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# There Are Epistemic Reasons to Compromise

## 1 Introduction

It is undeniable that there are pragmatic reasons to compromise. For example, two political parties may reach a compromise to avoid a civil war or to strengthen the stability of a country. In this case, a compromise is made not for its intrinsic value, but for its external consequences (avoiding civil war, strengthening the stability of a country). However, it is controversial whether there are principled, i.e., nonpragmatic, reasons to compromise. A principled reason to compromise is based on the value of the compromise itself, independently of its external consequences (May 2005, 2013).

Simon May has argued that there are no principled reasons to compromise (May 2005). This view rests on a conceptual observation. Compromise requires disagreement. But when two people have a principled reason to make a particular decision, they are not disagreeing. They may have disagreed before, and after some deliberation they may abandon their original position and come to an agreement. However, if they have changed their minds, then the decision ultimately reached does not count as a compromise. As Rostbøll and Scavenius clearly put it: “how can one, at one and the same time, both be sincerely committed to a certain moral position *and* have moral, as opposed to merely strategic, reasons to accept that it be compromised?” (2018: 7).

If May is right that the reasons to compromise are always pragmatic, it would imply that there is nothing intrinsically attractive about compromise. Compromises should only be made out of necessity, or to avoid a worse situation. Several philosophers and political scientists, however, have resisted May’s analysis and defended the idea that there are principled reasons to compromise. Weinstock (2013), for example, argues that there are three kinds of principled reasons to compromise: (i) epistemic reasons, (ii) reasons based on democratic principles (such as inclusion and reciprocity), and (iii) reasons based on moral respect for members of the democratic community.<sup>1</sup> All three categories are worth examining. But epistemic reasons seem to me the most intriguing, because they are inde-

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1 See also Rowland (2021: 147–153), who distinguishes between pragmatic, epistemic, and relationship-based reasons to compromise.

pendent of any notion of justice, fairness, or equity. In this chapter, therefore, I will focus on epistemic reasons to compromise.

My goal is to show that there are epistemic reasons to compromise, and hence that May's objection can be refuted. I begin with a conceptual clarification of the notion of compromise (section 2). I then return to the distinction between pragmatic and principled reasons to compromise (section 3). In the two following sections, I present attempts by Kappel (section 4) and Weinstock (section 5) to demonstrate the existence of epistemic reasons to compromise. However, it will be shown that these analyses are not completely immune to May's objection. I then suggest two different solutions to address this objection. The first is to distinguish between one's belief and one's personal take (a notion introduced by Worsnip 2023) (section 6). The second is to accept the possibility of a mismatch between one's belief and one's judgment (section 7).

## 2 Clarificatory Remarks on Compromises

Several definitions of compromise have been offered in the literature. For example, it has been suggested that a compromise is “an agreement in which all sides sacrifice something in order to improve on the status quo from their perspective, and in which the sacrifices are at least partly determined by the other sides” (Gutmann and Thompson 2012: 10), “an agreement in which all sides make concessions in order to be able to reach a collective decision, and in which the concessions are motivated by the presence of disagreement” (Rostbøll and Scavenius 2018: 4), or “a technique of regulating social conflicts, which mitigates a confrontation between colliding claims by means of an arrangement in which all conflict parties accept that parts of their claims are not realized, without giving up on their claims as such” (research group “Cultures of Compromise”). For the sake of my analysis, I will emphasize three aspects that are at the heart of any definition of compromise. Indeed, every compromise involves at least (i) an initial disagreement, (ii) an agreement which is eventually found, and (iii) a mutual sacrifice. It should be noted that the intention is not to suggest that these three elements are sufficient to define compromise. However, they do help distinguish the concept of compromise from related concepts, especially the concept of “consensus” (which supposes no mutual sacrifice).

In what follows, I would like to examine these three aspects in turn. Before proceeding, a simple example might help. Suppose Paul and Mary disagree about which restaurant to go to for dinner. Paul wants to go to *Le Cardinal*, but Mary prefers *Le Bleu Café*. Paul knows he will never convince Mary to go to *Le Cardinal*

because she thinks it is too noisy. Mary knows she will never convince Paul to go to *Le Bleu Café* because he thinks that the food is not fancy enough. After some discussion, they decide to compromise. They will eat at *La Fleur de Lys*, a restaurant they both like (although Paul prefers *Le Cardinal* and Mary prefers *Le Bleu Café*).

As previously stated, the first aspect of compromise is an initial disagreement. If Paul and Mary wanted to go to the same restaurant, compromise would not be possible. Note that, except in the tricky case of multiple personality disorder, disagreement requires at least two people or two groups of people. An interesting question concerns the nature of the disagreement. Should we interpret it as a conflict between two preferences (Paul prefers to go to *Le Cardinal*, while Mary prefers to go to *Le Bleu Café*), between two desires (Paul wants to eat at *Le Cardinal*, while Mary wants to eat at *Le Bleu Café*) or between two beliefs (Paul believes that *Le Cardinal* is the best option, while Mary believes that *Le Bleu Café* is the best option)? It is not certain that these three possibilities are mutually exclusive. In any case, for my purposes, I do not need to identify the nature of the disagreement.

Second, a compromise requires that an agreement is eventually found by the protagonists. In the mentioned restaurant example, a compromise can be identified between Paul and Mary because they find a solution, namely, they decide to go to *La Fleur de Lys*. If the disagreement had caused Paul and Mary to argue and they had ended up staying at home, being angry and frustrated, we would not say that they compromised. It is not the fact that they stay at home that is relevant here (after all, the *decision* to stay home could be the result of a compromise), but rather the fact that no collective decision is made. A successful compromise leads the protagonists to an agreement about what to do.

The fact that a compromise involves a collective decision has a corollary: the two people (or groups of people) who disagree must be able to decide, or at least they must believe that they are able to decide. Paul and Mary can compromise because they can decide which restaurant to go to. In contrast, suppose two friends disagree about a political issue, such as the reinstatement of the death penalty. Since they have no special political power, they cannot make a decision about the death penalty. Therefore, they cannot compromise, unless they believe (falsely) that they are in a position to decide. Imagine that the two friends actually live in a madhouse and sincerely believe that they are the masters of the country. In this situation, it seems possible for the two friends to compromise on the death penalty (for example, they can decide to reinstate the death penalty for very specific and rare cases).

It is important to emphasize that, in any compromise, once the agreement is reached, the initial disagreement does not disappear. Even after they have de-

cided to go to *La Fleur de Lys*, Paul still prefers to go to *Le Cardinal* and Mary still prefers to go to *Le Bleu Café*. There is a flavor of paradox here. How can two people disagree and agree at the same time? The puzzle is easy to solve once it is understood that agreement and disagreement are not on the same level. As mentioned earlier, disagreement can be interpreted as a conflict between two preferences, desires, or beliefs. Thus, disagreement is located at the level of the mental attitudes of the protagonists. These conflicting mental attitudes remain even after a decision has been made. Agreement, then, is located at the level of a collective decision made in spite of (or because of) disagreement.

This point leads to the third component: a compromise implies a mutual sacrifice (or concession) from the protagonists. The weight of the sacrifice corresponds to the gap between each compromiser's preference and the decision made. For Paul, it is a sacrifice (or a concession) to go to *La Fleur de Lys* because he would have preferred to go to *Le Cardinal*. In other words, in the absence of a disagreement with Mary, Paul would have gone to *Le Cardinal*. For Mary, it is a sacrifice (or a concession) to go to *La Fleur de Lys* because she would have preferred to go to *Le Bleu Café*.

The notion of sacrifice (or concession) helps to clarify the difference between compromise and consensus. Suppose that, after a discussion, Mary succeeds in convincing Paul that *Le Cardinal* is too noisy, and Paul succeeds in convincing Mary that the food at *Le Bleu Café* is not fancy enough. Therefore, Paul and Mary have changed their initial preferences. Now they both think that going to *La Fleur de Lys* is the best thing to do (or, to put it another way, they both prefer going to *La Fleur de Lys*, or they both want to go to *La Fleur de Lys*). In this new scenario, Paul and Mary have not reached a compromise: we will say that they have reached a consensus. Reaching a consensus after an initial disagreement requires that one of the decision makers – or both – changes their mind.<sup>2</sup> This is why when two people reach consensus, the initial disagreement disappears. It is also why reaching consensus does not involve any concession or sacrifice. In a compromise, on the other hand, the initial disagreement remains, and the collectively accepted decision implies a sacrifice.

Finally, the ontological status of a compromise needs to be clarified. To begin with, I follow Weinstock's (2013: 554–555) distinction between “compromising,” which denotes the process of reaching an agreement (namely, deliberation), and “compromise,” which denotes the result of that process. Thus, successful compromising (the process) leads to compromise (the result). Yet there is still an

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the fact that one of the deciders (or both) changes their mind is not a sufficient condition for reaching consensus. The protagonists must ultimately have the *same* preference.

ambiguity, as the compromise (the result) can be identified with a given action (the action of going to *La Fleur de Lys*), a given decision (the decision to go to *La Fleur de Lys*), or the content of the decision, namely a given option (the option to go to *La Fleur de Lys*).<sup>3</sup> It is clearly not an action. Paul and Mary reached a compromise at the moment they decided to go to *La Fleur de Lys*, that is, before they physically entered the restaurant.<sup>4</sup> I leave aside the question of whether a compromise is identical to the decision itself or rather to the content of the decision.

### 3 Reasons to Compromise

In this section, I will discuss the reasons why we compromise. To ease the discussion, I will set aside my restaurant scenario and consider a political example. Suppose the government of a country intends to legislate on assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia. Members of the government must decide whether assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia should be legal. For simplicity, let us assume that the decision is in the hands of only two people: the president and the prime minister (so the role of the other members of the government and the parliament will be put aside). For simplicity, let us imagine a caricature scenario in which the president and the prime minister have radically opposing views on the issue. The president defends a *permissive policy* (she wants assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia to be not only legal but also easily accessible), and the prime minister defends a *rigid policy* (he wants assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia to be completely illegal, with no exceptions). Suppose the president and the prime minister reach a compromise: they adopt a *moderate policy* that makes assisted suicide legal under very restrictive conditions. The details of the moderate policy are not of interest to us. Rather, the objective of this analysis is to examine the kinds of reasons the president and the prime minister might have for reaching such a compromise.

Let us begin with pragmatic reasons.<sup>5</sup> Suppose that the president has the political power to impose her position, i.e., to introduce a permissive policy even though the prime minister opposes it. However, doing so would have disastrous

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<sup>3</sup> I thank the *Thermos* Reading Group for this distinction, as well as for many other clarifications that helped improve the chapter.

<sup>4</sup> The fact that a compromise is not an action also explains why the lunatics in my earlier example can compromise on the death penalty. They have made a decision, even though they cannot implement their decision.

<sup>5</sup> The terms “instrumental reason” (May 2013) and “strategic reason” (Weinstock 2013) are synonymous with “pragmatic reason.”

consequences: the prime minister would leave the government and an important part of the population would blame the president's lack of collegiality. Therefore, the president risks not being re-elected. This consideration gives the president a pragmatic reason to compromise. A reason to compromise is pragmatic when it is not related to the value of the compromise itself, but rather to the value of some external consequence of the compromise. As May puts it, a pragmatic reason for compromise is "a reason for compromise, not in itself, but only insofar as it is contingently connected with a logically independent consideration" (May 2005: 320). In the example, the president compromises for a reason that has nothing to do with the value of the compromise itself: she simply wants to be re-elected.

May (2005) contrasts pragmatic reasons to compromise with principled reasons to compromise.<sup>6</sup> A principled reason to compromise is based on the value of the compromise itself, not on the value of its external consequences. As May puts it, a principled reason for compromise is "a reason for compromise in itself, aside from any impediment to other goals it may incidentally generate" (May 2005: 320). In my scenario, we would say that the president has a principled reason to compromise if that reason is based on the value of the compromise itself, independent of any external considerations such as the goal of being reelected.

The existence of principled reasons to compromise is controversial. Indeed, May (2005) has argued that there are no principled reasons to compromise. If the president had a principled reason to compromise, it would mean that she saw the moderate policy as the best policy. In other words, it would mean that the president had changed her mind: she has abandoned her original position of defending the permissive policy. As a result, adopting the moderate policy would not be a sacrifice for her and therefore would not count as a compromise. As Weinstock puts it, "it does not count as a compromise when you change your mind" (Weinstock 2013: 540). According to May, there are principled reasons to change one's mind, but there are no principled reasons to compromise.

However, some philosophers and political scientists have refuted May's objection and defended the idea that there are principled reasons to compromise. In particular, Kappel (2018) and Weinstock (2013) claim that there are epistemic reasons to compromise. In short, epistemic reasons to compromise are based on intellectual humility.<sup>7</sup> One has an epistemic reason to compromise when one admits that, given the complexity of the issue, it is not impossible that one is wrong. For

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<sup>6</sup> May (2013) uses the expressions "noninstrumental reason" and "principled reason" as synonyms.

<sup>7</sup> By "epistemic reason," philosophers usually mean *a reason to believe* that a proposition is true, as opposed to *a reason to do something* (practical reason). But it is not in this sense that the term is used in the present debate. In fact, an epistemic reason to compromise is a reason to *do* some-

example, if the president is intellectually humble and recognizes that the prime minister is a smart and thoughtful person, she may consider that the prime minister might be right after all. Thus, the compromise reduces the risk of being wrong. In this case, the president has a reason to compromise which is based on the value of the compromise itself, independent of any external considerations such as the goal of being reelected. Epistemic reasons to compromise are a subtype of principled reasons to compromise.

In sections four and five, Kappel's (2018) and Weinstock's (2013) views according to which the president and the prime minister may have an epistemic reason to compromise will be examined. I will argue that Kappel's and Weinstock's theories are promising, but not immune to May's objection. In sections six and seven, two different solutions will be put forward for making the idea that the president and the prime minister have an epistemic reason to compromise seem plausible.

## 4 Kappel's Defense of Epistemic Reasons to Compromise

Kappel (2018) has tried to show against May (2005) that we sometimes have an epistemic reason to compromise. Kappel illustrates his view with the example of a moral disagreement over abortion policy. However, I will try to summarize Kappel's analysis using my example of a disagreement between the president and the prime minister over assisted suicide policy. To recapitulate, the scenario is as follows: the president defends a permissive policy, and the prime minister defends a rigid policy. To explain Kappel's claim, it is necessary to make two refinements to my scenario: first, it is essential to make explicit the moral commitments underlying the political positions of the president and the prime minister, and second, it is crucial to introduce the idea that the president and the prime minister may have *pro tanto* reasons to compromise. I will present these two refinements in turn.

Suppose the president has the following moral commitment: she believes that every rational and autonomous person has the right to conduct their life as they wish, including the right to choose to end their life. Denying the right to choose is incompatible with the autonomy of the person. Let us call this moral commitment the “A-principle” (where “A” stands for “autonomy”). The prime minister, on the

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thing. The reason is epistemic not because it is a reason to believe, but because it is a reason based on an epistemic consideration.

other hand, has a different moral commitment. He believes that human life is sacred, and therefore no one has the right to voluntarily terminate it. To put it in a more secular way, he believes that human life is so precious that no one has the right to end it voluntarily. Assisted suicide, according to the prime minister, is contrary to the dignity of human life. Let us call this moral commitment the “D-principle” (where “D” stands for “dignity”).

The president and the prime minister support two different options (the permissive policy and the rigid policy) and have two different underlying moral commitments (the A-principle and the D-principle). However, according to Kappel, they may have a *pro tanto* reason to compromise, namely a “factor or consideration that count[s] in favor of compromise” (Kappel 2018: 78) which may be outweighed by other considerations. To illustrate this point, suppose that the prime minister recognizes how difficult and painful it is to live with an advanced disease, especially if the disease cannot be cured. He does not deny the importance of this problem, which gives him a *pro tanto* reason to compromise. However, he feels that this concern is outweighed by the D-principle. Therefore, all things considered, he defends a rigid policy. Similarly, the president accepts that human life has intrinsic value and that, other things being equal, it is better to preserve a life than to end it. This consideration gives her a *pro tanto* reason to compromise. However, she believes that this concern is outweighed by the A-principle. Therefore, on balance, she defends the permissive policy.

With my scenario now refined, it is relevant to examine the reasons, according to Kappel, why the president and the prime minister might have an epistemic reason to compromise after some deliberation. Kappel’s argument should be divided into two steps. First, he suggests that the president and the prime minister will reduce their confidence in their moral convictions (A-principle and D-principle). Second, he argues that the president’s and the prime minister’s reasons to compromise are no longer outweighed by their moral convictions. The following section will examine these two steps in turn. Then I will object that the decision made in this scenario is not really a compromise but rather a consensus.

First, Kappel suggests that the president and the prime minister will reduce their confidence in their moral convictions (A-principle and D-principle). This is due to the intellectual humility of the president and of the prime minister, who recognize each other as epistemic peers. Indeed, the president acknowledges that the prime minister is “as thoughtful and reflective” as she is. Consequently, the president concludes that, after all, the A-principle may be wrong, and the D-principle may be right (Kappel 2018: 84–85). Similarly, the prime minister recognizes the president as his epistemic peer and concludes that, after all, the D-principle may be wrong, and the A-principle may be right. Note that the president still believes in the A-principle and the prime minister still believes in

the D-principle. However, they both have less confidence in their beliefs than they did before the deliberation.<sup>8</sup>

Second, Kappel argues that the president's and the prime minister's reasons to compromise are no longer outweighed by their moral convictions. Recall that the president accepts that human life has intrinsic value. This consideration gives her a pro tanto reason to compromise. However, the A-principle gives her a pro tanto reason not to compromise. So far, the pro tanto reason to compromise was outweighed by the pro tanto reason not to compromise. Since the president is less confident in the A-principle, she will, however, give less weight to the pro tanto reason not to compromise. This is what Kappel calls the "Reduced Weight Principle" (Kappel 2018: 88). As a result, the pro tanto reason to compromise is no longer outweighed by the pro tanto reason not to compromise. Thus, the president is now inclined to compromise by adopting the moderate policy.

The same thing happens symmetrically with the position of the prime minister. Recall that the prime minister recognizes how painful it is to live with an advanced disease. This consideration gives him a pro tanto reason to compromise. However, the D-principle gives him a pro tanto reason not to compromise. So far, the pro tanto reason to compromise has been outweighed by the pro tanto reason not to compromise. But since the prime minister is less confident in the D-principle, he gives less weight to the pro tanto reason not to compromise. As a result, the pro tanto reason to compromise is no longer outweighed by the pro tanto reason not to compromise. Thus, the prime minister is now inclined to compromise by adopting the moderate policy.

Kappel claims that in this situation, the two decision-makers compromise not for a pragmatic reason, but for an epistemic reason, i.e., a reason based on an epistemic consideration. In effect, the president and the prime minister have reduced their confidence in their moral convictions because they recognize each other as epistemic peers. Kappel's theory can be challenged from at least three perspectives. First, it is uncertain whether disagreement with an epistemic peer is a reason to reduce confidence in one's own belief (see for instance Wedgwood 2010). Second, Kappel's "Reduced Weight Principle" is questionable. It is not clear that reducing confidence in one's moral commitment necessarily entails reducing the weight of the corresponding pro tanto reason in a practical deliberation. However, these two discussions are left aside here and the focus is shifted on a third

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<sup>8</sup> Thus, Kappel adopts a version of the *conciliatory view*, i.e., the idea that when two epistemic peers realize that they disagree about whether  $p$ , they should lower their confidence about whether  $p$ . The rival of the conciliatory view is the *Steadfast view*. For an overview of the literature on the epistemic significance of peer disagreement, see Rowland 2021: 85–101 and Frances and Matheson 2019: section 5.

criticism, namely that the president and the prime minister are not really compromising in the scenario described above.

In fact, an objection to Kappel's claim can be easily formulated in the following way. Kappel admits that the president and the prime minister change their minds as they deliberate. At first, they thought that the permissive policy and the rigid policy (respectively) were the best options. Later however, they realized that the moderate policy was the best option. This change of mind may be due to some sophisticated epistemic consideration, but it still is a change of mind. Moreover, since they both eventually agree that the moderate policy is the best choice, it would be incorrect to say that they are compromising; rather, they are reaching a consensus. This is precisely the objection that May (2005) raises to the existence of epistemic reasons to compromise (and, more generally, to the existence of principled compromises).

Kappel's response to this objection is as follows. He claims that one cannot deny that something is a compromise just because it involves a change of mind. He suggests that compromise does not require that the deliberators' positions remain unchanged, but rather that the moral commitments underlying the deliberators' positions remain unchanged (Kappel 2018: 90). In the mentioned scenario, the president maintains her moral commitment: she still believes that the A-principle is true, even if she gives it less weight. Similarly, the prime minister maintains his moral commitment: he still believes that the D-principle is true, even if he attaches less weight to that principle. In this sense, the decision they make is in tension with their moral commitments, and thus, according to Kappel, it is a compromise.

Kappel's answer does not seem convincing to me. His new criterion for compromise is too flexible. The word "consensus" seems more appropriate than the word "compromise" to describe the decision made by the president and the prime minister. In the second section, three characteristics of a compromise were identified: (i) an initial disagreement, (ii) an agreement which is eventually found, and (iii) a mutual sacrifice. In the scenario under consideration, the initial disagreement disappears once the compromise is found, and it is not clear that there is a mutual sacrifice, as will be explained now.

First, compromise requires that the initial disagreement between the two deliberators persists even after they agreed on a decision. In other words, the decision cannot be considered as the best option by the deliberators. It is true that in the scenario the president and the prime minister have two conflicting moral commitments. However, they both ultimately consider the moderate policy to be the best option. Thus, the initial disagreement has disappeared, and it is not a compromise.

Second, compromise requires mutual sacrifice on the part of the deliberators. Kappel claims that this requirement is met in his analysis, as explained in the following quote (to adapt the explanation to the scenario, replace “Adele” with “the president,” “principle P” with “A-principle” and “Y” with “moderate policy”).

It is often suggested that compromises are by nature painful; a compromise essentially requires acquiescing to a policy that one continues to find morally inferior. Again, the account preserves this feature, at least partially. When she compromises, Adele may still consider moral principle P to be correct, though she [is] less rationally confident in P and accordingly assigns lesser relative weight to the moral factors identified by P. But insofar as Adele still commits to P, there is a sense in which she can regret adopting Y, while still thinking that Y is all things considered best. (Kappel 2018: 90–91)

In conclusion, according to Kappel, the compromise involves mutual sacrifice (it is “painful”) because the decision conflicts with the moral commitments of the deliberators. However, this claim is questionable. It is important to recall that the reason why the president and the prime minister accept the moderate policy is precisely because they are less confident in their moral commitments and give less weight to the corresponding *pro tanto* reason. If confidence in moral commitments is reduced to the point that the moderate position appears to be the best option, it is not clear whether it still can be classified as a sacrifice.

However, I think there is something right in Kappel’s diagnosis. There is a sense in which the moderate position represents a sacrifice for the president and the prime minister. Furthermore, despite their agreement, there is also a sense in which the president and the prime minister still disagree. However, it seems to me that the way Kappel draws the scenario does not allow these points to be clearly captured. The goal of the sixth and seventh sections is to present the scenario in a way that makes the disagreement and the sacrifice clear. Before proceeding, I will present Weinstock’s attempt to show that epistemic compromises are possible.

## 5 Weinstock’s Defense of Epistemic Reasons to Compromise

Weinstock has also attempted to defend the existence of epistemic reasons to compromise. His theory is based on the observation that moral and political questions are complex in the sense that “many considerations, values, and moral arguments are relevant to their elucidation” (Weinstock 2013: 545). This is obviously true of the question whether assisted suicide should be legal. A debate on this

issue will raise many moral, prudential, legal, and medical considerations. In addition, an understanding of the experiences of people potentially affected by the policy (typically people suffering from a terminal illness) is relevant to the debate. The complexity of the issue is such that no one can understand every aspect of it clearly and completely on their own. As Weinstock says: “moral reasoners with limited epistemic resources will in virtue of their finitude be unable to cognitively, imaginatively or motivationally embrace all of the considerations relevant to the full ethical accounting of a difficult moral issue” (Weinstock 2013: 546).

The fact that political issues are complex allows Weinstock to claim that there is an epistemic reason to compromise. In short, the idea is that a compromise between the positions at play is more likely to reflect the complexity of the issue because it incorporates considerations from different perspectives. As Weinstock puts it, “positions that attempt to incorporate aspects of the positions that parties initially hold in a debate are not going to be affected by finitude to the same degree. Though fallible and revisable, they are more likely to be morally adequate than pre-integration positions” (Weinstock 2013: 546). To return to the mentioned example, the idea might be explained as follows. On one hand, the permissive policy reflects only the president’s considerations on the issue (considerations that are accurate but not exhaustive). On the other, the rigid policy reflects only the prime minister’s considerations on the issue (considerations that are accurate but not exhaustive). However, the moderate policy (the compromise) more accurately reflects the complexity of the issue as it integrates multiple moral concerns.

So far, the theory seems to be subject to May’s objection. Indeed, if the president and the prime minister adopt the moderate policy because they believe that this policy is the most likely to reflect the complexity of the issue, then one would say that they have reached a consensus rather than a compromise. In other words, in this scenario, the president and the prime minister change their minds for an epistemic reason. Weinstock replies that it is of course possible for deliberators to change their minds and reach a consensus. But he adds that there is another possible scenario, which he describes as follows:

A deliberator may still be skeptical about the considerations that his opponent brings to bear, or may not have had sufficient time fully to reflect and to arrive at a final consideration about the appropriateness of these considerations, or of the weight that should be accorded to them. But in recognition of his own epistemic finitude, and also of the trust that he ascribes to the party with whom he is deliberating, he may feel it best to assent to a compromise position. (Weinstock 2013: 547)

In this scenario, the deliberators do not really change their minds. In fact, they are “still skeptical” and feel that they need more time to think carefully. In other

words, although Weinstock does not use this terminology, the deliberators are suspending their judgment. They are no longer sure which policy is best.

It is useful to recapitulate the analysis in the light of the provided example. Initially, the president defends a permissive policy and the prime minister defends a rigid policy. After some deliberation, both realize that the issue is more complex than they thought. They suspect a moderate policy is more likely to reflect the complexity of the issue by incorporating several moral considerations. However, they remain uncertain as to whether the moderate policy is the best option. They are “still skeptical,” feeling that they need more time to think carefully about it. In other words, they suspend their judgment. However, since they have to decide immediately (it is assumed that they do not have time to deliberate further), they decide to adopt the moderate policy.

It remains unclear whether the president and the prime minister are actually compromising in this scenario. To address May’s objection, Weinstock insists that the deliberators have not changed their minds, because they are “still skeptical.” However, this answer is questionable. It is important to recall that compromise necessarily involves disagreement (which remains despite the decision) and mutual sacrifice. But since both the president and the prime minister suspend their judgments, it is difficult to see in what sense the initial disagreement remains and in what sense there is mutual sacrifice. Nevertheless, the issue is not as simple as it may appear and deserves to be examined a little more deeply. In the seventh section, I will defend that, depending on one’s conception of belief and judgment, the president and the prime minister do compromise in the scenario.

## 6 First Solution: Beliefs vs. Personal Takes

Here is a quick summary of the puzzle that is being attempted to be solved here. To defend the idea that there are epistemic reasons to compromise, it is necessary to address May’s objection by showing that the president and the prime minister have an epistemic reason to *compromise*, and not just to *change their minds*. If the deliberators change their minds and eventually agree, then a consensus (not a compromise) has been reached. Indeed, the initial disagreement has disappeared and there is no mutual sacrifice. Kappel and Weinstock have found promising ways to meet this challenge. Both have tried to make sense of the idea that the opponents have not completely changed their minds and therefore the disagreement remains. Kappel (2018) suggests that deliberators may not have changed their minds about their moral commitments. In my example, the president still believes in the A-principle and the prime minister in the D-principle.

They decided to compromise just because they attach less weight to their moral commitments. Weinstock (2013) points out that deliberators may not really change their minds, but rather have some doubts about their initial positions. However, as I have argued in sections 4 and 5, it is not obvious that disagreement persists, and that mutual sacrifice is at play in Kappel's and Weinstock's stories.

This section and the next further explore the idea that it is possible for the two deliberators to change their minds *and* compromise at the same time. My strategy is to suggest that, even if the president changes her mind during the deliberation with the prime minister, her initial position remains in a certain sense. Similarly, even if the prime minister changes his mind during the deliberation, his pre-deliberation position still seems right to him in a certain sense. In other words, the idea is to distinguish between two different epistemic attitudes: one that is revised during the deliberation, and one that is not. At first, this proposal might seem odd. However, two promising theories from the field of epistemic literature offer insights that help to make sense of it. The first is Worsnip's (2023) idea that we should distinguish between one's belief and one's personal take. The second is the idea that a mismatch between one's belief and one's judgment is possible. In this section and in the next, I will explore these two ideas in turn, and I will show how they facilitate an understanding of the epistemic reasons to compromise.

Let us begin with Worsnip's distinction between one's belief and one's personal take. Assume that the fact that an epistemic peer disagrees with you about a moral or a political proposition  $p$  gives you a reason to reduce your confidence in  $p$ .<sup>9</sup> For example, the president initially believes that the permissive policy is the best option, but the fact that the prime minister disagrees with her gives her a reason to reduce her confidence in her belief. It is important to understand that the president is not directly persuaded by the prime minister's arguments. The president reduces her confidence in her belief for a second-order reason (i.e., the fact that an epistemic peer disagrees with her) and not for a first-order reason (i.e., an argument of her opponent).

What happens when the president turns her thoughts away from the disagreement with the prime minister, and focuses only on first-order reasons, namely arguments for and against assisted suicide? In that case, Worsnip suggests, the permissive policy still seems perfectly right to the president.

In cases of (pure) moderation by disagreement-as-such, although your credence in your original view goes down, there is a sense in which your view still seems right to you, just as much as it ever did. Specifically, when you reflect just on the arguments and (first-order)

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<sup>9</sup> See footnote 8.

evidence pertaining to the matter in question, they still strike you as supporting your original view. (Worsnip 2023: 349)

Worsnip suggests that two different epistemic attitudes should be distinguished. The first is the president's attitude when she considers her disagreement with the prime minister. In this case, she holds a revised belief (she is not as confident as she was before the deliberation). The second is the president's attitude when she brackets her disagreement and focuses directly on first-order arguments. In this case, her original position still seems correct to her. The first attitude is a *belief*, and the second attitude is what Worsnip calls a *personal take*.

It is important to note that the relation between one's personal take and one's belief should not be understood diachronically. One's personal take is not simply a belief that one uses to hold, as the author makes clear in the following quote.

One's personal take can loosely be understood as one's "pre-disagreement" belief or credence. The crucial difference, however, is that we no longer interpret this temporally – in terms of the belief or credence that one historically had before encountering disagreement – but rather in terms of the belief or credence that seems right to one when one brackets the fact of disagreement-as-such, and focuses solely on the arguments and (first-order) evidence at hand. (Worsnip 2023: 350)

Thus, a personal take is an epistemic attitude that one still has even after one realizes that one disagrees with an epistemic peer.

Let us return to my example. The initial situation is as follows: the president believes that the A-principle is true and that the permissive policy is the best option, while the prime minister believes that the D-principle is true and that the rigid policy is the best option. Because they are intellectually humble and recognize each other as epistemic peers, they both reduce their confidence in their initial positions. As a result, they both suspend their judgments and decide to adopt a moderate policy. Is this a compromise or just a change of mind? If we use the distinction proposed by Worsnip, we can show that this is a compromise because the three elements of compromise, as outlined in the first section, are present: disagreement, agreement, and mutual sacrifice.

In fact, the disagreement remains, not at the level of beliefs (they both suspend their judgments) but at the level of personal takes. The permissive policy seems right to the president and the rigid policy seems right to the prime minister: they have conflicting personal takes. Furthermore, there is also an agreement reached, namely to adopt the moderate policy. Finally, there is a mutual sacrifice, as the president and the prime minister are acting against their personal takes. In other words, they give up defending a policy that seems right to them every time they focus on first-order reasons. In my scenario, therefore, the president and the

prime minister compromise. The reason they do so is not a pragmatic consideration, but an epistemic one: after all, they decide to compromise because they disagree with an epistemic peer.

## 7 Second Solution: Beliefs vs. Judgments

In this section, I set aside Worsnip's distinction between belief and personal take. I will consider the possibility of a mismatch between belief and judgment. The idea is to say that the president suspends her *judgment* about which policy is the best option, even though she still *believes* that the permissive policy is the best option. To make sense of this mismatch, I need to explain Meylan's theory of the suspension of judgment.<sup>10</sup>

What is the nature of a suspension of judgment? Meylan (2024) contrasts two different answers to this question. According to the first answer, suspension of judgment is a basic doxastic state, like belief and disbelief. When one suspends one's judgment about  $p$ , one does not believe that  $p$ , nor that  $\neg p$ . Meylan denies that suspension of judgment is a *doxastic state*; rather, she claims that it is a *mental action*. She thus defends an alternative answer, according to which to suspend judgment about  $p$  is to resist an inclination to judge that  $p$  is true. In other words, a suspension of judgment is a mental action that consists in refraining from judging that a given proposition is true. Meylan (2024) calls this view the resistive account of suspension of judgment.

To understand this resistive account, it is important to emphasize the distinction between a belief and a judgment. A belief is a (cognitive) mental state, whereas a judgment is a (cognitive) mental action (Meylan 2024; Cassam 2010; Shah and Velleman 2005). More specifically, a belief is a "mental state of representing a proposition as true" (Shah and Velleman 2005: 503), while a judgment is "the act of occurrently putting a proposition forward in one's mind as true" (Cassam 2010: 81–82). Normally, judgments and beliefs coincide. It is, however, possible that one's judgment does not coincide with one's belief, although this is not a common occurrence. The reason for this discrepancy is that beliefs are not under our direct rational control, while judgments are (Cassam 2010; Meylan 2024). Suppose that one believes that  $p$  is true, even though one has good reasons

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<sup>10</sup> Schwitzgebel (2021: 359) also argues that a mismatch between one's moral belief and one's moral judgment is possible. Due to space limitations, I will not consider his theory here, however.

to doubt that  $p$  is true. In this situation, one should suspend one's judgment about  $p$ . In other words, one should resist the inclination to judge  $p$  to be true.

Descartes' methodical doubt provides a good illustration of this case. Descartes decides to doubt every opinion that he has always accepted as true. He even considers as doubtful considerations that seem obviously true at first glance, such as the idea "that [he is] now here, sitting by the fire, wrapped in a warm winter gown, handling this paper, and suchlike" (Descartes 2008 [1641]: 13–14). After all, he may be dreaming, and so these considerations may be wrong. It seems to me, however, that even if one can consider, on a very intellectual and rational level, that these kinds of considerations might be wrong, one cannot prevent oneself from believing that they are true. Remember that a belief is a mental state, and as such, is not under our direct rational control. Thus, as an intellectual exercise, I can consider the hypothesis that I might be dreaming, be manipulated by an evil genius, or be a brain in a vat. Yet I cannot eliminate the belief that I am really sitting at my desk in front of my computer. So if we rephrase Descartes' methodical doubts in the language of the resistive account, we will say the following. Descartes still *believes* that he is sitting by the fire, wrapped in a warm winter gown and handling a paper, but he suspends his judgment about this proposition. In other words, Descartes resists his inclination to *judge* that he is sitting by the fire, and so on.

I suggest the domain of moral and political beliefs also offers a good illustration of the resistive account. This is due to the specific nature of moral and political beliefs, which are arguably tougher to revise than other beliefs. Schwitzgebel (2010, 2021) has emphasized that it takes time and work to revise moral beliefs because they "reflect our values, our commitments, our enduring ways of viewing the world" (Schwitzgebel 2010: 547). Moral commitments play a role in our identity (in the way we understand ourselves, our activities and projects) so it is not easy to abandon them.<sup>11</sup> If, after deliberation, one (slowly) begins to see things differently, it is not surprising that one's former moral belief does not disappear immediately: one must first *resist* one's belief by suspending one's judgment. This is because, again, judgments are under our direct rational control, contrary to beliefs (especially moral and political ones) that are not.

Beliefs are generally analyzed as dispositions, and judgments as manifestations of those dispositions.<sup>12</sup> I think that this general picture can make the resistive account plausible. Arguably, a good way to eliminate a disposition is to block its manifestation. Consider a boy who is afraid of dogs. Every time he sees one, he

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11 See also Pianalto (2011: 382) about the notion of moral convictions.

12 See for example Schwitzgebel 2023: section 2.1.

gets nervous and runs away. Fear of dogs is a disposition whose manifestations are episodes of nervousness and running away. If the boy wants to eliminate his disposition, a reliable strategy would be to block its manifestations: every time he sees a dog, he should resist his inclination to run away and try to stay calm and breathe deeply. If he does this regularly, his fear may diminish or even disappear. This example provides an interesting analogy for understanding the resistive account of the suspension of judgment. The person who believes  $p$  but suspends his judgment about  $p$  is somehow similar to the person who is trying to overcome his fear, i.e., he is blocking the manifestations of his disposition. Hopefully, he will eventually eliminate his belief, but the process may take time and may fail.

In what follows, I want to return to my political example. My aim is to show that if the resistive account of the suspension of judgment is correct, then the president and the prime minister have an epistemic reason to compromise. Recall that the scenario is as follows. Because she believes that the A-principle is true, the president defends the permissive policy (she wants euthanasia and assisted suicide to be not only legal but also easily accessible). On the other hand, because he believes that the D-principle is true, the prime minister defends the rigid policy (he wants euthanasia and assisted suicide to be completely illegal with no exceptions). After some deliberation, the president and the prime minister realize that the issue is more complex than they thought. In the end, they suspend their judgment about their moral commitments and, therefore, about the best policy. Since they have to make a decision immediately, they decide to adopt a moderate policy. The question we have to answer is whether this is a compromise or not.

It should be recalled that the president still *believes* that the A-principle is true and that the permissive policy is the best option. Similarly, the prime minister still *believes* that the D-principle is true and that the rigid policy is the best option. They suspend their judgment despite their remaining belief. As explained earlier, it is assumed that there is a mismatch between the deliberator's beliefs and judgments. By suspending her judgment, the president resists her inclination to judge that the A-principle is true and that the permissive policy is the best option. Similarly, by suspending his judgment, the prime minister resists his inclination to judge that the D-principle is true and that the rigid policy is the best option. In other words, they refrain from making judgments that are consistent with their beliefs.

Everything is now in place to show that epistemic reasons to compromise do exist. The main objection to the existence of epistemic reasons to compromise is that if the deliberators have an epistemic reason to agree on a moderate position, then the process would be a consensus rather than a compromise. In my scenario,

however, the president and the prime minister are making a compromise, not reaching a consensus. We have the three ingredients of compromise presented in the second section: disagreement, agreement, and mutual sacrifice.

There is an initial disagreement since the president and the prime minister defend two different policies. Furthermore, an agreement is reached, namely to adopt the moderate policy. Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize that the disagreement does not disappear once the decision is made. In fact, the president still believes that the permissive policy would be better, and the prime minister still believes that the rigid policy would be better. Despite the suspension of judgment, the disagreement remains at the level of beliefs. This fact also explains in what sense there is a mutual sacrifice. The president and the prime minister must resist their moral convictions. The decision they make is contrary to their moral convictions and therefore to the judgment they are inclined to make. This resistance is a sacrifice. In my scenario, therefore, the president and the prime minister make a compromise and their reason for making it is not a pragmatic consideration, but an epistemic one.

## 8 Conclusion

Following Kappel and Weinstock, I suggest that an epistemic reason to compromise requires intellectual humility. The following two lines of thought typically reflect epistemic reasons to compromise based on intellectual humility: “The issue is complex, and because I am cognitively limited, I cannot fully understand every aspect of it. A compromise is more likely to reflect the complexity of the issue” and “My opponent is as smart as I am and has thought about the issue as much as I have. Therefore, I could be wrong, and she could be right, and it is wiser to take a step in her direction.”

However, to show that there are epistemic reasons to compromise, we still need to address May’s objection, specifically, we need to show that intellectual humility provides one with an epistemic reason to compromise and not just to change one’s mind. I argued that the possibility of a mismatch between two different epistemic attitudes makes it possible to answer May’s objection. In my scenario, the president and the prime minister initially disagree about which policy to pursue. After some deliberation, they eventually change their minds and collectively decide to adopt the moderate policy. Nevertheless, even if they do so, their original positions still remain in some sense intact. There are two ways to capture this idea. The first is to say that even if they revise their beliefs, they still have

conflicting personal takes (section 6). The second is to say that even if they suspend their judgments, they still hold conflicting beliefs (section 7). These two solutions explain in what sense the disagreement remains, and thus in what sense the deliberators are compromising (rather than reaching a consensus). Finally, I would like to point out that, while I find both solutions plausible, the second seems more convincing. Indeed, this interpretation more accurately reflects the idea that compromising for an epistemic reason requires an effort, i.e., the effort of resisting one's belief.

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