “An Argument for Uniqueness About Evidential Support”, *Philosophical Issues* 26: 130-147.

Dogramaci, Sinan (2018) “Rational Credence Through Reasoning”, *Philosophers’ Imprint* 18(11): 1-25.

Greco, Daniel and Hedden Brian (2016) “Uniqueness and Metaepistemology”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 113(8): 365-395.

Horowitz, Sophie (2014) “Immoderately Rational”, *Philosophical Studies* 167: 41-56.

Horowitz, Sophie (2019) “The Truth Problem for Permissivism”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 116(5): 237-262.

Jackson, Elizabeth (2019) “A Defense of Intrapersonal Belief Permissivism”, *Episteme* online first doi: 10.1017/epi.2019.19.

Joyce, M. James (1998) “A Non-Pragmatic Vindication of Probabilism”, *Philosophy of Science* 65: 575-603.

Joyce, M. James (2009) “Accuracy and Coherence: Prospects for an Alethic Epistemology of Partial Belief”, in F. Huber & C. Schmidt-Petri (eds.) *Degrees of Belief*, Springer.

Kopec, Matthew and Titlebaum, Michael (2016) “The Uniqueness Thesis”, *Philosophy Compass* 11(4): 189-200.

Kopec, Matthew and Titlebaum, Michael (2019) “When Rational Reasoners Reason Differently”, in M. Balcerak-Jackson & B. Balcerak-Jackson (eds.) *Reasoning: New Essays on Theoretical and Practical Thinking*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lasonen-Aarnio, Maria (2020) “Enkrasia or Evidentialism? Learning to Love Mismatch”, *Philosophical Studies* 177: 597-632.

Lewis, David (1971) “Immodest Inductive Methods”, *Philosophy of Science* 38: 54-63.

Mayo-Wilson, Conor and Wheeler, Gregory (2016) “Scoring Imprecise Credences: A Mildly Immodest Proposal”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 92(1): 55-78.

Meacham, Christopher (2014) “Impermissive Bayesianism”, *Erkenntnis* 79: 1185-1217.

Pettigrew, Richard (2013) “Epistemic Utility and Norms for Credences”, *Philosophy Compass* 8(10): 897-908.

Pettigrew, Richard (2016) *Accuracy and the Laws of Credence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pettigrew, Richard (2020) “Logical Ignorance and Logical Learning”, *Synthese* online first doi: 10.1007/s11229-020-02699-9.

Schoenfield, Miriam (2019) “Permissivism and the Value of Rationality: A Challenge to the Uniqueness Thesis”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 99(2): 286-297.

Skipper, Mattias and Bjerring, Jens Christian (2020) “Bayesianism for Non-Ideal Agents”, *Erkenntnis* online first doi: 10.1007/s10670-019-00186-3.

Smith, Julia Jael (2020) “Unacknowledged Permissivism”, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* online first doi: 10.1111/papq.12299.

Smithies, Declan (2015) “Ideal Rationality and Logical Omniscience”, *Synthese* 192(9): 2769-2793.

Talbott, William (2008) “Bayesian Epistemology”, in E. N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology-bayesian/>.

Thorstad, David (2019) “Permissive Metaepistemology”, *Mind* 128(511): 907-926.

White, Roger (2005) “Epistemic Permissiveness”, *Philosophical Perspectives* 19: 445-459.

1. See Kopec and Titelbaum (2016) for an overview of the philosophical significance of the Permissivism vs. Impermissivism debate. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I’ll briefly touch on how Impermissivism accounts for the truth-connection below. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See, for instance, Daoust’s (2017) and Thorstad’s (2019) replies to Greco and Hedden’s (2016) idea that rationality ascriptions can be used to identify reliable informants and to plan what to believe in certain circumstances. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Thorstad (2019) proposes two versions of a permissive metepistemology that purport to explain the value of having rational beliefs without appealing to the truth-connection. By contrast, I want here to concede that there is such a thing as the truth-connected value of rationality to then show that Permissivism can vindicate it. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Let me also mention that Kopec and Titelbaum (2019) link permissivism to truth-conduciveness in a different way than the Horowitz-Schoenfield debate, i.e. by focusing on the question of the reliability of one’s methods. I won’t be concerned here with that approach. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For any proposition *p*, credence C, and possible world w, a scoring rule assigns a real number ≥ 0 which measures the *inaccuracy* of holding Con the basis of its proximity to the ideal credence function at w. If *p* is true at w the ideal credence is the 1; if *p* is false, then the ideal credence is 0. The best score achievable is 0, which means the distance from the ideal credence is minimised to 0. There are various scoring rules one can avail oneself of, but it is not my aim here to compare their respective pros and cons. See Pettigrew (2013) for a brief introduction to epistemic decision theory and Pettigrew (2016) for a book-length treatment of a decision-theoretic-based approach to epistemic rationality. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In line with a large body of work on Permissivism and Impermissivism (see Horowitz 2014, 2019, Kopec and Titelbaum 2019, Meacham 2014, Schoenfield 2014, 2019, White 2005), I will be focusing on credences, as opposed to outright belief. I will also follow a recent strand of research in formal epistemology, championed by Jim Joyce (1998) and Richard Pettigrew (2016) and also employed by Horowitz and Schoenfield, which uses the tools of epistemic decision theory to explain what it is for credences to be related to truth. Let us therefore take the relevant “acts” to be the (non-voluntary) adoption of credence functions, and interpret utility functions as functions that take a state of the world and a possible credence and return a measure of the epistemic utility that S attaches to that credence given that state of the world. By identifying epistemic utility with gradational accuracy, it follows that a credence has greater epistemic utility at a world if it has greater accuracy at that world. The gradational accuracy of a credence is measured by a suitable scoring rule. See Pettigrew (2013) for a brief introduction to epistemic decision theory and Pettigrew (2016) for a book-length treatment of a decision-theoretic-based approach to epistemic rationality. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. I formulate the Endorsement Argument differently from Horowitz’s. To my mind, the premise-conclusion formulation I adopt here scores higher in perspicuity than Horowitz’s. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Another assumption of the Horowitz-Schoenfield debate is the focus on *Interpersonal*, as opposed to *Intrapersonal*, Permissivism. According to the former, while rationality does mandate a specific response to any given total body of evidence for each agent, it does not mandate the same response across agents. According to the latter, Permissivism holds for a particular agent S, that is, rationality does not mandate a specific response to any given total body of evidence for each agent. This paper also focuses on Interpersonal Permissivism only. For a defence of Intrapersonal Permissivism see Jackson (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Talbot (2008) for a primer on Bayesian epistemology. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Probabilism tells us that S’s C should cohere with the following axioms: all probabilities are between zero an one; logical truths have probability one; when two propositions *p* and *q* are mutually exclusive, the probability of their disjunction is the sum of their individual probabilities. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Conditionalization tells us that S’s C in *p* at t1 is required to be equal to her initial conditional credence *p*|e at t0, where e is the total evidence S acquires between t0 and t1. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See e.g. Christensen (2004), Smithies (2015), Talbott (2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See e.g. Pettigrew (2020) and Skipper and Bjerring (2020) for different attempts at developing versions of Bayesianism which do not require logical omniscience. Dogramaci (2018), while explicitly rejecting Bayesianism, thinks that “something in the neighbourhood is true” (2018: 21). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I think, but won’t extensively argue here, that other types of decision-theoretic reasoning would be less suitable than maximisation of expected accuracy reasoning and avoidance of accuracy domination reasoning to make sense of the notion of regarding a belief-forming method as truth-conducive. Let me just make an example and consider Maximin reasoning, which is the kind of reasoning performed by subjects who take the best of the worst, as it were. Pettigrew emphasises (2016: 165-7) two features of Maximin reasoning: first, Maximin reasoning works well when the subject is trying to settle their initial credences; secondly, to motivate Maximin reasoning in an epistemic setting it seems that agents must be extremely conservative and always shun error, as James would put it. However, for one thing, since we regard a belief-forming method as truth-conducive both throughout our epistemic lives, and Maximin reasoning is meant to be applied to the earlier stages only, Maximin reasoning would not be well-suited to capture what it is to regard a belief-forming method as truth-conducive after we have settled our initial credences. For another, given how Maximin reasoning is motivated in an epistemic setting, such a reasoning would only capture how extreme conservative subjects regard a belief-forming method as truth-conducive, thereby failing to make sense of how non-conservative subjects regard a belief-forming method as truth-conducive (A symmetrical problem would affect using Maximax reasoning to spell out the notion of regarding a belief-forming method as truth-conducive.) Expected-accuracy reasoning and dominance reasoning do not seem to be saddled with these two problems. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Pettigrew (2016) for an extended discussion of these issues. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Following Lewis (1971: 55), I will always take the relativisation to evidence for granted. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Horowitz ascribes the maximisation of expected accuracy conception to Schoenfield, but what really matters for my purposes is that Horowitz constructs their debate in this way. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. A few clarifications on Immodesty are in order. While Horowitz (2014) offers a full defence of a stronger version of Immodesty (more on this below) and Schoenfield (2014: 201) accepts it in cases where credences are sharp, Immodesty is rejected by some authors (see e.g. Christensen 2013, DiPaolo 2019). Immodesty is also threatened by a more general objection to the idea that inter-level incoherence is a form of irrationality (see e.g. Lasonen-Aarnio 2020). Given the purposes of this paper, I think that it’s dialectically better to concede Immodesty to the opponent than to engage in a sustained dispute about its truth or motivation. Two further remarks on the content of Immodesty. First, Immodesty takes a wide-scope formulation, so S can comply with it also by dropping their credence. However, the cases that I will discuss are such that S does not drop their credence, so this way of being immodest won’t be considered here. Secondly, and importantly, Immodesty should not be confused with what Mayo-Wilson and Wheeler (2016) call “Strict Immodesty”, which enjoins S to regard only their own credences as maximising expected accuracy. Now, despite the fact that Horowitz (2014: 43) has Strict Immodesty in mind, I will build my argument around Immodesty since the latter is less controversial than the former. However, my argument does carry over to Strict Immodesty. I am extremely thankful to an anonymous referee for this journal for urging me to clarify these issues. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Of course, from what I’ve said above it follows that each specific set of credences has to obey Immodesty. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. One might claim that I’ve only argued for the existence of an all-things-considered reason in favour of such a pairing and question that we are allowed to move from such an all-things-considered reason to a “must” claim. Since the aim of this paper is to vindicate the truth-connected value of permissive rationality via the Endorsement Argument, all I need to show is that there’s a plausible version of the Endorsement Argument which doesn’t fall prey to Horowitz’s objections. So, we can replace the “must” claim with something weaker (e.g. “there’s an all things considered reason”) without affecting the conclusion of the argument. I thank an anonymous referee for asking me to clarify this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Joyce (2009: 267) for a remark to this effect. See Pettigrew (2016: chapter II) for a precise formulation of the argument in favour of Probabilism which respects Immodesty. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. While I’ll be granting this assumption for the sake of discussion, I should also emphasise that it is far from sacrosanct. See e.g. Cohen (2013) and Smith (2020) for reasons in favour of *Unacknowledged Permissivism*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)