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THE ETHICS OF DISBELIEF

Eleanor Gordon-Smith

A DISSERTATION

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY

OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Advisers: Sarah McGrath, Gideon Rosen

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Abstract

Early on in Descartes' *Meditations*, the meditator assures himself that his program of far-reaching doubt cannot go too terribly wrong. He writes, "no danger or error will result from my plan, and I cannot possibly go too far in my distrustful attitude. This is because the task now in hand does not involve action, but merely the acquisition of knowledge" (1641/1986, 15).

Like the meditator, philosophers and epistemologists have often thought of doubt or withholding belief as relatively safe options. It's widely thought that withholding belief does not carry serious costs, or at minimum, that its costs are systematically less serious than those associated with false belief. My aim in this dissertation is to trouble this picture. I argue that not only can doubt carry serious costs, it can carry *moral* costs. Consequently, we can have moral reason against doubt or withholding belief. This is a fairly radical result. However, I suggest, it turns out to already be in the background of much accepted moral theory.

I examine how the possibility of moral reasons against doubt might affect our existing epistemic commitments. I ask this question in three separate domains: the normativity of belief, our models of doxastic deliberation, and the permissibility of re-opening inquiry about an existing belief. In each case I show that attending to the possibility of morally deleterious doubt can help improve our epistemic theorizing, in some cases exposing independent reason to throw out some widely held views.

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Preface

Early on in Descartes' *Meditations*, the meditator assures himself that his program of far-reaching doubt cannot go too terribly wrong. Having devoted himself "sincerely and without reservation to the general demolition of my opinions" he notes, almost as a talisman for the journey, that "no danger or error will result from my plan, and I cannot possibly go too far in my distrustful attitude. This is because the task now in hand does not involve action, but merely the acquisition of knowledge" (1641/1986, 15).

Like the meditator, philosophers often think of doubt (or withholding belief, I'll use these terms interchangeably) as a relatively safe option. William James famously noted that believing truth and shunning error "are not two ways of stating an identical commandment; they are two separable laws" (1896, 18). Faced with a choice between which we should prioritise, philosophers have tended to recommend shunning error.[1] Of course, as James notes, withholding belief about p is just as good a way to miss out on truth as falsely believing ~p. Nonetheless, philosophers often treat the state of withholding belief as comparatively safe harbour.

Sometimes this is because we deny that missing out on belief can constitute an error, as Isaac Levi does:

> No error can be injected by [suspending judgement]. To import error, information needs to be added. But in [suspending judgement], information is never added. To the contrary, it is removed. (Levi 1991, 118)

[1] For instance, we tend to characterize epistemic norms in terms of what we should not believe rather than what we should. Anyone who thinks epistemology is normative thinks there are norms about what we should not believe. For just one example; Timothy Williamson's influential Knowledge and its Limits (2000) defends a norm of belief according to which, if one does not know that p, one must not believe that p. Others defend a norm according to which S may believe p only if p is true. Examples include in Whiting (2010), Boghossian (2008), Gibbard (2005), Littlejohn (2012), Shah and Velleman (2005), and Wedgwood (2002). However, there is less defence of the idea that sometimes one must believe that p, that is, one must not withhold belief. Feldman and Conee (1985) is a notable exception.

Other times, even if we allow that withholding belief can be an error, we treat it as the least-bad error available. It's standard to distinguish between Type I error — holding a false belief — and Type II error — lacking a true belief. It's often assumed that the costs of Type II error are systematically less serious than those associated with Type I error. For instance, Mark Schroeder holds that it's reasonable to expect that while "some costs of type-1 error are epistemic reasons to withhold, no costs of type-2 error are ever reasons against withholding" (2012, 279) and that it is a "plausible assumption that it is always true that $Err2 < Err1_p$ for all p" (2012, 280).[2] This view suffuses the rest of Schroeder's work on pragmatic and moral encroachment — and indeed, that literature more broadly — where the moral or practical costs of believing p are taken to provide reasons against holding that belief, but the moral or practical costs of *not* believing p are not taken to provide parallel reason to believe p instead. I criticize this view at length in Chapter Two.

What explains this tendency to see lacking belief as a relatively cost-free state?

I think it has to be at least partly influenced by the way doubt trails positive cultural connotations. The ability to tolerate doubt — even, to deliberately cultivate it — has often been seen as an intellectual virtue, to be contrasted with a kind of pigheaded certainty. For instance, in a 1952 television interview, Bertrand Russell cautioned; "I shouldn't wish people dogmatically to believe any philosophy, not even mine … we ought always entertain our opinions with some degree of doubt". Spinoza, in *On the Improvement of Human Understanding,* distinguishes between those who genuinely doubt and those whose "mind does not really hesitate", where "the cure of the latter belongs to inquiries concerning obstinacy and its cure" (1677/1955, 511/29). Reflecting on the terrorist attacks on London on the 7th of July 2005, writer and columnist John O'Farrell wrote of the suicide bombers, "absolute certainty is the most dangerous mindset in politics. They were so very wrong, and yet must have been so very sure they were right. What a precious political virtue is doubt. How civilized doubt is" (2017, 133, quoted in Cassam 2021, 1). Is it true that what holds most of us back from performing these

[2] Other views in this neighbourhood would include Clifford (1879) and Fritz (2017).

acts is the epistemic humility to doubt our own convictions, and not the equally strong certainty that it would be evil to blow up a train? At the political level, too, the freedom to doubt God or the King or the legitimacy of the state is a mark of freedom and fairness, its absence, a sign of fanaticism and despotism. Oliver Cromwell famously pleads to the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it *possible* you might be mistaken" (1650, 2).

The attitude that doubt is comparatively safe may also have been influenced by the thought that belief, alone among doxastic states, bears a constitutive link to action. The meditator hints at this when he says his plan "does not involve action". In explaining what's distinctive about believing p (as opposed to having a certain credence that p, or assuming or hypothesizing that p), a number of epistemologists say that belief that p carries a characteristic license to *act* as though p.[3] Alex Worsnip calls this the "reliance-involving" conception of belief (2021, 535). With this conception of belief in the background, we might expect that belief alone is vulnerable to the costs of action, and so belief is a fundamentally riskier state than withholding belief. As Jonathan Ichikawa puts it, "it is Dr. McCoy, not Mr. Spock, whom we more easily imagine making rash or impulsive moves" (forthcoming, 16). Of course, once we bring that argument into the light, it turns out to be a little flimsy. Nobody thinks that not acting is necessarily without cost. Nor does anything in a reliance-involving conception of belief tell us to expect that withholding belief will be costless, that its costs will always be less than the costs of belief, or that the costs of inaction will as a rule be less than the costs of action.

A final diagnosis might be that we sometimes see doubt as a tool that is useful in the hunt for knowledge, such that if we're interested in thinkers getting knowledge, we should play it pretty free with the rules about when thinkers can doubt. It's a funny feature of knowledge that those who are the most reverent about it often claim to have the least of it. If you're being solemn about truth, you'll be alive to the possibility that

[3] Representative views might include Ganson (2008), and Fantl and McGrath (2002), see also references in Worsnip (2021, 535). Hawthorne and Stanley (2008) defend the biconditional version of a knowledge-action link, such that it is appropriate to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting if and only if S know that p. Likewise, nothing in this suggests that *not* acting — the upshot of withholding belief — will be cost-free.

you don't have it — you'll double check things, doubt them, be slow to resolve inquiry, or take your own beliefs out of circulation now and then to rigorously challenge them. This way of understanding doubt sees it as ideally transient and instrumentally useful. I'll return to the distinction between doubt as tool and doubt as a settled attitude in Chapter One.

On this kind of view, even if lacking belief *can* come with danger or error, it might make sense to prefer those costs to the costs associated with belief. At least doubt comes with the chance of getting to epistemically firmer ground. A number of accounts see doubt in this way. The point of the meditator's journey is to find a way *back* to a set of beliefs, only this time to have reassurance that they are certain; "the eventual result of this doubt is to make it impossible for us to have any further doubts about what we subsequently discover to be true" (1641/1986, 12). Similarly, Francis Bacon argues "the reconstruction of scientific knowledge must be preceded by a provisional doubt" (Williams 1998, 123). Jane Friedman writes that "knowers and justified believers can [suspend judgement to] double-check on the thing they know or justifiably believe … without doing anything epistemically wrong" (2019, 90). For Peirce, it is constitutive of doubt that it is part of the hunt for truth. Doubt is "an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief" (1877/1997, 13). If we think of doubt in this way, it makes sense that we'd be cautious about regulating it too heavily. We'll want it to be permissible to doubt in a wide range of circumstances, because we'll want thinkers to be able to get access to what doubt can provide.

Whatever the diagnosis, contemporary epistemology has tended to tacitly agree with the meditator that withholding belief is a state from which "no danger or error will result" — or at minimum, that its dangers and errors are more tolerable than those associated with belief.

This tendency is not without its critics. As noted, James famously points out that it can be as big a deviation from truth to miss out on true beliefs as to wind up having false ones. Famous anti-skeptical arguments such as those from Wittgenstein (1972)

and Moore (1939) also hold that doubt can be inappropriate: lacking sufficient grounds, or too theoretically expensive. These arguments focus on the way doubt can cause *epistemic* problems. The locus of their criticism is what we will fail to believe or know when we stay in the suspended animation of withholding belief.[4]

This dissertation proceeds from the observation that doubt can go wrong in a different way: doubt can be *morally* corrosive.

To lack the belief p means that p is not in circulation for us. We can't rely on it in inference, or confidently act on p, or treat p as a fixed point from which we can expand our knowledge, and we won't name p in a list of the things we consider true. Depending on the content of p, that can have huge moral upshots.

One is that it can seriously degrade our relationships with others. It's been noted that our moral relations with others go better when we think of them in certain ways or think certain things about them, for instance, that they are persons, that that fact makes them morally considerable as such, that they are likely to tell the truth, or are capable of knowing things.[5] Less explored is the plausible flip side, that to *lack* certain beliefs is to imperil our ability to do right by others. I make this argument at greater length in Chapters One and Two.

Similar considerations might apply to our moral relationship with ourselves. Plausibly, self-respect involves having certain beliefs about ourselves, such as: that our life has value, that we are potential sources of knowledge, or that we have the right to make claims of others (Foley 2001, Telfer 1968). If Kant is right that there are duties of self respect, plausibly lacking these beliefs imperils our ability to live up that moral task.

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[4] See Ichikawa, forthcoming, for extended defence of this criticism.

[5] For instance, Marušić and White (2019) hold that believing another person to be inferior on the basis of race or gender is insulting and disrespectful even if that belief never manifests in behaviour; Blum holds that "respect for other persons is inconsistent with certain kinds of beliefs about them" (2004, 262); Raz holds "we respect people as people by believing there are limitations on the way one may impact on persons, limitations derived from the fact that they are persons" (2001, 134); and Adams holds "it is morally important, in typical cases, to believe that other people's lives are worth living" (1995, 78).

Lacking particular beliefs may also endanger our ability to complete our moral projects; it may make us perform badly as moral agents. Moral motivation and moral follow-through are shored up by the ability to believe things like "doing the right thing here and now might make a difference to the abject state of the world," or "my actions can affect how others behave" (Adams 1995, Niebuhr 1992, Chignell 2020). The corollary is that to lack these beliefs might imperil our ability to follow through with the actions that we judge are morally worthwhile.

The goal of this dissertation is to take seriously the possibility that withholding belief can be morally deleterious, and in turn, that we can have moral reasons against it.

This sounds like a wildly radical proposal. But one of my goals throughout is to show that something like the idea of morally injurious doubt is already humming around in the background of a lot of accepted philosophy. I've just mentioned how important certain beliefs are to our ability to complete important moral tasks. I'm by no means the first person to notice this. On the significance of belief to moral action, arguments of this style can be found in Guerrero (2021), Adams (1995) and Buchak (2021).[6] Kant, who thought the edicts of morality were discoverable from reason alone, nonetheless worried about the way that "prolonged experience of injustice — of a world-history in which the wicked prosper and virtue seems to make no difference — can chip away at our resolve" (Chignell 2020, 227). Hints at the significance of certain beliefs to self-respect appear in Velleman (1999); (2008) and Paul and Morton (2018a); (2018b). On the importance of certain beliefs to our interactions with others, studies of testimony and feminism have long emphasized the importance of certain beliefs to interpersonal

[6] Consider in particular the following passage from Buchak:

> Assuming we act on what we believe, it is sometimes advantageous to be committed to act on a true claim even in the face of doubts, since certain projects require action over an extended time. Moral projects are like this. Helping to alleviate poverty in a particular community, solving some social problem, and working towards a cure for some illness each require work over time, and this work is usually based on an uncertain claim —a claim which is the object of considerable disagreement—about whether this particular devotion of time and resources will be effective. Again, if it is in fact effective, then putting time and resources in steadily is better than varying them. Belief helps, in that it allows one to keep one's will steady. (2021, 19)

equality (Fricker 2007, Langton 2009). What I want to do is explore the photonegative. It seems natural enough to note the moral value of certain beliefs. I want to ask about the moral damage of certain doubts.

I'll also ask how moral reasons *against withholding belief* might clash with our existing epistemic norms, or our norms and models of inquiry and deliberation.

Since plausibly the opposite of doubt is belief, moral reasons against withholding would seem to be moral reasons for belief. However, a number of epistemologists have been at pains to avoid this result — even those who defend quite a significant role for moral considerations in determining what we should believe are often careful to stress that this need not entail positing moral reasons for belief.[7] The fear is that, if there *are* moral reasons for belief, they could diverge from our epistemic reasons, and morality might instruct a thinker to believe what the evidence alone would not allow. This seems like an unwelcome result; "wouldn't morality lose something important if the search for the *summum bonum* makes us incompetent in the search for the truth?" (Tenenbaum 2015, 80).

Further, if there are moral reasons against doubting certain propositions, how could thinkers ever *use* them? Belief is widely thought to be a non-voluntary state,[8] such that I can't stop doubting something just because I have moral reasons to, any more than I can reason to the conclusion that p by thinking about how morally useful it would be to believe p. This threatens to make moral reasons against doubt fundamentally unactionable — a bad fate for any aspiring reason. David Enoch and Levi Spectre have recently suggested there's something Moorean about thinkers even trying to use moral considerations in deliberation about what to believe: note how odd it sounds to

[7] "[I agree] that the only kind of epistemic reason in favor of any belief is evidence for the content of that belief" (Schroeder 2018, 118); "The constitutive reasons [for belief], i.e. the evidence … settle which particular belief we should hold" (Basu and Schroder, 2018, 12). "The view we defend is consistent with denying that there are practical or ethical reasons for belief … [we are not] going so far as to deny that our (nonfoundational) beliefs should be held solely on the basis of the evidence that supports them" (Paul and Morton, 2018b, 178; 190).

[8] For overview see McHugh (2012), Williams (1973), Alston (1988).

say "well, clearly the evidence shows [p], and epistemically this is what I should believe. Still, I refuse to do so, on moral grounds (2022, 11).

This dissertation tries to show that in fact, morally injurious doubt is a pretty plausible thing. It explores the possibility that this could yield moral reason *against* doubt, and examines how this result would sit with our existing norms of belief, deliberation and inquiry. In some cases, we will find a clash. In some cases we will also find independent reason to throw out existing epistemic orthodoxy.

Each chapter focuses on one localized application of the possibility that morality could frown on us for withholding belief. The first focuses on norms of belief, the second on our understanding of doxastic deliberation, and the third on norms of inquiry. They can be read as standalone papers or together.

1. Icky Inquiry: Backtracking on Existing Beliefs in Morally Laden Cases.

For many cases of what I'll call "morally laden" beliefs — that is, beliefs with moral content, or non-moral beliefs with high moral stakes — morality can tell us not to re-open inquiry, even when the norms of inquiry say that re-opening would be permitted. If you hold an existing settled belief that Nazis are evil, for instance, that domestic violence is wrong, or that it's wrong to hurt puppies for fun, it seems morally objectionable to pivot to treating these as open questions. I begin by getting clearer on the form of inquiry I call "backtracking inquiry," in which a thinker goes from believing an answer to a given question to considering that question open. Through a series of ordinary cases, I show that it's relatively easy to get zetetic license to backtrack; not even very well credentialed existing belief rules out the permissibility of backtracking inquiry. I then turn to a series of cases that are the morally-laden analogues of these ordinary cases, in which morality seems to say that thinkers should *not* backtrack. There seems to be an asymmetry between when the zetetic norms say we can re-open a question and when morality says we can.[9] This is a puzzling result! Inquiry can make our beliefs *better*. It can deliver knowledge, justification,

[9] Following Friedman (2020) I use the term "zetetic" for the norms of inquiry.

understanding, greater coherence or higher credence. Why wouldn't morality be excited by the prospect that we'd get these epistemic advantages in the cases that really matter? Weirder still, these epistemic improvements often travel with moral advantage. Thinkers who understand *why* their morally laden beliefs are true, or who have knowledge, justification, or coherence, are widely thought to be in a better moral position than if they simply had true beliefs. Why would morality frown on re-opening inquiry when the moral value of the post-inquiry belief can exceed that of the current belief? I give an explanation in terms of the moral value of tenacity and the moral wrongs of risk imposition. Among other things, this explanation confirms the appearance that there can be clashes between the zetetic and the moral norms. Since the zetetic norms are themselves epistemic, the case of backtracking inquiry yields a new argument that there can be bonafide clashes between the epistemic and the moral.

2. Can Moral Encroachment be Asymmetrical?

According to a recent popular proposal I call 'asymmetrical moral encroachment', the moral costs of believing p can provide moral reason against believing p. This phenomenon is one-way, however: moral considerations only ever push us *away* from holding morally objectionable beliefs and towards suspense of judgement, never towards holding more morally emollient beliefs. I argue that this view is not viable. Either there is symmetrical moral encroachment or none at all. This is because asymmetrical moral encroachment fails to account for the possibility of wrongful doubt. Through a series of cases and parity principles I show that doubt can wrong if any doxastic state can. Once we allow that beliefs can wrong, we should also allow that withholding belief can wrong. Anyone who thinks we have moral reason to avoid wrongful beliefs should agree we have moral reason to avoid wrongful withholding. But moral reason to avoid withholding just is moral reason in favour of belief, so there is no easy way to constrain morality's influence on belief to a prohibition on insulting beliefs. This generates two revisionary results. First, it's not possible to hold that morality only exerts one-way pressure on belief. Second, it's not possible for the defender of asymmetrical moral encroachment to maintain the core commitments of the view while maintaining, as many do, that evidence is the only reason for belief.

3. Surprise! Deliberation Does Not Vindicate the Evidentialist.

In Chapter Two I turn to the question of how the moral upshots of believing (or not believing) p could possibly weigh in deliberation about whether p, when at the moment it's widely thought they can't. Pragmatists and evidentialists alike have agreed that *only evidence about p* is psychologically able to feature in deliberation about whether p: even Pascal did not think the considerations of the wager could be efficacious in reasoning about whether God actually exists. Consequently, one major challenge for defenders of moral or practical reasons for belief is to explain how such reasons could possibly *work*. I'll argue that in fact, all sides of the debate should deny that only evidence can feature in doxastic deliberation. I model how practical and moral considerations can legitimately feature within deliberation about whether p is true. Two fairly radical upshots. "Transparency" — the phenomenon that deliberation about whether one should believe p is entirely exhausted by deliberation about whether p — turns out to be a non sequitur for reasons for belief, contra a number of widespread and plausible-seeming arguments. Second, moral or practical considerations can be psychologically efficacious after all. I sketch how the evidentialist could modify their position to better capture the spirit of their view, and outline a new way forward for the pragmatist-evidentialist dispute, that centres the question of when thinkers should transition from withholding about p to believing p.

Less known than Descartes' meditator is Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus, a hapless fictional would-be philosopher who takes seriously the injunction that "philosophy begins in doubt" (1844/1985, 133). Johannes sets off in the meditator's footsteps to demolish everything he thought he knew.[10] Through this journey, he becomes the opposite of the Humean skeptic, whose doubts disappear once he steps outside the philosophy classroom. For poor old Johannes, the doubts can't be got rid of. So starts his spiral into abjection and misery: "Johannes does what we are told to do — he actually doubts everything. He suffers through all the pain of doing that, becomes cunning, almost acquires a bad conscience. When he has gone as far in that direction as he can go and wants to come back, he cannot do so… Now he despairs, his life is

[10] Climacus' tale is published posthumously from unfinished works.

wasted, his youth is spent in these deliberations. Life does not acquire any meaning for him". Doubt "has gripped him so profoundly that rescue is perhaps impossible" (ibid., 113).

Climacus personifies Kierkegaard's attitude toward doubt; that in certain circumstances, doubt could present an ethical problem. In this dissertation I try to take that suggestion seriously and examine what it would do to orthodox commitments in contemporary epistemology. The idea that withholding belief could have serious costs — much less moral ones — has received surprisingly little philosophical treatment. I hope to show that, seen through a moral lens, doubt may not be so danger-free after all.

Icky Inquiry: Backtracking on Existing Beliefs in Morally Laden Cases.

Abstract: I identify and give a theory of the kind of inquiry I call "backtracking inquiry", in which a thinker goes from believing an answer to a given question, to considering that question open. Through a series of ordinary cases, I show that it's relatively easy to get zetetic license to backtrack. Not even very well credentialed existing belief rules out the permissibility of backtracking inquiry. I then turn to a series of cases that are what I'll call "morally laden" analogues of these ordinary cases, which involve beliefs with moral content or ordinary beliefs with high moral stakes. In those cases, even when the thinker's zetetic situation is identical to the opening cases it seems morality can say they should not start a backtracking inquiry. This is a puzzling result! Inquiry can make our beliefs *better*. It can deliver knowledge, justification, understanding, greater coherence or higher credence. Why wouldn't morality be excited by the prospect that we'd get these epistemic advantages in the cases that really matter? Weirder still, these epistemic improvements often travel with moral advantage. Thinkers who understand *why* their morally laden beliefs are true, or who have knowledge, justification, or coherence, are widely thought to be in a better moral position than if they simply had true beliefs. Why would morality frown on re-opening inquiry when the moral value of the post-inquiry belief can exceed that of the current belief? I give an explanation in terms of the morality of risk imposition. Among other things, the explanation confirms the appearance that there can be clashes between the zetetic and the moral norms, and therefore clashes between the moral and epistemic.

In an idle moment making breakfast, you realise you've long believed the dials on toasters correspond to time, not intensity. You also realise you also have no idea where you got this belief. What should you do? In many cases, we react to this discovery by re-opening inquiry: "Hang on, *do* toaster dials correspond to time?" I'll call this kind of inquiry **backtracking inquiry**. You began in a state of settled belief about an answer to some question, encountered some new factor, and respond by suspending judgement about your existing belief so as to re-investigate the question. All kinds of things can prompt backtracking inquiry. We do it in response to peer disagreement, new evidence, new stakes, new debunking stories, source amnesia (as in the toaster case), and a variety of other factors I'll discuss throughout this paper. Backtracking is a permissible response in most such cases.

Now consider a moral analogue. In an idle moment reading the newspaper, you realise you've long believed capital punishment is wrong. You also realise you have no idea

where you got this belief. Can you react in the same way, by re-opening inquiry? That is, can your response be to re-open the question of whether capital punishment *is* wrong?

For many cases of what I'll call "morally laden" beliefs — that is, beliefs with moral content, or non-moral beliefs with high moral stakes — it seems morality can tell us not to re-open inquiry, even when the norms of inquiry say that re-opening would be permitted. If your existing belief was that Nazis are evil, for instance, that domestic violence is wrong, or that it's wrong to hurt animals for fun, it seems morality objects to you shifting to treat these as open questions, even in the presence of an otherwise acceptable reason to embark on backtracking inquiry. Despite having zetetic license to inquire, it seems morality would prefer you to tenaciously hold to your belief. This presents a problem for thinkers confronted with reason to backtrack on their existing morally laden beliefs: should they follow their moral or zetetic permissions?

It is also a theoretically puzzling result, since as I'll show, re-opening inquiry can put our beliefs on better footing both epistemically and morally. Why would morality tell us to avoid that result?

My aim in this paper is to notice and explain the asymmetry between the moral and zetetic verdicts about when we may re-open a question. I'll begin by getting clearer on the structure of backtracking inquiry**,** in which a thinker goes from believing an answer to a given question to considering that question open. Through a series of ordinary cases, I'll show that it's relatively easy to get zetetic license to backtrack; not even very well credentialed existing belief rules out the permissibility of backtracking inquiry. In Part II I'll turn to a series of cases that are the morally-laden analogues of these ordinary cases. There, morality seems to say that thinkers should not backtrack on their existing beliefs, even though they have the same reasons for inquiry as the original thinker. That is, there can be clashes between the zetetic and the moral norms on whether to reconsider a question; the zetetic norms can say "you may inquire," when the moral norms say, "don't inquire". I'll suggest this phenomenon indicates there is distinct moral value not only to holding true morally-laden beliefs, but to holding them

tenaciously. This is bad news, because the norms of inquiry are epistemic, so our cases yield a new argument that there can be bonafide clashes between the epistemic and the moral, something a number of philosophers have worked hard to deny.

In section III, I'll ask why this could possibly be the case. It's surprising that morality would ask us to keep morally important questions closed, because inquiry can *improve* our beliefs. It can deliver knowledge, justification, understanding, greater coherence or higher credence. Even more puzzlingly, in morally laden cases, these epistemic improvements can come with moral advantage too; we do better as moral agents when our morally laden beliefs are on surer footing. So why would morality frown on us for re-opening inquiry, when inquiry can get us into a *morally* better position? I consider and reject some candidate explanations and offer my own risk-based account. Morality can prefer us to remain in a suboptimal moral position, rather than to seek improvement, if the path between the two states involves taking significant risk of wronging others. This principle suggests some guidance to thinkers wondering whether to re-open some morally laden question; as thinkers we should be sensitive to the moral risks of even temporarily rescinding our morally laden beliefs.

I. Some Preliminaries

Let me start with some preliminaries about inquiry more broadly before moving to the particular case of backtracking inquiry. I'll be working in a full-belief framework that posits both belief and credence, though as we'll see inquiry bears only a loose relationship to credence.

The kind of inquiry I focus on, **backtracking inquiry,** has received relatively little treatment on its own,[11] so I'll spend a reasonable amount of time in section II getting clear on the contours of this kind of inquiry and the question of when it is an epistemically good move. We'll first plug a bit of a hole in the literature, by developing

[11] A notable exception is Friedman (2019).

a straight-ahead epistemic account of backtracking inquiry before moving to the moral analogue.

Throughout, I'll follow Friedman (2013, 2017, 2019, 2020) in thinking that inquiry is not just a matter of being uncertain about the answer to a given question q. Instead, inquiry involves taking an attitude toward the question – a stance of having it "on the agenda" by having the goal of figuring it out, being sensitive to new evidence, or being disposed to take steps that will find some. For instance, I am currently uncertain about whether actuarial businesses in Calgary qualify for tax breaks, but since the answer doesn't matter to me and I'll take no steps to find it out, I am not an inquirer about that question. To inquire into some question q is to treat the question as *open*.

As a corollary, I'll take it that inquiry involves suspending judgement. Because inquiry involves setting out to *get* the answer to q, one should not take oneself to already have q's answer. That is, I'll endorse an

> **Ignorance Norm:** if S has a full belief in an answer to q at t, S ought not to inquire into a question q at t.[12]

Support for the ignorance norm is both conceptual and strategic. On the conceptual side, Friedman (2017, 2019) has pointed out that there is something deeply Moorean about inquiry simultaneous with full belief. Sentences like "p won the election, but I'm wondering, who won the election?" sound awful (Friedman 2017, 309), and the detective who traipses around the murder scene bagging evidence all while believing that he himself committed the crime does not seem to be a genuine inquirer into the question "who did it?" (Friedman 2019, 300-303). On the strategic side, if you want to investigate whether some hypothesis h is the right answer to q, the best place from which to do that is neutral with respect to the truth of h. If we believe h *while* investigating whether h is true, we will compromise our investigation; evidence for ~h will have to strike us as misleading, since by our current lights ~h is false. "[A] proposal cannot be given a hearing without begging the question against if [it] is taken to be

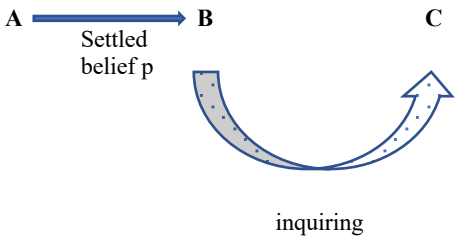
[12] For defence and discussion see Friedman (2017), Whitcomb (2017), van Elswyck and Sapir (2021).

false. Consequently, the inquiring agent needs to modify his current state of full belief so that the new hypothesis becomes a serious possibility" (Levi 1991, 118).[13]

Trying to figure out the right answer to q thus seems to mean not simultaneously believing any of q's answers.

I'm going to focus on what I'll call **backtracking inquiry.** Let backtracking inquiry be the following kind of case. S starts out believing one of q's possible answers, p. Something changes in her situation to make her re-open inquiry, and in order to conduct that inquiry she suspends judgement about p. For instance, I believe the train leaves at 3pm. You tell me "No, it goes at 2pm". I treat your testimony as counter-evidence and react by re-opening the question "when does the train go?". In this period I believe neither your answer nor mine, and set out to try to figure out the answer (I search online, telephone the station).

Backtracking inquiry can be distinguished from blank-slate inquiry, in which a thinker starts out with no beliefs about q's answer but sets out to get some. In backtracking inquiry, a thinker removes an existing belief. Here's a little diagram to see how it works:



At A, a thinker believes an answer to q, p. Her attitude to q is that it's closed. At B, something changes to make her re-open the question. She suspends judgement about q's answers (including p), and embarks on tests and checks and investigations to re-

[13] Descartes, too, invokes the importance of suspension for the proper evaluation of a hypothesis, both throughout the *Meditations* and in his accompanying Dedicatory letter to the Sorbonne. For instance, apologising for the length and complexity of his proofs, he nonetheless asks his reader to suspend their existing beliefs for the purpose of evaluating those proofs, since "they require a mind which is completely free from preconceived opinions" (1641 S5/1996, 5).

establish the answer to q. If her inquiry goes well, at C she returns to a settled answer about q, which might mean reinstating the original belief p.

One important thing to note is that I'll be thinking of backtracking inquiry as something we can *decide* to do. Descartes' *Meditations,* for instance, is a canonical example of backtracking inquiry. The meditator devotes himself "sincerely and without reservation to the general demolition of my opinions" (1641/1996, 12). It's clear that this program of winding-back is deliberate. He writes about having put it off until he was confident enough of his ability to conduct the inquiry well; about using "the will" to reject existing beliefs, and about "resolving" to embark on the inquiry (15).

This process of deciding to backtrack seems common to everyday cases as well, whatever other dissimilarities there are between the Meditations and ordinary backtracking. Often, the moment before we embark on backtracking inquiry is one in which we confront some factor — what Peirce might call an "irritation" (1877, in Menand ed. 1997, 13) — and we frown and decide what to do about it. Sometimes we think "eh," and continue to hold our belief untroubled. Sometimes we think "no, hold on" and decide to re-investigate the question. To be sure, some backtracking inquiry is involuntary, for instance when the evidence is so indecisive, and we're so emotionally attached to knowing q's answer that we can't help but fixate on asking what's true. I'll set these cases aside and focus on situations in which thinkers *decide* whether to devote resources to re-opening a question.

Importantly, since backtracking inquiry means removing a belief, it therefore means potentially losing information. There's the risk that inquiry won't reinstate the belief that p even though p is in fact true, and there's the guarantee that we'll be without the belief that p for as long as inquiry takes. Given backtracking involves these costs and risks, what could license that decision? Strikingly, lots of things.

II. It's surprisingly easy to get license to embark on backtracking inquiry.

Here are a few cases in which backtracking inquiry seems fine by the zetetic norms — that is, by the norms of inquiry.

(1) NEW EVIDENCE: S gets new evidence concerning possible answers to her question q. She believed the Lakers won the game last night because she saw the scoreboard on a TV at the gym, but later learns the gym's owner likes to play reruns of old games.

(2) DISAGREEMENT: S learns that an epistemic peer has reached a different answer about q. At a restaurant, S and a colleague quickly calculate how much each person in the group should chip in, so as to reach the total + tip. S' colleague reached a different final total to S. S picks up the receipt to run the inquiry again (Christensen 2009).

(3) NEW DOUBTS: S gets new reason to doubt the quality of the reasoning that gave her the answer about q. She believed that people with criminal convictions are significantly more likely to fraudulently claim welfare payments, but learns that being from her social class and attending her economics graduate school correlates with holding that belief, and worries that her background (rather than the truth) may have caused her to hold this belief. She sets out to learn the real rates of welfare abuse. For example, Peirce writes: "there are some people who when they see that any belief of theirs is determined by any circumstance extraneous to the facts … will experience real doubt of it, so that it ceases to be a belief" (1877, 9).

These all look like cases in which the thinker has zetetic license to start a backtracking inquiry.

One thing worth noting is that all these cases seem to work by downgrading the thinker's credence in her existing belief. Peirce wrote that inquiry is caused by the "irritation of doubt"; "doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state … [that] causes a struggle to attain a state of belief. I shall call this struggle *inquiry*" (1877/1997, 13). One way to read NEW EVIDENCE, DISAGREEMENT, and NEW DOUBTS is as credal instantiations of this claim. The thinker encounters something that drops her credence in her existing belief, and she re-opens inquiry to fix that and get back into the territory of higher confidence. However, not all reasons for backtracking inquiry work by downgrading credence.

(4) NEW STAKES: S learns of new stakes that do not speak to the truth of possible answers to q but to the importance of getting the answer right. For instance, S stopped in at the grocery store in a hurry to buy a cake for a party. She picked up a brown cake from the bakery section, and on the basis of a quick glance she believes it is chocolate. When another guest points out the host is deathly allergic to carob, S thinks "uh oh, could this be a carob cake?". She re-opens inquiry into the ingredients in the cake (Moss 2021, 259).

What changes in NEW STAKES isn't credence, but whether S treats the question as *open*. Learning of the fatal allergy can make C .9 in "this isn't a carob cake" suddenly not feel like enough, so that S re-opens inquiry despite still being relatively confident that the cake won't turn out to be carob. Two thinkers can have the same credence about q's answers but differ in whether they are inquiring.

On some views of (1) – (4), the new factor — counter-evidence, stakes, doubts, or disagreement — supplies reason for backtracking inquiry because it corrodes or removes the thinker's justification to hold her existing belief. She launches backtracking inquiry because in the presence of the new factor, she'd be unjustified in continuing to believe p (though we can imagine line ball cases of NEW EVIDENCE and NEW DOUBTS in which the counter-evidence or the debunking story wasn't

sufficient to mean continued belief in p would be unjustified). However, not all triggers to backtracking inquiry work by removing justification. Consider:

(5) NEW BAR: The amount of evidence S has to support her belief p stays static, but she changes her mind about how much or what kind of evidence she would need in order to call q closed. For instance, S has heard about an alleged forgery in her workplace committed by coworker X. She has testimony of several coworkers as evidence, and originally decided that was enough to call the question closed, and so believed X committed the forgery. However, she decides she needs more evidence than that, or that testimony is not the right kind of evidence on which to call this question closed, and so suspends for further inquiry.[14]

(6) FORGOTTEN GROUNDS: S believes p, but realizes she has no idea where she got the belief that p. Unsure of what her reasons were for in fact believing p, she wavers on whether she should continue to believe p, and suspends for inquiry on whether p is true. Our opening case: S is making breakfast one morning and while idly looking at the toaster, realizes she's long since held the belief that the dials on toasters correspond to time, not intensity of heat. She has no recollection of where she formed that belief. She moves from wondering why she believes p to wondering whether p, and looks up what toaster knobs do.

Backtracking inquiry looks okay in these cases, even though belief based on testimony or conservative retention of existing belief are not usually considered unjustified (Coady 1992, Harman 1986, especially Ch4).

[14] Some will see NEW BAR as a variant of NEW STAKES. I include NEW BAR to show that sometimes thinkers re-open inquiry because they *elect* to have different attitudes about the kind or amount of evidence they would need to call a question settled. Other examples of this phenomenon might be aesthetic propositions. For instance, perhaps I concluded that the movie was a masterpiece on your say-so, but then realise it's a bit odd to come to aesthetic opinions on one person's testimony, so I suspend until I can get first hand evidence by seeing the movie myself (or at least until the amount of testimony is overwhelming).

This is a wide spread of reasons for backtracking inquiry! Already, we can make some observations. First, the zetetic norms seem to say **backtracking inquiry is permissible in (1) – (6).**[15]

The next thing we can observe is that even fairly well-credentialed belief in p at t1 does not seem to imperil the license to re-open inquiry at t2. For instance, *knowing* p at t1 doesn't seem to make it a problem to re-open inquiry at t2. In FORGOTTEN GROUNDS, for instance, it well could be the case that S knows at t1 that toaster knobs measure time. If the principle of conservatism holds, the fact that S believes p at t1 justifies continuing to believe p at t2, even if at t2 S is no longer in touch with the independent evidence for p (Harman 1986, 39). If it's true that toaster knobs measure time, S's belief could thus be knowledge, in the same way that you and I know that Bogota is the capital of Colombia even though we cannot recall where we first got that belief. Nonetheless, it seems permissible for S to re-open inquiry at t2.

Similarly, believing p with very high credence at t1, or vanishingly low chance of error, also does not seem to block license to re-open inquiry at t2. For instance, in NEW STAKES, we can imagine the chance of the cake being carob getting asymptotically lower — the store only sells one carob cake every year; every ten years; it's never sold carob cake at all — while still approving of S's decision to suspend to thoroughly investigate the cake's ingredients.[16] The stakes aren't necessarily the explanation. Backtracking inquiry can also look permissible in cases of extremely high credence where there is nothing at stake at all. Suppose you and I know that at 9:30am today in

[15] Can inquiry be required and not just permissible? In some cases it looks at least like the suspension of judgement is rationally required. For instance, suppose S' existing corpus of beliefs contains two beliefs that are inconsistent. Harman (1986) and Levi (1991) both argue that S must abandon both beliefs when she discovers they are inconsistent. It is not up to her whether to suspend; she is "coerced" (Levi 1991 68). However, she can abandon both beliefs without re-opening inquiry, by devoting no further resources to figuring out q's answer. So it seems suspension rather than inquiry is the upshot of an obligation to retreat from inconsistency.

[16] This suggests there might be a difference between the conditions under which it's rational to suspend for inquiry and the conditions under which it's rational to suspend as a settled attitude. If the shop has never sold carob cake in its history, it looks irrational to suspend in perpetuity about whether the cake is carob, although it might still be permissible to suspend temporarily for the purposes of further inquiry. Since inquiry involves a personal attitude towards q, i.e. having it on one's agenda, I'm lightly skeptical that there could be epistemic requirements to take that attitude toward a particular question. I won't rule it out, however. I'll leave the matter of rationally required inquiry an open question, so to speak.

the engineering lab some undergraduates will toss 400 fair coins. At lunchtime they'll reveal the result by pulling back a big red curtain. At 10am we both have credence $1-0.5^{400}$ in the proposition "it is not the case that all 400 coins came up heads". I'm not an inquirer into this question, because I just don't care what happened and I'm not disposed to spend any cognitive resources finding out. You are an inquirer, because you do care what happened, and you will take steps to find out. All morning you're excited ("I'm not going to miss my chance to see a once in a lifetime event if it *does* happen!"). Your enthusiasm is contagious, and by lunch I really want to know what happened, so at 1pm we both trot over to the lab to find out. Between 9:30 and 1pm I have switched from being a non-inquirer to being an inquirer, despite having a very high and unchanging credence in what I expect to be q's answer.

In fact, even p being a priori does not seem to preclude license to inquire. Let me tax your patience with one more case.

(7) COHERENCE CLASH: S realizes two of her beliefs don't sit well together so suspends on both of them to properly inquire into which if either of them is true. For instance, in S' mathematics class she learns about the soccer ball polygon, made of four dodecagons, 12 decagons, and 28 equilateral triangles as gaps. S' maths teacher tells her it's impossible for true soccer ball polygons to physically exist, because the shape cannot close at the vertices. However, that evening while explaining to her brother, she tries to make the shape out of paper to show him, and finds it does close. She finds she believes (a) I've made a soccer ball polygon that closes at the vertices, and (b) it's impossible for soccer ball polygons to close. She suspends judgement on both beliefs in order to re-open inquiry into whether soccer ball polygons can close.

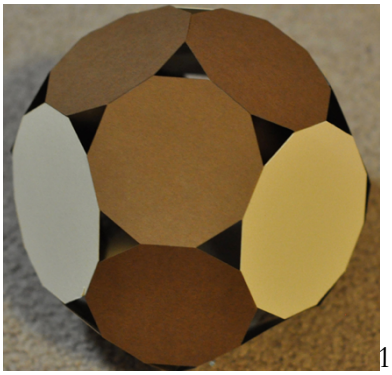


Fig 1: Mathematician Craig Kaplan's "impossible polygon", supplied to Lamb (2017). The warp of the paper accounts for the misleading appearance that the polygon can close.

In COHERENCE CLASH, the mathematical truth that soccer ball polygons cannot close is a priori, but the armchair-proof-ability of the claim does not seem to preclude S's license to re-open inquiry in her circumstances (see note 15 for whether inconsistency mandates rather than merely permits re-opening inquiry).

So the license to re-open inquiry is not wildly difficult to come by. A large array of factors can be reason to start a backtracking inquiry, and even very well-credentialed belief, high credence, knowledge, or a priority at t1 does not rule out re-opening inquiry at t2. Friedman (2019) holds that this permissibility is a good thing, because good believers are not only in the game of acquiring good beliefs. They are also in the maintenance and upkeep game. Consequently "knowers and justified believers can … double-check on the thing they know or justifiably believe without a change in epistemic circumstances and without doing anything epistemically wrong." (Friedman 2019, 90). How far does this extend? Perhaps we should endorse something like:

> Strong Norm: for any subject S with belief p at t1, always at t2 S may suspend judgement about p for the sake of backtracking inquiry into a q to which p is a possible answer.

This seems too strong. Sometimes it does look irrational to re-open inquiry. For instance, consider Wittgenstein's critique of bonafide skeptics; it's irrational to keep pouring resources into questions like whether the world really exists, or whether I have a brain, because "grounds for doubt are lacking!" (1969, 4). In some cases, q has a frontrunner answer ("does the world exist?" "yes"). Evidence for that frontrunner is so strong, and evidence for its alternatives so paltry, that re-opening inquiry just doesn't look rational. I agree with Friedman (2019) that there can be circumstances in which the evidence is just too good; there are "Suspension-Proof-Epistemic Circumstances", or "SPECs" (90-91). It's hard to say exactly what characterises an SPEC, and I won't offer an account here. As we've seen, they won't just be cases of

knowledge or high credence or a priority. Tautologies seem like good examples, as well cases of recent perceptual experiences (if I just had a conversation with Nancy in my office, it seems strange to wonder for no reason "was Nancy *really* just in here?"). Or consider a tweak to the evidential situation around FORGOTTEN GROUNDS. At t I realise I've forgotten where I first learned that that's what my face looks like, but it's also the face in every mirror I see at t, so it seems bad to re-open inquiry). Perhaps then we should endorse:

> Less Strong Norm: if S believes p as an answer to q at t1, and is not in an SPEC with respect to p at t1, S may re-open inquiry into q at t2.

Better, but the Less Strong Norm leaves out something important. As noted, backtracking inquiry comes with costs and risks. We've already said there is guaranteed informational loss for however long inquiry takes, plus the risk that our actual inquiry will fail to reinstate the belief that p even though p is true. There are also cognitive opportunity costs, since inquiry involves a sensitivity to new evidence, chewing up attention that might have been used elsewhere. There are theoretic costs, since as long as we're inquiring into q, we can't also rely on any of q's answers in other reasoning (Levi 1991, 18; see also Buchak 2021, 17). Finally there can be psychological costs, since as Kierkegaard warns, doubting attitudes can be painful to endure and difficult to shed once they set in (1844/2013). Something has to justify incurring these costs and risks. The norms governing backtracking inquiry should be sensitive to the fact that backtracking means moving to an informationally worse position, even if, hopefully, temporarily.

Following Levi (1991), I prefer a norm that holds backtracking inquiry is permissible to the extent that the costs of inquiry are offset by the *informational advantage* a thinker could get from inquiry. There has to be the chance that the post-inquiry answer to q will be *better* than the existing answer. As Levi writes, if K is the original corpus of knowledge that contains an initial answer to q; K* is the state of inquiring into q (and so suspending judgement about q's answer), and K** is the post-inquiry corpus

containing a post-inquiry answer to q, "there is no sense in incurring the risk of ending up in K* unless there is a chance of benefiting by ending up with K**" (1991, 156).[17]

One obvious way that K** could improve on K is by containing an answer to q that is true when K contained an answer that was false — that is, S could change her view. Another obvious way is that S could re-establish that her original belief p was true, but have justification in K** for believing p that she was lacking at K.

Thinkers can also gain informational advantage because K** fulfills explanatory virtues that K did not. For instance, K** could contain an answer to q that a thinker *understands*, whereas in K she merely took it to be true. We can illuminate this by considering David Enoch's useful distinction between "transparent" reasons for belief, which "disclose that in virtue of which [p] is true" (2014, 237), and opaque reasons, which do not. Opaque reasons for belief might include testimony, or conservative retention of existing belief. When we believe p for opaque reasons, we are not in a position to explain why the content of p is true. We may be justified in believing p; we may even know p. Still, we do not have insight into why p is true, and this comes at some informational cost — we could not explain p to others, we don't know why it's true, and we can't assess its explanation for coherence fit with the rest of our beliefs. By contrast, when we believe p for *transparent* reasons — that is, on the basis of reasons that do disclose p's truthmakers — we are in a better informational position with respect to the content of p. We know why it's true, we can give this explanation to others, and we can accurately appraise how that explanation fits with the rest of what we believe.

Certain kinds of backtracking inquiry can improve things by moving a thinker from an opaque relationship to p to a transparent relationship to p. In FORGOTTEN GROUNDS, for instance, S embarks on backtracking inquiry to establish from scratch what it is that toaster knobs measure. Had she not embarked on backtracking inquiry, she could have carried on holding her belief conservatively. That continued belief

[17] See also; "The inducement is the possibility of obtaining valuable information through subsequent inquiry that compensates for the information lost" (Levi 1991, 118). Levi restricts his account to *informational* value e.g. coherence, explanatory value, etc — later on in my account I'll turn to moral value also.

might have been justified; if might even be knowledge. But backtracking inquiry allows her the chance to get into a better informational position with respect to the content of p by establishing it from scratch with transparent evidence.

There's a myriad of ways inquiry can improve our beliefs. S's post-inquiry belief can be less ad-hoc than it once was; more coherent with the rest of what she believes; held on higher credence, or less marred by the uneasy sense that there are still some un-ironed-out questions in the vicinity. These kinds of improvements are what can offset the costs of embarking on backtracking inquiry.[18] Consequently, I propose:

> **Advantage Norm:** If at t1, S has a belief about q's answer, p, S may re-open inquiry into q at t2 if inquiry could yield a belief about q's answer that exceeds the informational value of S' belief at t1.[19]

This will explain why SPECs seem like impermissible sites for backtracking inquiry: the thinker's situation at K is already too good. It will also explain why it seems the license to backtrack can be acquired in a variety of ways. Because informational advantage takes a variety of forms (truth, justification, coherence, understanding, higher credence, etc), even existing beliefs that are true, justified, or a priori can be

[18] In Descartes' backtracking inquiry, the strategy of paying with the costs of doubt so as to improve the thinker's beliefs is fairly explicit. Although he agrees that the beliefs he is going to demolish are "still much more reasonable to believe than to deny" (1996, 15) he doubts them for instrumental reason; "the result of this doubt is to make it impossible for us to have any further doubts about what we subsequently discover to be true" (9).

[19] I said I follow Levi in this way of seeing things. Levi would not exactly endorse the Advantage Norm, preferring instead to give a decision theoretic account on which it makes sense to eject a belief from the corpus to properly inquire into some question when the informational value of K** multiplied by the probability of achieving that value through inquiry exceeds the informational value of K. My own view is that the decision theoretic account does not work, because it has the potential to be "hacked" by outcomes that are vanishingly improbable but would be extremely valuable to know. For an analogy, the futurism movement within effective altruism claims that when we're assigning charitable donations, instead of prioritising the needs and welfare of people around us, we should devote a significant chunk of our charitable donations to preventing a nuclear war that might happen four hundred years from now and is, it's agreed, extremely unlikely. Futurists claim this follows from a decision theoretic framework. If we plug something wildly bad into the calculus (e.g., species-level extinction), then even the vanishingly low probability that that outcome will ever eventuate suffices to rationalise putting effort into trying to prevent it. Seth Lazar has criticized this as a form of "moral inflationism" (Lam, 2023). A similar criticism can be made in the inquiry case. It would be *extremely* informationally valuable to learn, for instance, that there's no external world or that I'm a brain in a vat. It would revolutionise the rest of my beliefs. Consequently, even on the cosmically miniscule chance that inquiry will reveal that is the truth, decision theoretic frameworks may still say we should devote a chunk of cognitive resources to that inquiry. This seems implausible. Most of us hold fixed that if any inquiries are irrational, these ones are.

improved on in a variety of ways. Thinkers can therefore elect to move temporarily to a worse informational position for the sake of pursuing that advantage.

This is my preferred account of the permissibility of backtracking inquiry, and I'll refer back to it later on. However, those who prefer the Strong Norm or the Less Strong Norm will also run into a clash with moral norms. The basic point I've wanted to emphasise in this section is that **backtracking inquiry seems permissible by the zetetic norms in** NEW EVIDENCE, DISAGREEMENT, NEW DOUBTS, NEW BAR, NEW STAKES, FORGOTTEN GROUNDS and COHERENCE CLASH.

III. The Moral Analogue

Let's now move to the moral case. There can be cases where, although the zetetic norms say, "you may inquire", morality says "don't inquire". I'll focus on what I call **morally laden** cases, which include moral beliefs, as well as non-moral beliefs with high moral stakes.

This is a strange result! Why would morality caution us *off* getting clearer on our answers to morally important questions? Shouldn't morality be excited by the prospect that we'd get on firmer ground in morally weighty cases? I'll return to this puzzle in section III. First, I'll defend my claim that there can be situations in which morality gives different verdicts to the zetetic norms about whether we may re-open inquiry.

Consider a new set of cases.

> MORAL DISAGREEMENT: S is a young resister in Vichy France. Unlike her parents, teachers, and many of her peers, she believes Nazis are evil. She knows that her parents, teachers, and peers are just as good as she is at reasoning, and she knows they all have access to the same information about what the regime is doing. S responds to this peer disagreement by suspending judgement about whether Nazis are evil and re-opening inquiry.
>
> MORAL NEW EVIDENCE: Same case, but S believes that the Jews do not have a Zionist plot for world domination. One of her peers says, "yes they do, it's a

global conspiracy". S treats her peer's testimony as new evidence about whether there is a Zionist conspiracy and suspends to look into things further.

MORAL NEW BAR: S believes on the basis of testimony that domestic violence is wrong. He has the testimony of several peers as evidence. However, he decides he needs more evidence than that to call the question settled, and so suspends.

MORAL FORGOTTEN GROUNDS: Watching a news report one morning, S realises she believes it's wrong to hurt animals for fun. She also realises she has no idea where she first got that belief. She moves from wondering why she believes it's wrong to hurt animals for fun, to wondering whether it's actually wrong to hurt animals for fun.

MORAL COHERENCE CLASH: S is a solider who believes the guiding moral principle should be doing the greatest good for the greatest number. She believes torture is wrong. She also knows of instances in which torture has produced information that saves lives. She realises she simultaneously believes (1) φ is not wrong if φ does the greatest good for the greatest number, (2) torture is wrong, (3) torture sometimes produces the greatest good for the greatest number.

These are moral analogues of the cases we opened with. There, the intuitive response to cases was that the zetetic norms said, "you may inquire". The Strong Norm, the Less Strong Norm, and the Advantage Norm, agreed on theoretic grounds.

These moral cases seem the same in relevant zetetic respects. The Strong Norm will allow backtracking inquiry because it always does. The Less Strong Norm will also allow backtracking here because these thinkers are not in SPECs. (Later on I'll return to the objection that the pivot to the moral realm converts these cases into SPECs). And the Advantage Norm is satisfied, because the original beliefs can be informationally improved upon; backtracking inquiry can deliver an informational

advantage over the original state of affairs.[20] By the features of the cases, any of the candidate zetetic norms of backtracking inquiry seem to say the thinker may inquire.

However, it seems morality wants us to resist re-opening these questions. There is something undeniably morally *icky* about considering these grave questions to be open. If the Vichy resister were to genuinely suspend as a result as a result of her encounter with the Nazi, or a man were to truly take it to be an open question whether domestic violence is impermissible, I imagine morality would regard this shift as outrageous. Morality objects to treating evils as open questions. Whereas it seemed fine to re-open inquiry in our original cases — lifting up the hood on what we believe to check things and run maintenance — it seems morality has a strong aversion to us so easily removing our moral commitments.

I'm not sure how to argue for this beyond inviting you to agree that it's true. Consider what it would genuinely look like for a thinker to backtrack inquiry in these cases. If someone were to ask, "are Nazis evil?" or "is torture wrong?", S would have to answer "I really don't know". Conditional claims and inferences associated with her morally laden belief may have to be pulled out of circulation (Levi 1991, 134); she might not be able to hold onto the conclusions that it's safe to bank with Jews, or that she can blame people for striking their family without excuse. Action would be implicated, since belief that p bears a close and on some views constitutive relationship to action (Worsnip 2021, 5) such that suspending judgement about p will alter the structure of related practical inferences. The soldier who does not think have a settled belief that torture is wrong is not a soldier you want to encounter. It seems that even temporary loss of morally laden belief can be a grave moral misstep.

A notable feature of all our moral cases is that the thinker's starting belief is true. There seems to be an asymmetry in the objectionableness of backtracking, depending on

[20] Many cases are candidates for multiple kinds of informational advantage. At a minimum: in DISAGREEMENT, inquiry can deliver a belief based on her total evidence including peer disagreement (Kelly 2010), and so a better justified belief (I'll stay ecumenical about whether it would be epistemically unjustified to continue holding her own belief without re-appraising in light of the disagreement). In MORAL NEW BAR, inquiry can deliver a belief held for transparent reasons instead of an opaque. So too in MORAL FORGOTTEN GROUNDS. In MORAL NEW EVIDENCE, inquiry can deliver a belief held on higher credence. In MORAL COHERENCE CLASH, inquiry can make the corpus of beliefs more internally consistent.

whether the original belief was correct. If you were right to begin with, backtracking looks morally bad, but if you were wrong, it doesn't. Morality objects when the resister reacts to her encounter with the Nazi by re-opening inquiry but would approve if the Nazi responded to that same encounter by re-opening. As Cassam notes, "doubt looks like a virtue when it stands in the way of extremism, but a vice when it stands in the way of progress" (2021, 16).[21] I think this asymmetry is right, and faithful to the phenomenon. When we believe the right stuff to begin with but take the wrong stuff seriously enough to suspend for investigation, we are doing worse by the lights of the right stuff than if we had stuck with it without interruption (I'll come back to the observation that this does not seem to be true for *all* true morally laden beliefs).

In pointing out this phenomenon, I'm building on a number of philosophers' observations that being a good person seems to require having beliefs about right, wrong, and the state of the world. So far, this has typically been understood in terms of the *strength* of those beliefs. For instance, a number of philosophers have noted that having confidence in one's moral beliefs — the courage of one's convictions — makes morally worthy action much more likely. Alex Guerrero notes that moral heroes such as revolutionaries and self-sacrificers are frequently "confident, certain, lacking in doubt" about "their specific cause, the moral necessity of the actions they were taking, the permissibility [of] means of dealing with dissent or opposition" (2021, 7). Similarly, Cassam writes that 19th Century abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison "did not doubt that they were doing the right thing in campaigning as they did against slavery … they were uncompromising in pursuit of the immediate emancipation of the slaves, and thought of [as] extremists or fanatics" (2021, 2-4). In more quotidian moral life, Robert Adams argues that "it is essential to a moral life to hold some strong beliefs about good and evil, right and wrong", and that when it comes to moral life, "we are not prepared to accept attitudes toward probability and doubt that seem perfectly appropriate, or even praiseworthy, in relation to most other topics" (1995, 77; 90). Sergio Tenenbaum echoes this point by agreeing it is morally objectionable to *hedge*

[21] Cassam also holds that virtues like courage can apply whether or not the starting position was morally wrong, so we can admire a criminal for his courage in sticking to a plan or belief even when it was morally bad in the first place. I don't think such cases would be enough to mean that in absolute terms, morality could frown on re-opening inquiry about a belief that was objectionable in the first place.

one's morally laden beliefs, say by factoring in a 10% chance that morality is a delusion, or a 30-50% chance that that self-interest justifies betraying innocent persons, where "the problem is obviously not that the percentages are too high, but that we have entered the possibility of error into our calculation at all" (2015, 89).

Less emphasized than the importance of *strong* moral beliefs is the importance of *stable* moral beliefs. Stability is not a matter of having strong conviction in the sense of confidence or high credence per se, but rather endurance; a commitment to continuing to treat the question as closed. Lara Buchak is illuminating on the difference: "[There is] a distinction between what we might call 'ordinary belief' and 'conviction'— the latter being a belief that we not only hold but are committed to continue holding (perhaps: have the intention to continue holding) even in the face of a certain amount of counterevidence" (2021, 206).[22]

Our cases suggest it can be morally bad to lack this kind of stability when it comes to morally laden beliefs. The problem is not necessarily that thinkers in these cases have low confidence in their morally laden beliefs, since we know from Part I that it's possible to re-open inquiry without an alteration in credence, and that not all inquiries into q imply middling or low credence in q's answer. The better way to catch the problem is that the thinker does not treat q as a question that is closed and ought to stay closed.

One advantage of thinking in terms of stability rather than strength is that to hold a belief stably does not seem to preclude recognizing reasons to doubt it. We can stay committed to treating q as closed even when we feel some unease about our existing answer, or our credence in it drops, or we recognize that there are kinks in our belief that p that haven't fully been ironed out. This is a point of contrast with continuing to

[22] I'm deeply indebted to Buchak's thinking on this point. As indicated by this brief passage, her aim is to argue that thinkers can have reasons to insulate their *convictions* from counter-evidence, especially peer disagreement, even while her credences exactly track that evidence. My more zetetic focus prompts some differences in our accounts. For instance, S could be committed to continuing to believe p in Buchak's sense — she *intends* to keep believing it at t3, after inquiry — but temporarily suspend at t2 for inquiry so as to make sure she understands the reasons p is true, or has triple-checked it. On my view the instability on this arc could mean S is still doing something morally objectionable even though she strictly has the intention to resume believing it.

have high *confidence* that p. Stability allows us to retain an answer to q while being in touch with reasons to be uneasy about it in a way that high confidence does not.

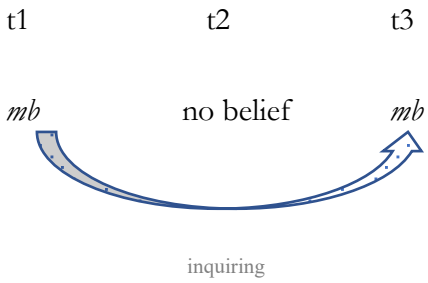
This point echoes Kierkegaard's thinking on faith. Whereas faith has sometimes been understood as confidence, e.g. in John Calvin's description of "full confidence" and "full assurance" (1960, 11, quoted in Adams 1995, 89), Kierkegaard's faith allows believers to have more contact — indeed, more difficult, painful contact — with the reasons to abandon their belief. For Kierkegaard, the faithful believer is precisely not someone who has been delivered from Peirce's "irritations of doubt" into a contented state of untroubled belief. Rather, she is committed to continuing to hold her belief in the face of the irritations of doubt. "If I wish to preserve myself in faith, I must constantly be intent upon holding fast the *objective uncertainty*, so as to remain out upon the deep, over seventy thousand fathoms of water, still preserving my faith" (1846/1941, 182, italics added. Cited in Adams 1995, 90).

This dogged closed-ness seems to be what matters in our moral cases, rather than confidence per se. It can take real courage to hold onto your moral convictions in the face of reasons to backtrack on them. Part of what makes it moral *courage* — and not just rationality — is that those reasons do in fact have force. To maintain high credence in these cases would be to not acknowledge counter evidence, peer disagreement, inconsistency, and so on, as reasons to backtrack. To resist inquiry is to hold fast to treating q as closed despite recognizing those reasons. This, it seems, is what morality asks. Stability in one's morally laden beliefs thus seems like an important good when those beliefs are true, independent of confidence (though confidence might be its own good). Pettit (2017) and Portmore (2022) argue that the moral good or worth of an action is in part a function of its "robustness", i.e. whether it would have been performed in different circumstances. It seems something analogous is true for certain morally laden beliefs as well; morality cares not only about whether we have true morally laden beliefs, but how stably we hold them.

Strikingly, morality sometimes seems to object to instability in morally laden beliefs even if the end result is that the original belief is reinstated. If the resister in DISAGREEMENT suspends judgment so to inquire into the hypothesis that Nazis are

not evil, and the result of her inquiry is that she returns to believing that Nazis are evil, morality still seems to object to the period in which she treated the question as open. That is,

Wavering Belief

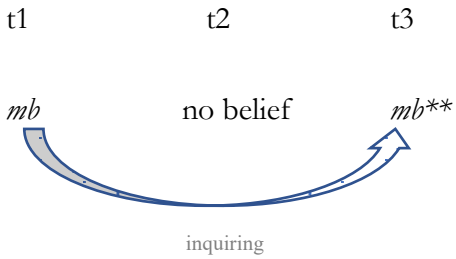


Can be morally worse than**:**

Stable Belief



Even more strikingly, it also seems that morality can prefer the stable belief scenario to one in which a thinker concludes her inquiry in a better information position with respect to her morally laden belief *mb* than she was in to begin with. As in our original cases, these moral cases seem to satisfy the Advantage Norm. Puzzlingly, it seems that *even when* that informational value is attained, morality can still disapprove. In Part One we used K and K** as symbols for the states of affairs pre-inquiry and post-inquiry, so in the moral case, I'll use *mb* and *mb***. It's possible that S' inquiry will mean she moves from mb to mb** where mb** is more informationally valuable than mb:



However, in some moral cases, it seems like that informational advantage can fail to offset the moral damage from losing the belief for the duration of inquiry. Consider MORAL FORGOTTEN GROUNDS. S realises she believes it's wrong to hurt animals for fun, but also realises she has no idea where she first got that belief. This is the moral analogue of FORGOTTEN GROUNDS, in which S realizes she believes the dials on toasters correspond to time but has no recollection of where she formed that belief.

We said backtracking inquiry in this circumstance has the potential to put a thinker in a better informational position with respect to p than she would be in if she did not inquire, by moving her from an opaque relationship to p to a transparent one. Presumably the same thing will be true for MORAL FORGOTTEN GROUNDS. Incidentally, this same informational advantage is available in the pair NEW BAR and MORAL NEW BAR, where S decides she needs more evidence than just testimony to carry on holding her belief. In NEW BAR, the belief is that colleague X committed forgery; in MORAL NEW BAR, the belief is that domestic violence is wrong. In both cases the alternative to inquiry would be to carry on holding the beliefs on testimony, also an opaque reason for belief.

Nonetheless, it seems morality can disapprove of the inquiry. When someone tells us that they have come to the conclusion — at last — that domestic violence is wrong, the reaction is not straightforward relief. Nor is the feeling that they have been engaged in an objectionable and slightly alien inquiry wholly alleviated by their assurances that they now understand *why* domestic violence is wrong. Similarly, the person who seizes hold of the license to suspend about whether it's wrong to hurt animals seems somewhat morally unrecognizable to us, even if the result of their inquiry is that they reinstate that belief in a transparent way rather than an opaque one. The decision to seek that informational advantage in the first place seems a little off. Was it so onerous to just carry on believing that you shouldn't hurt puppies for fun, in the same way that we carry on believing all kinds of things for opaque reasons; geographic facts, historical facts, reports from testimony? Why try to get to the bottom of *this* belief?

Something similar happens, to some extent, in all our cases. All the thinkers in our scenarios stand to gain some informational advantage: greater confidence, internal consistency, assuredness as a result of having confronted counter-evidence head on, better access to the reasons for their belief, and so on (see note 20). Nonetheless, the prospect of achieving this advantage does not automatically seem to remove the moral problem with backtracking, and even worse, even actually securing these advantages is not always enough to remove the moral blemish of embarking on the inquiry to begin with. There can seem to be something odious about a person who sheds a morally important belief for the sake of pursuing improvement in their informational relationship to its content.

One immediate upshot of what we've said so far is that the case of backtracking in morally laden cases suggests there can be clashes between the *epistemic* and the moral norms. We've said that morality and zetetic norms seem to give contrary advice about whether a thinker may re-open inquiry. The familiar zetetic norms are themselves epistemic, as Friedman (2020) has shown: "We inquire in order to reach our epistemic ends — knowledge, better understanding, some sort of epistemic improvement … there is some important sense in which the norms that guide and constrain us in our efforts to acquire knowledge and understanding are epistemic" (26). It's often worried that competition between moral and epistemic norms would put thinkers in unresolvable binds. Consequently it's sometimes argued that there can be no conflicts between the epistemic and the moral.[23] Nonetheless, it seems that attention to the case of re-opening inquiry reveals that there can be such clashes. Indeed, inquiry is a nice way into the possibility of clashes between the epistemic and the moral. One way it's natural to reject that possibility is via the complaint that morality governs action, paradigmatically action over which we have some control. Belief is not an action, much less one over which we have control, so morality cannot apply to the epistemic. Unlike belief, inquiry does look action-like. It is deliberative, consciously guided, instrumentally oriented — it may even involve actual physical actions. So it seems less confronting to say that inquiry would fall under the sovereignty of the moral, even

[23] See for instance Smithies (2023), Schroeder (2018), Basu and Schroeder (2019), Basu (2020), though compare Basu (2021, 114).

though it also seems to be characteristically epistemic, that is, wrapped up with norms of belief and the search for the truth.

An Objection

It might be objected that the zetetic norms actually don't license inquiry in the morally laden cases. Perhaps the pivot to the morally laden realm changed something about the epistemic or zetetic situation so that the thinkers' starting beliefs are insulated from backtracking inquiry in a way that the opening beliefs were not.

There is a long tradition of holding that moral knowledge enjoys a security or an accessibility that ordinary beliefs do not (McGrath 2019, 83-85). Perhaps this means inquiry is epistemically off-limits in moral cases although it looked fine in our analogous opening cases. This might struggle to explain why inquiry also looks bad in non-moral but high-stakes cases, like the belief that there is a Zionist plot. But to spot the reply, perhaps beliefs like this are inconsistent with some other moral belief, so that if the moral belief is accessible or justified the thinker has associated epistemic license to reject the Zionist claim.

One way moral beliefs are sometimes thought to be special is that they are *a priori*. Ethical rationalists, for instance, hold that moral truths are analogous to mathematical truths in this regard, and Kant and the heirs to constructivism hold that the core moral truths can be deduced from the armchair by reflecting on the structure of agency (Korsgaard 1996; 2021). Another way in which moral beliefs are thought to be epistemically special is that moral truths are accessible to every subject they bind, whether or not they are also *a priori*. "A distinguished tradition in moral philosophy insists that everyone (or at least, every non defective adult human being) is in a position to know the essential truths of morality" (McGrath 2019, 84, see also the references there, including Reid (1788/2003 645): "the whole system of moral conduct follows so easily, and with so little aid of reasoning, that every man of common understanding … may know it", and Gert (2004, 90): "morality does not require beliefs that are not known to all moral agents").

This special status has sometimes been used to give an explanation for why morality seems to bridle when we do not believe its contents, without positing a clash between the epistemic and the moral. For instance, Tenenbaum (2015) holds that although that there is moral value to holding our moral beliefs with high confidence (not hedging our moral beliefs, not entering any possibility of error into our calculations, and so on), this does not require overreaching evidence or clashing with the epistemic norms at all. Because moral truths are self evident and 'apoditically certain' (90), believing them without qualification or hedging is just the epistemically warranted level of conviction. Similarly, in explaining why morality seems to object to "repugnant beliefs", Smithies (2023) has argued that repugnant beliefs are always unjustified because "there are universal moral facts that hold necessarily for everyone… [and] we always have a priori justification to believe them" (23).

These responses seek to eliminate the competition between the epistemic and the moral by showing that moral pressure to believe the moral truths aligns with the thinker's epistemic reasons to hold those beliefs. The moral norms say, "believe p", and so will the epistemic.

The problem with importing this strategy into our zetetic case should be obvious. As we saw in Section I, nothing about having justification to believe p at t is sufficient to rule out the permissibility of inquiry at t. Nor does knowing p, or p's being a priori, one's belief in p having an extremely low chance of error, and so on. Thus even if the pivot to the moral case means that the relevant beliefs are unusually accessible, a priori, or high-credence-licensing, this is not sufficient to mean that the zetetic norms will tell thinkers they cannot re-open inquiry. For that, moral beliefs would have to be SPECs, and that seems unlikely. It would be very difficult to explain the levels of moral disagreement and bad action if that were true, and our cases were designed in such a way that the evidence is *not* overwhelming. The thinkers face counter-evidence, debunking stories, peer disagreement, totally corrupt moral environments, and so on. This seems like part of why it would be a moral achievement for them to stick to their guns. Thus, even if morally laden beliefs are more accessible or secure than ordinary beliefs, that will not suffice to rule out the zetetic permissibility of re-opening inquiry and the competition with the epistemic will stand.

I conclude that inquiry looks bad in our cases for moral, not epistemic reasons. I've suggested morality asks for *stable* as well as true morally laden beliefs. I conclude that morality can frown on us for re-opening inquiry in morally laden cases.

IV. Huh?

This is a strange result! I've already pointed to one way in which it's surprising; inquiry can deliver epistemic improvements. It's odd that in the cases that seem especially morally important, morality would warn us off a process that could get us to firmer epistemic ground. Let me now add another way in which this is surprising. In moral cases, these epistemic improvements come with *moral* improvement, too.

Consider the case of moving from an opaque to a transparent relationship to p. It's been widely noted that when it comes to morally important beliefs, a transparent relationship to the content of that belief is *morally* preferable to an opaque one. To take a canonical example from McGrath (2009), there seems to be something morally problematic about a thinker who believes that eating meat is wrong simply because his wife says so and he treats her as a moral expert. A plausible and widely-defended explanation for why this feels wrong somehow is that the thinker is missing an important component of why it's *morally* valuable to have true moral beliefs (McGrath 2009, 331). The thinker who holds a moral belief like "eating meat is wrong", but can't say quite why, is morally impaired. She can't do the right thing for the right reasons, can't offer interpersonal justification to others for her action (McGrath 2019, 92-96); Hills (2009) argues that she cannot be virtuous because virtue requires understanding. Enoch (2014) holds that having opaque moral beliefs betrays a lack of moral achievement. This could carry into the case of the non-moral belief with high moral stakes. It's morally better to believe that there is no Zionist plot than it is to suspend, but it's better still to be able to persuade others of why that's true, resist hostile rebuttal from badly motivated opponents, and so on. So the move from an opaque to a transparent relationship to one's morally laden beliefs can come with moral value.

Other kinds of informational advantage also seem like they can travel with moral good. In Part II, we said that some reasons for backtracking inquiry work by corroding the

thinker's epistemic justification to carry on believing p. Sometimes peer disagreement, counter-evidence, or new stakes mean S would be epistemically unjustified in continuing to believe p. In those cases, inquiry has the potential to convert an unjustified belief into a justified one. How could it be morally bad to seek to have justified morally laden beliefs, when the alternative would be to hold them without justification?[24]

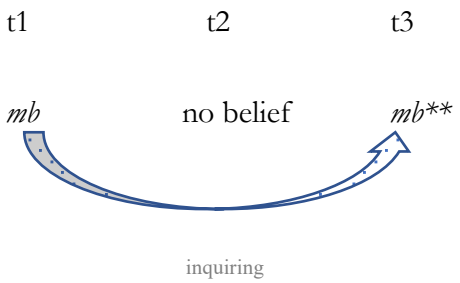
Sometimes the way backtracking inquiry improves things is by delivering higher confidence. We've already said why this too seems like it can be its own moral good. It can be very difficult to follow through on moral projects when one has low confidence that doing the right thing will make a scrap of difference. Kant knew this, and worried about the way that "prolonged experience of injustice — of a world-history in which the wicked prosper and virtue seems to make no difference — can chip away at our resolve" (Chignell 2020, 227). Similarly, Guy Kahane (2017) argues that worrying about nihilism can lead us to abandon our moral projects. In cases where backtracking inquiry could deliver a higher-confidence belief, that seems like it can come with the moral value of a greater likelihood of acting well.

And don't let's forget that from the first-person point of view, the force of a reason to inquire is often that it's a reason to suspect that one's existing belief might *not* turn out to be the one vindicated by inquiry. Reasons to inquire often raise the spectre that our existing belief is incorrect. In morally laden cases, we know that that's a potentially very bad situation to be in — the costs of error for a morally laden belief frequently strike us as well worth avoiding just on moral grounds. That is, from the thinker's point of view, to carry on holding that belief can be to stick to it despite reason to worry it was in error. This can feel bad not only epistemically but morally. David Enoch has argued that we should be morally aversive to the risks of holding inaccurate moral beliefs because of a "(sort-of) moral requirement to minimise the risk of wrongdoing" (2014, 241). If so, receiving some reason to think our existing belief is in

[24] In some of our cases, the new factor might not mean the existing belief dips into the territory of being unjustified, only that inquiry can provide *more* or *better* justification. The same question — doesn't it seem morally better to have more justification for our moral beliefs? See Sher (2009).

error might even trigger an obligation to embark on backtracking inquiry, so as to try to hold one's morally laden beliefs with lower risk of error.

So backtracking inquiry can come with the possibility of an increase in moral value as a result of the increase in informational value. That is, the state post-inquiry can be preferable to the state pre-inquiry just on moral grounds:



Nonetheless, I think embarking on backtracking inquiry looks morally bad in our morally laden cases, even though there's the chance of this greater moral value at the end of the arc.

The Advantage Norm said backtracking inquiry was permissible when it had the potential to improve the informational value of the thinker's corpus of beliefs. Perhaps we would have expected that morality would say something analogous: backtracking inquiry is *morally* permissible when it stands to improve the *moral* value of the corpus. What I'm pointing to is that morality does not seem to say that. In addition to the point made earlier, that the informational value of mb** can fail to offset the moral damage of suspending for inquiry, it seems even the greater *moral* value of mb** can do the same.

So here's the explanandum: how could the moral disvalue of the state at t2 sometimes be such that a thinker should not make the move from t1 to t2, even when the moral value of mb** exceeds the moral value of mb? That is, why would morality block us from trying to progress to a morally better situation?

One explanation might be that "we are morally obligated to believe the moral truths" (Harman 2011, 459). On this view, morality comes with an independent obligation to

believe its content, regardless of epistemic situation.[25] Since embarking on backtracking inquiry means suspending instead of believing, this will mean falling out of compliance with the obligation to believe the moral truths if the original belief was true.

First, this won't cover non-moral but high-moral-stakes cases. An obligation to believe all the moral truths surely does not entail an obligation to believe all the morally important non-moral truths, or even to believe all the inferential upshots of the moral truths, by a clutter-avoidance principle. Second, it's not clear that an obligation to believe the moral truths would be so strict as to allow no diachronic digressions. It's not obvious that in general, an obligation to φ means an obligation to always and continuously φ. Often an obligation to φ (e.g. to run into the burning building, to tell the truth), admits a grace period of deliberation in which the thinker is not φ-ing, but is figuring out whether to φ. Often the fact that she eventually does φ means she's square with her obligations. The obligation to believe the moral truths would need to be unusually diachronically strong to mean that thinkers could *never* not believe them, even temporarily.

Third, this response won't account for an additional feature I said I'd come back to: that not *all* morally laden beliefs seem to be bad candidates for backtracking inquiry. For instance, suppose at t1 I believe that eating meat is permissible. Suppose also I'm in a world where that belief is correct. But I read Peter Singer, and I waver and re-open inquiry, suspending for the moment on the question of whether it's permissible to eat meat. In this case, the passage from belief to suspension of judgement does not seem to come with the same attendant moral horror as the cases in which the thinker suspends about Nazism, torture, violence, and so on. This won't be captured if the problem in those cases was that she was obliged to believe the moral truths — all the starting morally laden beliefs are by stipulation true, so all will generate an obligation to believe them, and we should expect the vegetarianism case to be a site of moral outrage also.

[25] Though on Harman's view not all thinkers are blameworthy for failing to fulfil this obligation.

A different explanation might turn to the nature of the moral costs accrued at t2 and the nature of the moral benefits gained at t3.

You might think the costs associated with the move to "no belief" at t2 are costs that target others, whereas the moral benefits that accrue at t3 are moral benefits for me. When I stop believing mb at t2, and mb is true, things get worse for the people around me than they were in t1. They are at higher risk of bad treatment; I'm not taking it that they have the rights that they do, if you think doxastic wronging is real then I may be doing that. So t2 is a bad progression from the point of view of others. However, plausibly, the moral advantages that mean the state at t3 is a moral improvement on the state at t1 accrue to me. In t3 I may have understanding or justification or greater coherence in my moral outlook, but these are ways of *me* being virtuous. And you might think there's something morally bad about someone who takes a risk with other people's wellbeing for the sake of polishing their own virtue. David Enoch makes a similar argument in the context of moral testimony; "someone willing to tolerate a greater risk of acting impermissibly merely in order to work on her moral understanding … is acting wrongly, and indeed exhibits severe shortage in moral understanding" (2014, 249).

I agree that there's something wrong with the person who is prepared to risk wronging others for the sake of pursuing moral advantages that primarily accrue to her, and this might account for part of what's going wrong in some of our cases. But this explanation will not catch all our cases, because not all of the moral values that inquiry stands to realise are values that accrue solely to the thinker. We've mentioned confidence and its role in shoring up moral action. It's valuable to others if I'm more likely to stick to your moral projects. Further, understanding does not only produce individual virtue. As noted, when I understand mb, I can offer explanation and interpersonal justification for my actions to others. On some views (Scanlon 2000, Rawls 2005), the ability to provide this justification is a central part of what it means to do well by others. So t3 is not just as good as t1 from the point of view of people around the thinker.

Instead I propose to develop the risk component of this explanation and offer a **risk imposition** explanation for why morality can say thinkers should not launch backtracking inquiry even when mb** has greater informational and moral value than mb. This explanation also aims to capture why it does not always seem that morally says thinkers should avoid backtracking inquiry when they hold true morally laden beliefs.

Here's how it goes. When a morally laden belief is true, there are moral costs and risks to losing it even temporarily. We've pointed to some of these already, but I'll now say some more about them.

Losing a true morally laden belief exposes the people around us to a higher risk of being wronged. First, let's examine beliefs with moral content. When we don't consider it settled that X is wrong, we are more likely to violate people in X-related ways than when we do consider it settled that X is wrong. When you suspend judgement about whether the genocide taking place around you is evil or ought to be stopped, you're much less likely during that period to do what you would if you had the settled belief genocide *is* wrong. On some views, this is just what it means to lack a settled belief; to lack the belief p is to lack practical entitlement to act as though p.[26] With or without this constitutive link between belief and action, it's just psychologically the case that a thinker who takes herself to not have q's answer is much less likely to confidently act on one of those answers. We know this even from lower-stakes cases — when you're trying to figure out where the passport is, and you don't take yourself to know the answer, you're not likely to confidently act as though it's in the glovebox. When the thinker's starting belief was a true moral belief, losing it means a higher risk of wronging others in how she acts.

Second, non-moral but high-moral-stakes beliefs. A high-stakes belief is one in which costs of error are higher than usual. If we wrongly believe the cake is chocolate, someone will die; if we wrongly believe there's a Zionist plot, we will treat innocent people egregiously badly. The costs of error are typically thought to accrue to false

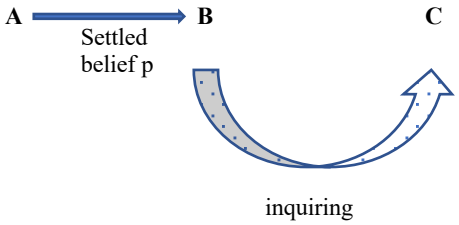
[26] See Worsnip (2021), 5, and the references there.

belief, i.e. to moving from p to ~p. But the move to suspending judgement is not without stakes-based risk either. Suspending judgment is not always the safe option, particularly where the stakes are *moral*. We will badly wrong innocent Jews if we wrongly believe there is a Zionist plot, but we will not be completely in the moral clear if we simply lack the belief that there isn't one. We are still more likely to withhold business, act with suspicion, decline to blame those who *do* believe there's a conspiracy, and so on — there's greater moral risk when we suspend than when we had the settled true belief. So in both kinds of morally laden belief, the move to opening inquiry comes with a greater risk of wronging others.

There are also risks further upstream, in our mental environments as well as our patterns of behaviour. On a variety of views, doing right by others involves taking certain mental stances towards them. There are a variety of accounts of what these requisite mental stances in fact are. On some views morality can ask for benevolent care toward others (Noddings 1984), or respect (Darwall 2004, Velleman 1999). On others, moral life with others requires adopting certain interpretive frameworks toward them e.g. viewing them from the participant stance, as agents who respond to reasons (Strawson 1962), or through a fundamentally equalizing gaze, such that one sees a setback to another's welfare as just as morally serious as a setback to one's own (Anderson 1999). The variety of candidate mental states here speaks to how plausible we seem to find it that moral demands do not end at the edges of the skull. It's widely agreed that doing right by others involves thinking of them in certain ways.

Plausibly, we will imperil our ability to maintain these mental postures toward others when we take certain beliefs about them out of circulation. If morality asks you to interpret women as moral equals, for instance, or as worthy of care qua person, but you are genuinely suspending judgement about the wrong of being violent toward them, there's an obvious risk that that suspension will cascade through the rest of your mental environment. It's hard to imagine the person who maintains care or respect or careful attention toward women while suspending about how bad it is to kill them. So to move from a true settled belief to re-opening inquiry can mean moving to a state with a higher risk of losing these important mental goods.

To plot this on our starting diagram of backtracking inquiry, the observation is that the move at B means moving to a state with higher risk of wronging others than there was at A.



This observation will help us answer the explanatory challenge of why morality could frown on the move to B even when C>A in terms of moral value. There are rules about when we get to gamble with the possibility of wronging others. Obviously, we can't hold that re-opening inquiry is impermissible at B just because it comes with a higher risk of wronging others. A sensible principle of when we can permissibly φ, when φ carries the risk of wronging others, must be sensitive to the nature of the relevant wrongs and what stands to be gained by φ-ing. Plainly, I can permissibly decide to take a pill that will increase the risk that I'll break two promises today, if taking the pill means I have the chance to save a hundred lives. We need a relationship between the gravity of what's risked and the importance of what's gained. A great deal has been written about the moral permissibility of taking risks with others' welfare. I don't suggest what I'm about to say is a grand unified theory. I want to observe one moral principle about risk-taking that will help is in the zetetic case.

Attach moral values to the states at B and C. For B, we multiply the gravity of the moral problems associated with suspending belief by the likelihood that those outcomes will eventuate during the period of inquiry. E.g., it's middlingly bad to stop caring for someone, and very likely that suspending about their value will produce that result. While it might be less likely that suspending for inquiry will mean you'll take actions to assist in genocide, it's astronomically bad to do so. For C, we multiply the moral value of the post-inquiry state by the likelihood that inquiry will yield it. As we know, post-inquiry beliefs can be higher in moral value than their pre-inquiry counterparts, but there's a wide spread in just how morally valuable they can be. For instance, in some circumstances it would be extremely valuable for me to move from

an opaque relationship to *mb* to a transparent one (e.g. I am in a position to change a lot of minds and alleviate a lot of suffering if I can get in touch with the reasons mb is true). In in other cases the moral value that inquiry stands to deliver is smaller; there's some value in me coming to have high credence in mb, but nothing much turns on it. We'll then be able to read out three figures.

- The moral value of the true settled belief mb*,* the state at A. Call this v1.
- The moral disvalue of suspending for inquiry, the state at B. Call this v2. V2 is acquired by multiplying the gravity of the moral costs associated with suspension by the likelihood that those risks will be realized.
- The moral value of the aimed-for post-inquiry state, v3, acquired by multiplying the moral value of that state by the likelihood of achieving it via inquiry.

As a principle, I propose:

> **Big Gap:** Backtracking inquiry is morally permissible in morally laden cases when v3 *far exceeds* v1 and *far outweighs* v2.

Marginal improvement is not enough.

This gels with our general approach to the moral permissibility of gambling with the risk of wronging others. For that decision to be morally permissible, it seems that the rate of moral return has to be very high, and the relevant risks have to be relatively tolerable. For instance, it seems permissible to risk wronging you in the promise-breaking-pill case because these conditions are met. But suppose things were reversed. To take the pill was to risk ending a hundred lives, and the benefit of taking it was a guarantee that I won't break my promises. It now looks positively deviant to willingly take that risk. Big Gap is not satisfied.

Big Gap is going to explain our moral cases. In each of them, the costs of suspension are so great, and the marginal moral improvement so slim, that it seems morally preferable to stay committed to *mb* instead of deciding to embark on inquiry. Thus,

the explanation for the asymmetry between the zetetic and moral permissibility of backtracking is not only that the moral disvalue of lacking a particular belief can exceed the informational cost of lacking it (though that's true). The explanation is that there is a different principle for when it's morally permissible to lose that belief, because doing so comes with risk of moral wrongs. A marginal chance of marginal improvement will not suffice to make that move permissible. It can be morally preferable to stick to a state of lower moral value (at A) than to seek to improve it (by aiming at C) if the pathway between them means taking certain kinds of moral gambles.

Big Gap also captures why backtracking inquiry looks bad in only some cases. We said that suspending about whether Nazis are evil looks significantly worse than suspending about whether meat-eating is permissible, even if we stipulate that both beliefs are correct. With this principle in hand, the explanation is that given the content of the belief and the facts of the actual world, the risks associated with the period of inquiry are significantly worse in the Nazi case than the vegetarianism case. In the world where meat eating *is* permissible, moving to uncertainty about whether that is the case does not seem to come with any significant increase in wronging others. Big Gap looks satisfied in the meat case and not the Nazi case; in the meat case, the moral improvements to the belief as a result of inquiry might be such that they far outweigh the moral risks of inquiry, given those moral risks seem negligible.

Frameworks like this necessarily involve a degree of idealization, and thinkers don't need to use them exactly in their decisions about whether to re-open inquiry. But we can use a rough-and-ready assessment of the risks of inquiry to assess the moral permissibility of deciding to call the question 'open' when we encounter a factor like new evidence or disagreement.[27] Thinkers can thus judge that they should all-things-considered keep the question closed, even though the zetetic considerations alone would license re-opening inquiry.

[27] Given that the point at which we make that decision is one in which we currently believe *mb,* it's consistent to assess those risk from the standpoint that mb is true.

Conclusions

I've given a working theory of backtracking inquiry, and noticed that it seems we can have moral reason against re-opening inquiry, even when the norms of inquiry say that backtracking would have been permitted. In addition to pointing out that this generates a clash between the moral and zetetic (and therefore the epistemic), I've wanted to explore *why* morality might discourage us from engaging in backtracking inquiry, given such inquiry has the potential to improve our epistemic and moral position. The best explanation I can see for this phenomenon is that the moral principle governing when we can gamble with the possibility of wronging others is stricter than the zetetic principle governing when we can gamble with informational loss.

There is plainly much more to say about this phenomenon. But one important upshot is that at least so far as morality is concerned, suspending judgement and retreating from belief is not always a "safe" option, even if we do it for the sake of improving our beliefs. I've wanted to show that in some cases it can be a grave moral error to doubt our existing beliefs, even when doing so has the potential to deliver greater understanding. This is a puzzling result that suggests our theorizing about when to embark on inquiry should be sensitive to not only the informational dimensions of our situation, but the moral ones as well.

Can Moral Encroachment be Asymmetrical?

Abstract: It is appealing to try to capture the idea that morality cares what we believe about each other, but it's difficult to do so without suggesting that morality could sometimes ask us to believe things that look improbable given our evidence. That result strikes many as unacceptable. Insofar as the idea that morality cares what we believe leads to that result, many are pushed to throw it out, too. This would be a theoretically expensive forfeiture, since we do seem to take a moral interest in what others think of us. A recent solution suggests we can keep both ideas by holding morality gives reason *against* particular beliefs, never for others, so that there is never a competition between morality and stringent evidential standards on belief. I call this position **asymmetrical moral encroachment** and argue it is not viable. I defend a novel claim: anyone who thinks we can wrong each other with our beliefs should agree we can wrong each other by withholding belief as well. But moral reason to avoid withholding just is moral reason in favour of belief, so there is no easy way to constrain morality's influence on belief to a prohibition on insulting beliefs. This generates two revisionary results. First, it's not possible to hold that morality only exerts one-way pressure on belief. Second, more radically it's not possible for the existing defences of asymmetrical moral encroachment to maintain the core commitments of the view while maintaining, as many do, that evidence is the only reason for belief.

I. INTRODUCTION

Here are two ideas that are each independently plausible but hard to reconcile. One, from the moral domain: we can insult each other by believing certain things. You would have a moral complaint if I believed you were inferior to me because of your race or gender; a tool or a means for accomplishing my ends; or if I believed you deserved contempt or punishment when you didn't. Call this DOXASTIC WRONGING. Another, from the epistemic realm: thinkers should not hold beliefs that the evidence alone would not allow. Call this NO SHODDY BELIEFS.

Each view is widely held in its home arena.[28] Put together, however, they seem to clash: if doing right by each other involves believing in certain ways, morality seems to claim the ability to shepherd our beliefs. But granting that role for morality seems to explode the norms of a sensible epistemology, for if we face moral pressure to believe this or that, it could presumably diverge from our epistemic reasons and could deliver ultimately divergent verdicts — morality could ask us to believe what evidence alone would not permit.[29]

The idea that morality could ask us to believe against the evidence strikes many as absurd.[30] Indeed, it strikes many as so absurd that if it turns out to be the end result of a morality that cares what we believe, we'd better turn around, tollens our way back, and deny that morality cares what we believe. This would be a theoretically expensive forfeiture, since we do seem to feel wronged when others believe demeaning things of us, but if the two claims are irreconcilable, something has to give.

A recent proposal offers a way to keep both DOXASTIC WRONGING and NO SHODDY BELIEFS. It holds that morality works as a one-way ratchet on belief: moral considerations push us away from certain beliefs and towards suspense of judgment, never towards a positive belief that the evidence alone would not allow us to believe. Morality thus only works to extinguish injurious beliefs, not to encourage more emollient ones, so there is no competition between a morality that regulates what we think and an epistemology that forbids believing on

[28] Variations on NO SHODDY BELIEFS run as far back as Clifford's (1877) famous invective that it is "Wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence." Bertrand Russell appears to invoke the principle when asked how he would justify his atheism to God, were they to meet at the pearly gates: "Not enough evidence, God! Not enough evidence!" – see Kelly (2002). NO SHODDY BELIEFS receives a canonical statement in Feldman's evidentialism: "For any person S, time t, and proposition p, if S has any doxastic attitude at all toward p at t, and S's evidence at t supports p, then S epistemically ought to have the attitude toward p supported by S's evidence at t." (2000, 67). Variations can be found in Shah (2006); Shah and Velleman (2005); Enoch (2016); Way (2016). Variations on DOXASTIC WRONGING appear in a variety of ethical debates. Elizabeth Anscombe famously held that not believing another person "is an insult and may be an injury" (1979 150), an idea which receives extensive treatment in Miranda Fricker (2007) and José Medina's (2013) arguments that we can wrong others by failing to take their testimony sufficiently seriously. Feminist theories of silencing argue that men can wrong women by believing they do not really mean to refuse when they say "no" (Langton 1993; McGowan 2014; Maitra 2009), recent theories of friendship argue I may wrong those I am close to by believing they will not complete their projects or do what they say they will (Stroud & Keller 2004; Morton & Paul 2019). Wedgwood (2002) argues that "Self-respect requires that one hold certain beliefs about oneself" (2002, 8). Marušić and White (2019) hold that believing another person to be inferior on the basis of race or gender is "insulting and disrespectful" even if that belief never manifests in behaviour; Blum (2004) holds that "respect for other persons is inconsistent with certain kinds of beliefs about them" (262).

[29] See Marušić and White (2019), Bolinger (2020) and Schroeder (2019) for exposition of this problem.

[30] Feldman (2000, 678): "I just don't understand [the idea]. Of course, by this I mean to suggest that no one else understands it either. It makes no sense". See also Begby (2018), Enoch (2016).

scant evidence. I call this view **asymmetrical moral encroachment (AME).**[31] AME is increasingly popular, and if it holds, it is an appealing and elegant view. It allows us to let morality into the epistemic ken just a little, without mutinying against the sovereignty of evidence. It delivers a role for morality as a polite houseguest within the accuracy-oriented norms of epistemology. If it holds, it's therefore good news for those of us who would like to have beliefs that are neither evidence-flouting nor morally objectionable.

My goal in this paper is to show that AME is an untenable position. I defend a novel claim: if doxastic states can wrong, withholding belief can wrong. Anyone who holds that thinkers have reason to avoid wrongful doxastic states should agree that thinkers have reason to avoid wrongful withholding. After all, it would be a strange epistemology that tells a person to resist believing because of the moral costs of that doxastic state, and then — once she withholds — tells her not to mind the moral costs of *that* doxastic state. But moral pressure to avoid withholding just is moral pressure to believe, so morality will sometimes seem to ask us to believe when ordinarily we would withhold, reinstating the competition between morality and evidence that AME hoped to dissolve.

The first upshot of this critique is that it looks like there must either be symmetrical moral encroachment or none at all. Once we allow that doxastic wrongs can make a difference to what we should believe, morality will occasionally tell thinkers to believe what the evidence alone would not allow. We should be pessimists about our chances for reconciling DOXASTIC WRONGING and NO SHODDY BELIEFS. The second, more radical upshot is that it turns out that defenders of asymmetrical moral encroachment lack the resources to maintain the core commitments of their view while maintaining, as many do, that evidence is the only reason for belief.

A great deal of philosophical attention has been spent on the norms that govern belief. Much less attention has been given to the norms that govern *dis*belief. Part of my aim in this paper is to suggest that any attempt to paint our beliefs with moral status will have to include *withheld* belief as well, and this will make such proposals more

[31] Representatives of asymmetrical moral encroachment would be Schroeder (2012a), Schroeder (2018), Bolinger (2018); Basu & Schroeder (2019), Basu (2019a; 2021) Morton & Paul (2018), though compare Begby (2018), Basu (2019b).

epistemically revisionary than it's typically thought. The apparent clash between DOXASTIC WRONGING and NO SHODDY BELIEFS remains unsolved – we still don't know how to reconcile a morality that cares what we believe with an epistemology that forbids believing on scant evidence.

I: The Case For Asymmetrical Moral Encroachment

Before I defend my conditional claim that withholding belief can wrong if any doxastic state can, let me begin by outlining the case for asymmetrical moral encroachment.

AME begins as a diagnosis of a phenomenon in which a thinker has good evidence for a particular proposition but nonetheless it seems she would do something wrong by believing it. Some paradigm cases from the literature:

> *Spouse*: You have struggled with an alcohol problem for many years, but have been sober for eight months. Tonight you attend a departmental reception for a visiting colloquium speaker and are proud of withstanding the temptation to have a drink. But when you get home, your spouse smells the wine that the colloquium speaker spilled on your sleeve while gesticulating to make a point, and you can see from her eyes that she thinks you have fallen off the wagon. If you are like us, then you will be prone to feel wounded by this. Yes, you have a long history of falling off the wagon, and yes, there is some evidence that this time is another. You can see how it could be reasonable for someone to draw this conclusion. But it still hurts… it seems to be a belief that you would like an apology for (Schroeder and Basu, 2019, 2).

> *Racism*: The night before he is to be presented with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, John Hope Franklin hosts a celebratory dinner party at the Cosmos Club, at which he is a member. All the other black men in the club are uniformed attendants. While walking through the club, a woman sees him, calls him over, presents her coat check ticket and orders him to bring her coat (Gendler 2011, 36).

Similar cases abound. Schroeder (2020) discusses an HR manager who believes a young female candidate wants the job purely for its maternity benefits; Marušić (2011) examines the case of a smoker who thwarts their ambition to quit by believing they'll never succeed and Moss (2018) and Bolinger (2018) explore the moral insult of believing racially profiled propositions. In all

these cases, the thinker's evidence seems to support the proposition on offer, yet it seems she can be criticized for believing it. AME holds that the explanation is that there is something *morally* wrong with believing the proposition — that is, DOXASTIC WRONGING is true — and this has rightly affected our verdicts about what the thinker should believe.

There are different accounts of exactly how beliefs can be morally wrong. Moss (2018) and Bolinger (2018) develop accounts according to which my belief wrongs you when it makes it more likely that I will treat you in objectionable ways. Basu (2019b) holds that downstream accounts are incomplete accountings of the wrong in wrongful beliefs and instead locates the wrong internal to the doxastic state, while Schroeder (2018) locates the wrong in the ability of a doxastic state to 'falsely diminish' fellow agents. I will return to these accounts a little later. For laying out the dialectic, it suffices to say that the key claims of asymmetrical encroachment are that believing p can wrong, and this can affect whether a thinker should believe p.

The challenge is to hold this view in a way that preserves NO SHODDY BELIEFS. A full-blooded pragmatism could diagnose these cases by holding that morality can compete with or trump evidence in determining what a subject should believe, but this would mean abandoning NO SHODDY BELIEFS. We are looking for a way to explain these cases in a way that *preserves* the result that thinkers should not believe p except if the evidence alone permits them to believe p. That is, we are looking for a way to deliver the "asymmetry" that morality only ever pushes us away from certain beliefs, not toward others.

To see how AME tries to deliver this result, we need to get into some finer grain about how AME works. It would be easy to understand AME as a "threshold-altering", or a "bar-raising" view. Alex Worsnip gives a helpful illustration with what he calls the "beaker of reasons" (2021, 3-4):



A: The ordinary evidential bar

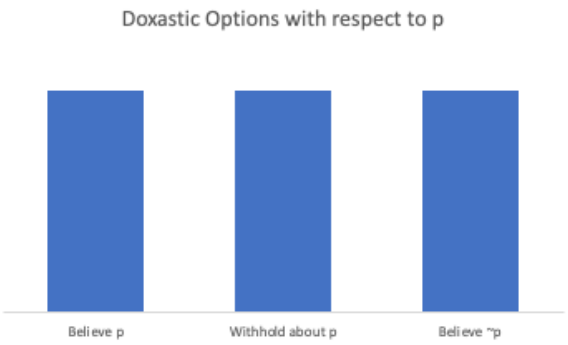
B: The evidential bar under higher stakes

Fig 1: The beaker of reasons.

The shaded area in both beakers represents the evidential case for p. In order to know whether this evidence is sufficient to justify *believing* p, we also need to know where the "bar" is, that is, how much evidence is required. The placement of the bar is supplied by non-evidential considerations, such as the stakes and costs and risks associated with believing p. Thus a given amount of evidence can be sufficient to justify belief in case A, but not in B.[32]

Nothing about the bar-raising metaphor is misleading, exactly, it does leave slightly mysterious the question of how morality is meant to move the bar, and why asymmetrical encroachers think it will only move it upwards, such that morality can never compete with the evidence-only standards for belief. Nothing about a bar-shifting mechanism rules out the possibility the bar could be lowered as well as raised by a thinker's moral stakes.[33] To any threshold-shifting s tory, we can simply ask "why would the bar only move upwards?". The original position of AME as represented in Schroeder (2012a); (2012b); (2019); Basu & Schroeder (2019), Basu (2019) and Schroeder (2021) has a sophisticated answer to both questions that we will miss if we speak in bar-raising metaphor. To fully capture the asymmetry in asymmetrical encroachment, I represent the view with what I'll call the 'three columns of reasons'.[34]

Take a full belief framework in which a thinker has three options with respect to a proposition p: she can believe p, believe ~p, or withhold belief about p. Represent these options with three columns.



[32] Views along these lines are represented in Owens (2000), Fantl & McGrath (2007), Ganson (2008), Pace (2011), Morton & Paul (2018), Basu (2019), Basu & Schroeder (2019); Stanley (2005).

33 See Worsnip (2021), 9.

34 Though everything I say in the following sections should be equally troubling for a threshold version of AME. There, my claim would be that the moral costs of withholding could lower the bar for how much evidence is sufficient to justify belief.

The height of each column represents how much reason a thinker has for that particular option. The more reason she has for an option, the higher its column will be. Evidence for p grows the "believe p" column; evidence for ~p grows the "~p" column, and factors in favour of agnosticism grow the column 'withhold'.

It's a commitment of AME that a thinker should go in for whichever doxastic option has the tallest column.[35] This is an epistemically well-motivated principle: it has been notoriously difficult for epistemologists to specify a threshold past which the evidence is sufficient to justify believing p.[36] By dispensing with threshold talk and operating on a norm that tells thinkers to take the doxastic option best supported by her reasons, AME can explain when evidence is sufficient to justify belief in p: when it outstrips any other doxastic option. The norm is not "believe p when the evidence for p passes a certain threshold," but "believe p when the reasons for believing p are greater than the reasons to withhold or to believe ~p".

Crucially, it's also a commitment of the view that the only thing that can feature in the 'believe p' and 'believe ~p' columns is evidence. That is, AME endorses:

EVIDENCE ALONE: All reasons to believe p (or ~p) are evidence that p (or ~p).[37]

It is the combination of EVIDENCE ALONE, plus the norm that thinkers should go in for whichever doxastic state is best supported by reasons, that delivers our target asymmetry.

This positions us to see how morality will only ever make it harder to come by justification for belief. To see the mechanism in action, let's compare *Spouse* to a case with different moral stakes. When believing p would be morally wrongful, that fact supplies reason to withhold belief instead (the moral costs of believing p cannot be reason to believe ~p, since they are

[35] Schroder (2012), 274.

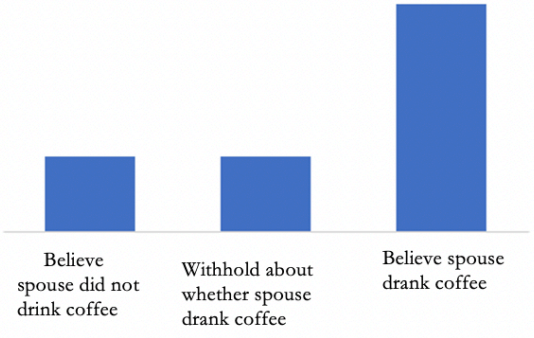
[36] See Shope (1986), Schroeder (2015).

[37] "[I agree] that the only kind of epistemic reason in favor of any belief is evidence for the content of that belief" (Schroeder 2018, 118); "The constitutive reasons [for belief], i.e. the evidence … settle which particular belief we should hold" (Basu and Schroder, 2018, 12). "The view we defend is consistent with denying that there are practical or ethical reasons for belief … [we are not] going so far as to deny that our (nonfoundational) beliefs should be held solely on the basis of the evidence that supports them" (Paul and Morton, 2018b, 178; 190). This position is sometimes termed "evidentialism", e.g. in Shah (2003; 2006), Shah & Velleman (2005), Way (2016). I have avoided this terminology to distinguish it from the Conee and Feldman (1985) position of the same name, which holds that a thinker should have the belief best supported by her evidence.

not evidence that ~p).[38] In *Spouse,* for instance, let's grant that it would be a moral insult to believe one's partner had consumed alcohol. There's therefore moral reason to hold off believing that, for the same reasons we always have to put a handbrake on potential insults. By contrast, in the low-stakes case, there's no such reason to withhold.

Spouse (Modified, Low stakes)

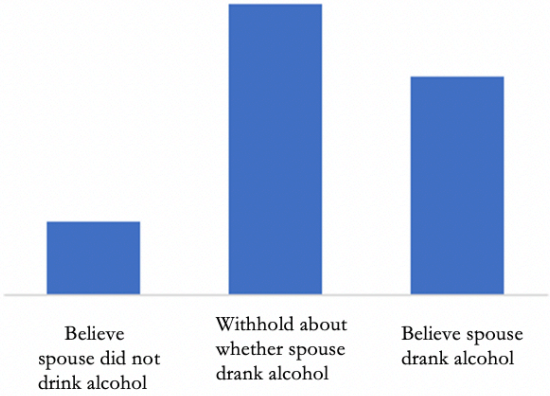
You come home from a colloquium smelling like coffee, which you rarely drink at night because it keeps you awake, but which you are quite fond of. When your spouse embraces you at the door they smell coffee and conclude you had an after-dinner espresso. In fact you didn't, and the smell is because someone at the table spilled theirs onto you.



Spouse 1: Low Stakes

Spouse (Original, High stakes)

"When you get home, your spouse smells the wine that the colloquium speaker spilled on your sleeve while gesticulating to make a point, and you can see from her eyes that she thinks you have fallen off the wagon." (Schroeder and Basu, 2019, 2)



Spouse 2: High Stakes

In both cases, the candidate proposition p enjoys a similar amount of evidence. There is the strong olfactory experience of a beverage, the knowledge that that beverage was at the event, the probabilistic background that it's rare for this person to consume it, but equally, the knowledge that they might be tempted. Let's stipulate that the evidentiary support for p and ~p is the same in both cases. In *Spouse 2,* AME holds that evidence is not sufficient to justify belief, because the moral costs of believing p have made the case for withholding strong enough that the 'believe p' column no longer enjoys the lead. What creates the appearance that

[38] Other reasons for withholding might include the fact that more evidence will arrive in a moment (Schroeder 2012a; 2012b), the fact that the evidence for p is not very reliable, or the fact the evidence dead-heats between 'p' and '~p'.

the evidential bar has 'moved upwards' is in fact that the case to withhold has grown so strong that we'd need more-than-usual reason, i.e. evidence to outstrip it.

Since nothing besides evidence can appear in the columns for believing p or believing ~p, moral considerations can *only* feature in the case to withhold. Thus, their net effect can only ever be to strengthen the case to withhold, and thus to mean thinkers would need more evidence to believe p, never less.

So understood, AME is a significant intellectual achievement. It has been notoriously difficult for epistemologists to specify how much evidence a thinker needs in order to be justified believing p, and what's so special about that level of evidence. By dispensing with threshold talk and operating instead on a norm of belief that tells thinkers to take the doxastic option best supported by her reasons, AME can explain when evidence is sufficient to justify belief in p: when it outstrips any better doxastic option. It can explain why non-evidential reasons sometimes seem to affect what we should believe; it is because they provide reason to withhold. And it seems able to preserve the appealing result that those reasons don't go the whole nine yards to being incompatible with evidence or to generating reason to believe what the evidence alone would not allow; it is because only evidence is a reason for belief. This delivers the target reconciliation between DOXASTIC WRONGING and NO SHODDY BELIEFS. Since moral considerations only appear in this picture as reason for withholding, their function will only ever be to make it harder for the 'believe p' column to win. Morality will thus only push us *away* from particular beliefs.

But what if withholding belief could wrong?[39] In the remainder of the paper I defend my conditional claim that if doxastic states can wrong, withholding belief can wrong. This creates a puzzle for AME that threatens to explode the position: how to weigh the moral costs of withholding as anything other than moral pressure to believe?

[39] Mark Schroeder, one of the key architects of AME, seems to think it cannot. He writes, "if non-belief is never wrong, there can never be any conflicts between the moral and epistemic standards governing belief which consists in some belief being morally required even though it is improbable given our evidence" (2018, 116), though he does not give explicit defence of the antecedent.

II. Wrongful Withholding

What is it to withhold belief, and how could it wrong? Let us say a subject withholds belief about p when she has considered the question of whether p but believes neither p nor ~p.[40] Already this category is so large that it crackles with normative possibility. We can withhold belief at the beginning of inquiry by suspending our existing beliefs in order to deliberate, as we do when we consider some question "open".[41] We can withhold belief at the end of inquiry after concluding that our resources are insufficient to recommend believing either way. We can withhold belief in ways that look voluntary, as when Descartes resolved to "demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations" (1641/1995, 15) and we can withhold belief in ways that look involuntary, as when we are gripped by doubt or mistrust. We can withhold belief in ways that take an attitude towards the proposition under examination, such as doubt or skepticism, and we can withhold belief in ways that involve the absence of an attitude, such as when I have forgotten what I once believed.

It turns out to be quite an ambitious thesis, then, to say that "non-belief is never wrong". It would mean holding that all these ways of relating to propositions about each other; our testimony; our tastes; values; hopes; personhood; reliability; and trustworthiness are either always permissible or morally unevaluable. In this section I'll argue this is false. I'll argue in two ways. First, by cases and then by extension of existing theories. Let me begin with the arguments from cases. Our opening cases were *Spouse* and *Racism*. We can construct comparable moral wrongs with withheld belief.

> *Spouse**
>
> You return from a colloquium talk smelling like the alcohol the speaker spilled on your sleeve. Your partner, who knows about your struggle to stay sober, plainly smells the wine. The mood is icy between you, and you press them on whether they think you've broken your promise to stay sober. They say no; they don't think you drank. They just don't know what to believe.

In the original case, the belief is one "for which you'd want an apology". Is apology less felicitous here? No; whatever is supposed to be maligned by the belief "my spouse drank

[40] See Wedgwood (2003). Withholding belief is therefore broader than suspending judgement, which is to take a neutral attitude towards p; see Friedman (2013).

[41] See especially Goldberg (2020), Friedman (2020).

alcohol", whether it's honesty or the tenacity it takes to stay sober, it can just as easily be maligned by withholding.

Here's another case like *Spouse** in which an insulting belief between spouses is not obviously less insulting once the thinker withholds instead. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, the eponymous general is driven mad by the suggestion from Iago that Desdemona has been unfaithful. Othello is "dragged back and forth across the keel" of his doubt (Cavell 1979, 277), wondering first this and now that, seeing evidence on all sides. Importantly, Othello does not immediately adopt the belief that Desdemona has been unfaithful. At first, he simply loses the belief that she hasn't. He has no settled belief either way: "By the world, I think my wife be honest and think she is not" [III, iii, 432-435]. Of course, Othello is famously quick to form the positive belief that Desdemona has been unfaithful, and it is difficult to pinpoint where exactly he begins to wrong her on the journey from doubting her in Act III to smothering her in Act V. But it strikes me as arbitrary to declare that he cannot be wronging her before he forms the belief that she has been unfaithful. If the clock stopped in their relationship at the moment he retreats to agnosticism, it is not obvious that he is doing much better by Desdemona than when he believes false things about her.

The second case of a wrongful belief was the white woman who takes John Hope Franklin to be an attendant because he is black. Here's the modification:

*Racism**

> The night before he is due to receive a prestigious award, John Hope Franklin attends a reception in the University's Great Hall. Spotting him across the room, a white female professor points him out to a colleague and asks, "who's that?". "It's the awardee", her colleague replies, "that's him!". The professor turns and frowns, taking in Franklin's skin colour. "Are you *sure?",* she asks.

The speaker has no belief about the identity of the person she has pointed out. She has not falsely taken him to be a coat check attendant or a member of staff. Nonetheless, she lacks the belief that he is what he is: the recipient of a prestigious award. I think withholding belief in this way can replicate the wrong in *Racism*. Indeed empirically, people of colour are routinely insulted by being the object of doubt, agnosticism, or withheld belief, in situations where others would not be (Mills 2007). For instance, Moss' (2018) account of the wrong of racially profiling beliefs references Claude Steele's (2011) memoir Whistling Vivaldi, in which Steele

describes whistling classical music as he walks down the street to give suspicious nearby white people a form of epistemic reassurance. In practice, it is possible that Steele's whistle does not just work to disprove a held belief ("He's dangerous"), but to resolve doubt ("Is he…? Should I….? Oh, phew").

*Spouse** and *Racism** are rough sketches, but already they make me wonder whether we didn't misdiagnose at least some of our original motivating cases. In practice the boundary between withholding about p and believing ~p is not always starkly lit. Many of the doxastic wrongs initially described as wrongful belief might in reality be equally well diagnosed as wrongful withholding. Does the employer who falsely dismisses an applicant as "just wanting maternity benefits" actually believe that, or does he simply treat it as a live possibility an objectionable way? Does the person who does not think her friends will train for and complete the marathon actually believe they will not, or is she just seriously doubtful? It's often hard to tell. Importantly, our feeling of being insulted does not seem to turn on having a precise answer to which doxastic state it is.[42]

Let me now zoom out from them to argue by an extension of the existing theories of how beliefs can wrong. I propose:

> BELIEF-WITHHOLDING PARITY: For any wrong-making feature F, if beliefs can wrong because they are F, withholding can also wrong because it is F.

Schroeder (2018) thinks wrongful beliefs wrong by falsely diminishing their targets. Following Korsgaard (1996), he suggests we take morality to be a co-operative activity that requires "treating someone in ways that are compatible with co-operating with them … [and] you cannot cooperate with someone else while discounting their capacity for agency" (112). If it is insulting to have one's capacity for agency denied, it can be insulting to have belief withheld about it (Johnson 2003, Fritz and Jackson 2021). An interlocutor who picks up the hypothesis of our equal agency in epistemic tweezers, turning it over and scrutinising it for possible weaknesses, does not seem better positioned to co-operate with us than one who holds an actively agency-discounting belief.

[42] Fritz and Jackson have made the similar point that "generally, we don't need to know that a person has formed an outright belief in order to know that she has engaged in objectionable racial profiling" (2021, 1396). Fritz and Jackson use this observation to argue that if there is moral reason against forming a belief that would be injurious, there can also be moral reason against raising one's credence in that proposition (1404).

A different account, Basu and Schroeder (2019) hold that beliefs can wrong by directly harming our relationships, because relationships are in part constituted by what we believe of one another. If it's true that what we believe of each other can constitute our relationships, what we don't think of each other can do the same. Suppose A mentally picks at the hypothesis of B's infidelity, for instance. There is a level of preoccupation at which A cannot also take herself to be wholeheartedly committed to B's word, since to be wholeheartedly committed is an emotional state in part defined by the shunning of alternative attitudes. (Moran 2004, 450). A's way of withholding can take on a self-fulfilling character; by not taking herself to be in a trusting and committed relationship she makes it the case that she is not. If I can be required to avoid the beliefs that undermine trust, it seems I should avoid withholding belief when it does the same.

Finally, downstream accounts of wrongful beliefs, such as those presented by Moss (2018) and Bolinger (2018) to diagnose the wrongs of racist beliefs, hold that beliefs wrong when they raise the likelihood of objectionable behaviour or dispositions. Same move: if all the thinkers who presently do believe racial stereotypes simply started withholding belief about whether blacks are dangerous or intellectually inferior, it is not clear that their behaviour or dispositions would morally improve. Why hire someone whose capacities you doubt when there is a white equivalent whose capacities feel sure of?

The dialectic at this point should be clear: for any account of the wrong in wronging beliefs, that wrong could also be instantiated by withholding belief.

III. How Could We Have Missed This?

Let me take a brief interlude to ask how we could have missed this. Plainly, the claim of the preceding section is fairly obvious: we sometimes feel as injured by the absence of a belief as by the presence of a demeaning one, and rightly so. Yet the original discussions of DOXASTIC WRONGING omitted this possibility, and only fairly recently has it come under explicit consideration.[43]

[43] See especially Crewe and Ichikawa (2021), who emphasize that the moral hazards of not believing sexual assault survivors' accounts can mean schools or individual believers should use a lower evidential bar than law enforcement when assessing whether an assault occurred. This point is echoed by Basu (2020, 205): "perhaps we have a moral burden to lower our evidential standards for believing the victim". Likewise, Enoch and Spectre have noticed that sometimes what seems morally wrongful is not just "[a] belief, but also raising the relevant credence, having the hedged belief, [or] failing to have some other belief … [although] we don't have an

I think the oversight can be explained in the following way. We said that withholding belief is a matter of lacking the belief p and lacking the belief ~p while having considered whether p. So construed, it's easy to think the costs of withholding will be costs derived from the conjunction — in which it's the state of lacking both beliefs that germinates the wrong. On this picture, when we look for wrongs of withholding, we are looking for wrongs that would be equally well alleviated by believing either p or ~p. This appears to be the expectation about how wrongful withholding will look. For instance, Schroeder holds:

> If you want to know what sort of thing could be a reason for or against withholding, it pays to pay attention to what makes withholding different from belief. To withhold is to not make up your mind, to have formed no belief. Consequently, any disadvantage of forming beliefs—of making up your mind—is potentially a reason to withhold … and to be the right sort of reason [against withholding], you have to be a benefit of having made up your mind (2012a, 277).

Such that:

> The costs [of withholding] are associated with reasons to *not withhold*—i.e., to either believe p or believe ~p (2012a, 280).

Costs of belieflessness *per se* are hard to find. Moral instances are even harder. But it is a mistake to conclude too quickly from the lack of such cases that there's no such thing as wrongful withholding, because it is a mistake in the first place to think wrongful withholding is exclusively associated with disjunctive moral reason to believe *either* p or ~p. While it's true that people who withhold can be said to believe nothing, it doesn't follow that the wrongs we should look for are wrongs of believing nothing. Sometimes a scenario will set off the wrong-detector because lacking one particular belief is sufficient for a wrong. If morality objects when you don't do A, it's true that every world in which you avoid that objection is one in which you do either A or B — one in which the disjunction is true. But it doesn't follow that you can satisfy morality by doing B.

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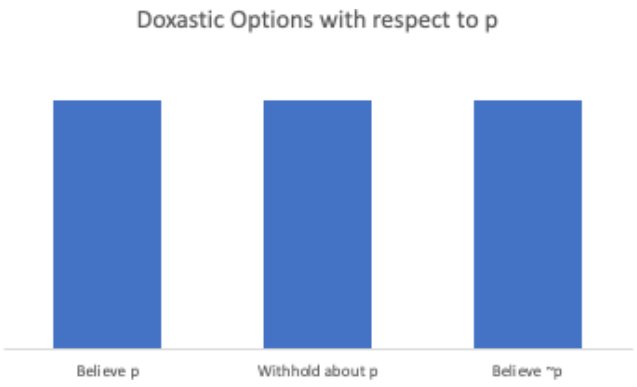
argument clearly establishing that this result generalizes" (2022, 8). I am aiming at giving an argument that these cases *do* generalize, at least with respect to cases of failing to have a belief. Another point of distinction between my view and these accounts is that these views tend to argue that morality can lower as well as raise the bar while leaving in tact the claim that evidence is the only reason for belief. As I'll argue in the next section, in fact this second claim is in peril as well, as long as the defender of AME wants to maintain the core of her view.

I believe this is the mistake the literature has often made: we have failed to distinguish between wrongful withholding caused by the lack of a particular belief (let's call it **unipolar** wrongful withholding), and the wrong of *belieflessness per se*.

IV. The Problem For Ame

I said the possibility of wrongful withholding created two bad upshots for AME. First, that it will turn the position symmetrical, by yielding the result that morality could sometimes ask thinkers to believe what the evidence alone would not allow. Second, it means defenders of AME cannot hold onto the core of the view while maintaining the commitment that evidence is the only reason for belief. Let me start with the second.

Returning to AME's original schema, we can now see the problem is that there is no place to count the costs of withholding.



The potential costs of believing p were supposed to go in the basket of reasons for withholding. Where can we put the costs of withholding? One strategy might be to count them as negatives in the withholding column, so that they undercut the rest of the case for withholding. But this would repeat the mistake we diagnosed by failing to distinguish between costs of withholding that derive from the state of belieflessness, and those that derive from the lack of a particular belief.

The better strategy is to break the costs of withholding belief into its component parts; the moral cost of lacking the belief that p and the moral cost of lacking the belief that ~p. Let φ stand for "believe p", and ψ "believe ~p". My claim has been that there can be distinctive moral costs associated with not-φing, which do not symmetrically advance the case to ψ. The

most straightforward way to parse these moral costs would be to hold that they give pro tanto moral reason *against not-φ-ing*, and in turn it seems natural to say that that moral reason against not-φing just is moral reason to φ. Unipolar moral costs of withholding would thus give pro tanto moral reason for a particular belief, just as many defenders of DOXASTIC WRONGING hold that the moral cost of an insulting belief gave pro tanto reason against it. The problem is this will bring us to a set of overlapping conditionals.

(1) If DOXASTIC WRONGING holds, withholding belief can wrong.
(2) If withholding belief can wrong, thinkers can have moral reason to avoid wrongful withholding.
(3) If thinkers can have moral reason to avoid wrongful withholding, they can have moral reason for belief.

Such that once we affirm that doxastic states can wrong, we set off a series of mousetraps through the contravention of EVIDENCE ALONE.

What could a rehabilitative effort say in response? We could try to block (1), by holding that what has so far seemed like wrongful withholding, isn't. Perhaps our cases were misdiagnosed: in fact what went wrong was that the thinker did not *act as though* p, or suppose p. For instance, perhaps our sense of objection to Othello is tracking the fact that he did not *act as if* Desdemona is faithful.[44] This response would incur a significant explanatory burden as long as the goal is to avoid abandoning the idea of DOXASTIC WRONGING altogether. Why would wrongful withholding, and not its belief-specific analogues, be best alleviated by a change in action or commitment? Further, it is not clear that a practical resolution to act as though p or to suppose it really does get a thinker off the moral hook. Consider: "I'll act as though you've been faithful, but I don't believe you have been"; "I'll grant for the purposes of our interaction that you're qualified for the job, but given your gender I'm really not sure". Belief is frequently distinguished from other doxastic states by its conceptual link to the truth of its content. It seems like exactly what we want from others in these cases is to agree that these things *are true*.

[44] For the difference between belief, commitment, and other takings-as-if, see Shah and Velleman (2005), Buchak (2014).

Perhaps instead we could try to block (2) by saying that although there are wrongs of withholding belief, unlike wrongs of belief, they should not affect our doxastic verdicts. The idea would be that despite BELIEF-WITHHOLDING PARITY, there is an asymmetry in epistemic upshot: doxastic verdicts should only take into account the costs of belief. On pain of begging the question, we cannot not get this result by wheeling in the commitment that only evidence is a reason for belief.

One strategy might be to look to whatever distinguishes full belief as a doxastic state. Perhaps it also grounds this unique relationship to moral costs. For instance, in the nearby literature on pragmatic encroachment, many have held that the hallmark of belief as a doxastic state is a constitutive link to practical outputs, e.g. to believe p is in part to be disposed to rely on p in action or in practical reason, or to have license to act as though p. (Stanley 2005, Fantl and McGrath 2002; 2007; 2009, Fritz 2017. Compare Roeber 2016, 18). If this is so, the costs associated with acting in particular ways will uniquely target belief, since what it is to resolve that we may believe p just is to resolve that we may rely on p in action. The practical costs of relying on p in action are therefore exactly the kind of thing to uniquely implicate the verdict about whether we can *believe* — not whether we can withhold.

The problem for importing this strategy into the moral domain is that as far as morality is concerned, wrongs of omission are still wrongs. On the question of whether we did the right thing, morality is yoda-like: we did, or we not. To be sure, actively doing wrong may be worse than allowing it, but both are chastisable for not being the right. So once we affirm DOXASTIC WRONGING and cast mental activity as its own kind of moral act, we seem to open up the possibility of doxastic wrongs of omission. It can be bad to lack a morally good doxastic state. This seems to be what causes the trouble in unipolar wrongful withholding. Consequently, even doxastic states characterized by *not* relying on p in action or inference can carry exposure to the relevant costs: it is no longer true that belief alone is constitutively related to the costs in the right kind of way. Further, this response would generate peculiar counsel to deliberators: it would tell them that *x* kind and degree of moral wrong should be avoided when caused by belief, but not when caused by withholding.

Finally, we could reject (3) by holding that moral reason against wrongful withholding is not moral reason for belief. Earlier I said that when φ is "believe p", and ψ is "believe ~p", the moral costs of not-φing can give pro tanto moral reason *against* not-φ-ing, and that it is natural to simply call "moral reasons against not believing p," "moral reasons to believe p". But

perhaps this is wrong. The claim that reason against not-φing just is reason to φ seems straightforward where the only options are to φ or to not-φ (Greenspan 2005, Snedegar 2018). But it might be objected that when it comes to belief, there are three options, not two: withhold, believe p, or believe ~p. This could undermine the sense in which reason against not-φing is reason to φ.

Some philosophers think that even in cases of multiple options, reason against not φ-ing is still reason to φ (Schmidt 2023). But suppose it is right that only in binary cases is reason against not-φing reason to φ. Then all our work establishing the asymmetrical origin of the wrong here will still leave it open that the reason generated is just reason against not believing p*,* where that is disjunctive, satisfied by either believing p or ~p.

However, in cases of unipolar wrongful withholding, morality seems to be objecting to the lack of a particular belief. It objects when we believe ~p, it objects when we believe neither p nor ~p, and it is only not objecting when we believe p. In these cases, even if the reason generated by the costs of withholding is disjunctive, the separate moral reason against believing ~p will suppress one half of that disjunctive upshot. In aggregate the moral reasons will favour believing p. I think this is sufficient for saying that the thinker in this scenario has moral reasons to believe p.[45]

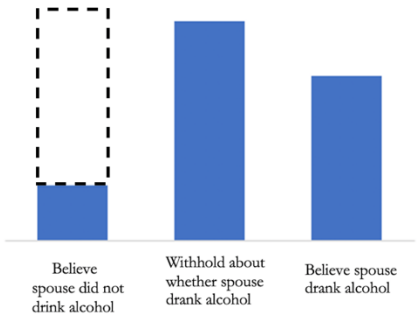
This is terrible for AME! For now we've said that on pain of being ad hoc about which moral costs are worth avoiding, we should allow that the moral costs of withholding can give moral reasons *against* withholding, which are best understood as moral reasons for belief.

This brings us to the second upshot; we cannot keep moral encroachment asymmetrical. Plainly, if the moral costs of lacking a particular belief p can be reason to believe p, then in

[45] A second response is that one plausible way of thinking about the apparent tripartite structure of full belief is *as* a combination of pairwise comparisons: the reasons to believe p versus the reasons to withhold, and the reasons to believe ~p versus the reasons to withhold (Schroeder 2012a, Ross and Schroeder 2014). Believing p and believing ~p are distinct doxastic states with different for-and-against conditions. This is why we represented believing p as φ, and believing ~p as ψ; there could be reasons against believing p that are not relevant to the net case for believing ~p. On this sort of a model, the decision over whether to believe p *is* comprised of a set of binary choices over φ and ψ, and we will be back to a binary model on which reasons against not φ-ing are reasons to φ. We could use this combination of pairwise comparisons to give an account of how moral reasons might figure in an overall verdict about what to believe: a thinker should believe p instead of withholding when the evidence for p + the cost of lacking the belief p > the costs of falsely believing p. She should believe p instead of believing ~p when the evidence for p + the costs of lacking the belief p + the cost of falsely believing ~p > the evidence for ~ p + the costs of lacking the belief ~p + the costs of falsely believing p. And she should believe p outright when both these conditions hold. Nothing substantive in my argument depends on accepting this model, however, since the first response should be sufficient to vindicate the idea that wrongful withholding can trigger moral reasons for belief.

principle, the costs of lacking the belief that p could advantage the case to believe p so much that we should believe p even when the evidence does not allow that. Recall *Spouse*,* where the moral costs of lacking the belief "my spouse did not drink" seem to weigh in favour of believing it. For a rudimentary diagram, I've marked them with a dashed black line:

*Spouse**



In principle, the moral damage of *not* believing p could advantage the case to believe p enough that it becomes the doxastic option best supported by reasons, even if there is very little evidence for p (as in this case), or the evidence dead-heats between p and ~p. Because AME is committed to saying that a thinker should take whichever doxastic state she has most reason for, it looks like there can be moral pressure to believe what the evidence alone would not allow. NO SHODDY BELIEFS is violated.

Crucially, because of the structure of our argument in the previous section, the defender of AME has lost her way to block this result. Recall the overlapping conditionals;

(1) If DOXASTIC WRONGING holds, withholding belief can wrong.
(2) If withholding belief can wrong, thinkers can have moral reason to avoid wrongful withholding.
(3) If thinkers can have moral reason to avoid wrongful withholding, they can have moral reason for belief.

This argument suggests that DOXASTIC WRONGING contains the seeds of the negation of EVIDENCE ALONE. So AME can no longer invoke EVIDENCE ALONE to block the possibility that that morality could ask us to believe on less than usual evidence.

Now, why not simply hold that wrongful withholding means morality can "lower" as well as "raise" the bar, without making the bolder claim that it suggests there can be moral reasons for belief? To be clear, it's not so much that *I'm* defending the claim that there can be moral reasons for belief. What I am defending is the conditional claim that once we grant that there can be doxastic wronging, and that thinkers can have moral reasons to arrange their doxastic states in a way that avoids doxastic wronging, and we add the observation that withholding belief can wrong, we get the result that there can be moral reason for belief. Nonetheless, a number of authors have preferred to defend the idea that the bar can move symmetrically without holding that there can be moral reasons for belief.[46] So why haven't I allowed that this option is available to the asymmetrical encroacher?

The answer is that by the tenets of AME, the direction of explanation is the other way around. AME, properly understood, explained the phenomenon of the "shifting bar" in terms of the weight of reasons. What determined the apparent placement of the evidential bar *was* the interplay between reasons to believe p, reasons to believe ~p, and reasons to withhold. Suppose S is considering whether the sandwich before her is almond or peanut butter. S has a fatal peanut allergy, so the costs of falsely believing "it's almond butter" supply reason to withhold instead, and she would need more than usual evidence to believe it. We shorthand this process by saying that the stakes have "raised the evidential bar", but in fact what's happened is that the preponderance of reasons to withhold mean that "believe p" would need more reason than usual on its side in order to be the option best supported by reasons. The "movement" of the evidential bar is supplied by the comparative strength of reasons in favour of believing p, withholding about p, and believing ~p.

Given this background picture to which AME is committed, we should expect there to be a parallel explanation for the appearance of bar-*lowering*. That is, if the defender of AME were to pivot to defend symmetrical encroachment — allowing that morality can ask subjects to believe p on less-than-usual evidence — we should expect that appearance to be explained by

[46] For instance, Paul and Morton (2018a; 2018b) hold that morality can "lower the evidential bar" within a certain epistemically permissible range. Ideally the evidence would establish what to believe on a first pass, but where the evidence is permissive, "on second pass" (2018b, 193) the moral costs of believing something like *I'm never going to make it* can permit using a lower evidentiary threshold within the epistemically permitted range. Crewe and Ichikawa (2021) and Basu (2020) each suggest it can be permissible to use a lower evidential bar for testimony of sexual assaults. Worsnip (2021), Fritz and Jackson (2020), and Enoch and Spectre (2022) have given reason to be skeptical that any bar-shifting account can avoid this result; they hold that if morality can affect the 'evidential bar', there is no principled way to deny that it can also lower it.

some change in the arrangement of *reasons*. Because AME is committed to thinking that how much evidence a thinker requires to justify belief is a function of the comparison between reasons to believe p, withhold, or believe ~p, AME should hold that variations in how much evidence is needed to justify belief are upshots of the weight of reasons. So if there are cases in which thinkers have moral grounds to believe p, though the evidence alone would have her withhold, AME's background commitments should explain that appearance by saying that some additional reason must have been added to the case to believe p. We know that cannot be evidence, so by AME's own lights, the best explanation for the evidential bar shifting downwards should be that there are moral reasons for belief.

Of course, it would be possible to hold that the evidential bar 'moves' for reasons other than the interplay of reasons to believe p, withhold belief, or believe ~p. But for the defender of AME to throw out that commitment along with the claim that morality exerts is doxastic influence asymmetrically, would be to abandon the core of the AME view.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Let's return to our opening dialectic. We began with two plausible claims, DOXASTIC WRONGING and NO SHODDY BELIEFS. Asymmetrical moral encroachers want to be optimists about our chances for reconciling these two claims. They hold we can admit some role for morality in determining our doxastic verdicts, without hurtling all the way to the result that morality can ask us to believe what the evidence alone would not permit. If AME held, it would present a very polite version of morality, which ordinarily presents itself as sovereign when it tells us what to do. I've argued that AME is not a viable position since it fails to account for the wrongs of withholding belief. If morality regulates the head, it *really* regulates the head. Regrettably, then, we should still be pessimists about our chances for reconciling these two plausible views. So much the worse for one of them — or perhaps, for us.

Surprise! Deliberation Does Not Vindicate Evidentialism.

In the debate over what kind of thing can be a reason for belief, pragmatists and evidentialists alike have agreed that the moral or practical advantages of believing p are not psychologically able to feature in deliberation about *whether p*. It seems only evidence can do that. Consequently, a major challenge for defenders of moral or practical reasons for belief is to explain how such reasons could possibly *work*. I argue that in fact, all sides of the debate should deny that only evidence can feature in deliberation about p, and model how practical and moral considerations can legitimately feature after all. Two fairly radical upshots. "Transparency" — the phenomenon that deliberation about whether to believe p is resolved by deliberation about p — is a non sequitur for reasons for belief, contra a number of widespread and plausible-feeling arguments. Second, practical or moral facts can be psychologically efficacious in factual deliberation. I suggest a new way forward for the pragmatist-evidentialist divide, and for the strategy of pulling normative verdicts about reasons for belief from the psychological structure of deliberation.

In this paper I'm going to show how the moral and practical upshots of believing p could possibly weigh in deliberation about *whether p,* when at the moment it's widely thought they can't. Pragmatists and evidentialists alike have agreed that as a matter of psychology, we simply are not able to deliberate towards conclusions about p by thinking about how good it would be if we were to believe p. Even Pascal did not think the considerations of the wager could be efficacious in conscious reasoning about whether God exists (1995/1690 §233). Consequently, one of the major challenges facing any view that defends moral or practical reasons for belief is to say how such reasons could possibly work — how could thinkers ever *use* them? I'll argue that attention to this question reveals a puzzle.

On the one hand, there is a widely defended and deeply plausible-feeling argument that the psychology of deliberation is such that moral or practical considerations cannot explicitly feature in deliberations that produce belief, and that this vindicates **evidentialism** about reasons for belief: the position that all reasons to believe p are evidence about p.[47]

[47] I will use 'evidentialism' to refer to this position, rather than the Feldman and Conee (1985) position of the same name which claims that a thinker should hold the belief best supported by her evidence, which is a claim about justification. Representatives of *reasons* evidentialism would be Way (2016), Shah (2003), (2006), (2013), Kelly (2002), Schroeder (2012), (2018), Parfit (2011). Representatives of the view I'll call 'pragmatism', that there can be

This argument works by observing that when you wonder what you should believe about some proposition p, your method for asking and answering that question is just to find out whether p. If you wonder whether you should believe it is snowing, you will look out the window for snow. Once you have the answer to that factual question, you have the answer about what you should believe. This feature is sometimes called the *transparency* of doxastic deliberation, for the way the normative question ("should I believe p?") sits like clear glass in front of factual question ("p?"). Transparency seems to squeeze out the room for non-evidential reasons for belief. Plausibly, reasons to φ have to be able to feature in the deliberation that produces φ, so reasons to believe p must be able to feature in deliberation that produces belief. Since deliberation about whether to believe p is entirely transparent to deliberation about whether p, any reason to believe p must be able to feature in deliberation about whether p. Only evidence about p can do that, so the psychology of deliberation shows that only evidence can be a reason for belief. I'll call this the *argument from transparency*.[48]

On the other hand, I propose, everybody should agree that at least one non-evidential consideration can work within deliberation about whether p: the thought "I have enough evidence now". To succeed at deliberating about whether p, thinkers need to be able to tell when they can move from "p?" to an answer either way. That is, a key part of what it is to deliberate about whether p is to be able to recognise when to stop deliberating. The thought "I have enough evidence now" is not itself evidence either way about p, so it seems to be a counter-example to the claim that only evidence can feature in deliberation about whether p.

"Some counter-example!", we might think. If I tell you that I've found something besides evidence that can work in deliberation about whether p, and I show you this, you may want your money back. However, I'll argue this is not a small crack in the dam. Once we grant that this non-evidential thought can appear in deliberation about

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non-evidential reasons for belief, would include Foley (1993), Rinard (2015), (2018), (2019), Leary (2017), and is one natural way to read Preston-Roedder (2013). See Berker (2018) for why evidentialism and pragmatism are frustrating labels for these views.

[48] The locus classicii are Moran (1988) and Shah (2006). Similar arguments appear in Velleman (2000), Shah (2003), Way (2016), Shah and Velleman (2005); Enoch and Spectre (2022).

whether p, we risk opening the door to full-blooded moral or practical considerations. I outline a new model of deliberation according to which moral and practical considerations can *supply our thoughts* about whether the evidence is enough to conclude p. If it's right that this is a plausible model of deliberation — and I think it is — then even granting that deliberation about whether to believe p is transparent to deliberation about whether p, nothing about that suffices to show that evidence is the only reason for belief, because nothing about that suffices to show that only evidence appears in deliberation about whether p.

Thus, the puzzle: we can either try to resuscitate the argument from transparency, risking an implausible view of deliberation according to which evidence alone appears in deliberation about whether p, and never thoughts about whether we have enough evidence. Or we can allow that thoughts about whether we have enough evidence do sometimes appear in deliberation about whether p, and risk opening the door to moral and practical considerations after all; the psychology of deliberation would not turn out to find for the evidentialist. I argue the best response is to take the second option. This calls for a radical restructure in the dialectic about moral and practical reasons for belief. All sides should reject the prevailing view that deliberation about p exclusively involves evidence. Further, transparency turns out to be a non-sequitur in the debate about reasons for belief. Instead, the best way forward is to pivot to directly confronting the question of *which* non-evidential considerations can legitimately help establish whether the evidence is enough to close the question "p?". I close by suggesting that all sides should be pessimistic that anything in the structure of deliberation will reveal the answer to the normative question of whether we can have moral or practical reasons for belief.

One of the peculiar things that happens in thinking about this is that by the end it can sound wholly natural that non-evidential thoughts could appear in factual deliberation about p, when at the outset, pragmatists and evidentialists alike seemed to agree that was absurd. As we go, I'll try to diagnose how these opposing claims could each sound so obviously right.

Let's begin by laying out the widespread argument that transparency vindicates evidentialism about reasons for belief. Throughout, I will use "evidentialist" to refer to those who think all reasons to believe p are evidence that p, and "pragmatist" to those who deny this claim. Only some pragmatists make the additional claim that there can be moral or practical reasons for belief. When referring to them I'll just say that's what they do.

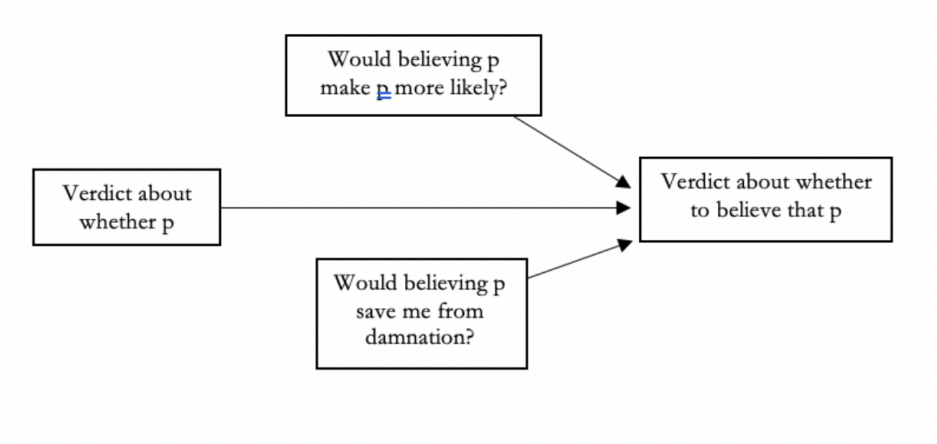
§1. The Argument from Transparency.

There are two questions we could ask in deliberation about believing p: a normative question, *whether I should believe that p,* and a factual question, *whether p.* Pragmatists and evidentialists alike have agreed that the upshots of believing p (for instance, how practically or morally good it would be to believe p) cannot appear in the deliberation that establishes p.

Even Pascal, bold defender of pragmatic reasons for belief, did not think that thoughts about the wager could be put to work in conscious deliberation about whether God exists. Consequently he advises thinkers to eschew "proofs of God" and acquire belief in non-proofy ways instead: "acting as if [you] believe, taking the holy water, having masses said", reassuring (!) that "eventually this will deaden your acuteness" (1995/1690 §233). Or suppose I were asking whether I will complete my project on time. William James might hold that believing I will get my work done on time makes it more likely that I actually will, and that fact supplies practical reason for belief. But like Pascal, James does not think that I can use that fact to reason to a conclusion about whether p. In letters, he laments this feature of our psychology, since it means thinkers may find they "can't for the moment really believe" what the practical reasons recommend (1901, in Skrupskelis and Berkeley 1992, 432). Contemporary pragmatists such as Richard Foley have agreed that when it comes to belief, "deliberations concerning your practical reasons are customarily inefficacious and hence pointless" (1993, 16).

If you want to defend non-evidential reasons for belief, as these pragmatists do, you therefore need a story about how thinkers are supposed to interact with those reasons. If they don't get in on the factual question, where do they get in? The natural way to parse the Pascalian-Jamesian suggestion is that facts about the upshots of believing p are supposed to weigh on the second question; the normative question of whether I should believe that p. There, recognizing those facts can get me to do things like tinker with my evidential environment in the way that Pascal suggests, though they cannot get me to reach a conclusion either way about whether p. The pragmatist's model of deliberation seems to envision deliberative space between our answer to whether p, and our answer to whether we should believe p, such that moral or practical considerations can weigh on the second question without weighing on the first.

Pascalian-Jamesian model of deliberation:



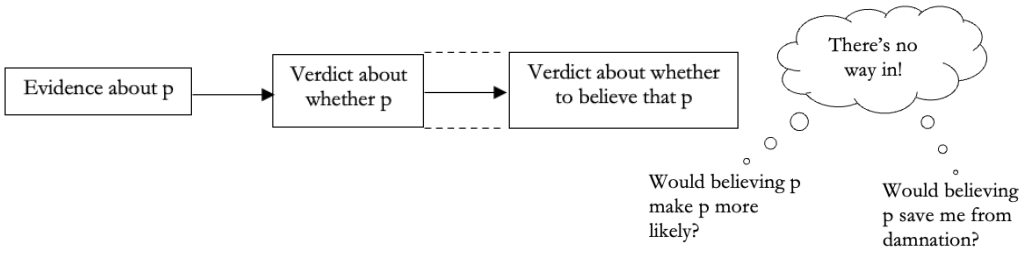
But now here's a problem. Doxastic deliberation also exhibits the phenomenon of **transparency**, as noted by Nishi Shah (2006), Gareth Evans (1982) and Richard Moran (1988). When I ask myself whether I should believe p, that question gets asked and answered entirely by asking whether p. When you ask whether you should believe it is snowing, not only do you look out the window for snow, that's *all* you do. It seems to be an empirical feature of our psychology that when we ask the normative question about what we should believe, that question instantly and exclusively gives way to the factual question of whether p. Our attention swings, compass-like, to whether p is the case, and that is all we need to answer in order to answer what we should believe.

Other deliberations about other attitudes – like whether we should be angry, or amused – can admit some space between a first-order question about the aptness of the attitude and the second order normative question about whether we should have it (Srivinasan 2018, D'Arms and Jacobson 2000). The fact that my guests are late may make anger perfectly apt, but I can recruit other considerations in deliberating to my ultimate verdict about whether I *should* be angry. Maybe it's a special occasion, and being angry will only spoil things, so all-things-considered I should not be angry. However, in the case of belief, the phenomenology is that there *is* no space between the first order question of whether p and the second order question of whether I should believe p; there are no "all things" to consider. The question of what we should believe gets asked and answered entirely by whether p. This is the *transparency* of doxastic deliberation.[49]

Transparency is a psychological claim. It imperils the Pascalian-Jamesian model of deliberation because it means that if non-evidential considerations (like how good it would be to believe p) cannot get in on the question of whether p, they cannot get in at all. The very structure of deliberation seems to squeeze out the room for non-evidential considerations. There is a psychologically impenetrable pipeline between whether p and whether to believe p, such that the only way some consideration can weigh on whether we should believe p is by helping to establish p. Since it is very difficult to see how anything besides evidence about p could do that, facts about the moral or practical upshots of believing p will be left outside in the cold.

[49] So construed transparency is a procedural claim, following Evans' (1982) original use of the term in his work on self-ascriptions of belief: Evans notes that when I ask whether I believe p, I set in motion "whatever procedure I have for answering the question whether p" (225). A point of distinction is that Evans is asking how we discover what we in fact do believe, whereas the transparency evidentialist focuses on how we resolve what we should believe. A different use of 'transparency' appears in the debate over whether assertions of "it is true that" add anything to the assertion "p", e.g. Kalderon (1997).

Transparency model of deliberation:



So far, so psychological. Transparency is a claim about the empirics of how we deliberate. But this psychological observation is widely thought to yield an argument vindicating the evidentialist position about reasons for belief.

This argument goes via the independently plausible principle that, since reasons have to be able to guide agents towards whatever they recommend, reasons to φ have to be able to appear in our deliberation about φ. This is the **Deliberative Constraint on Reasons** (Dancy 2000, Scanlon 2000)**.** There have been a variety of ways of spelling out the deliberative constraint, but the key insight is that for some fact R to be a reason to φ, R has to be able to feature in the deliberation that produces φ in a way that leads us to φ. For instance, suppose φ was "catching the bus," and R is the fact that the bus will get me to work. According to the deliberative constraint on reasons, the fact that the bus will get me to work can be a reason to get the bus because it can feature in the deliberation about whether to get the bus in a way that actually leads me to get the bus; by recognizing it, I can get some propulsion towards getting on the bus.

There is some variation about how exactly to specify what this propulsion needs to be. Some hold that in order for R to be a reason for S to φ, R must be able to *motivate* S to φ (see Leary 2017). Others hold R must be able to *dispose* S to φ (Shah 2003). Others hold R must be a consideration *for which* S could φ (Williams 1970), or that S could reflectively endorse R as a reason to φ (Velleman 2000, White 2022, 280), or that R must be able to appear in *good* reasoning about whether to φ (Way 2016). My puzzle should apply equally well to these variations. The key point can be stated as follows:

> **Deliberative Constraint on Reasons:** For some fact R to be able to serve as a reason for a subject S to φ, R has to be able to appear in S' deliberation about whether to φ in a way that leads S to φ.

In the case of belief, then, for some fact R to be a reason to believe p, R must be able to feature in deliberation about whether to believe p in a way that produces belief (by motivating S to believe p, disposing her to believe p, being a consideration for which she believes p, and so on).

The deliberative constraint thus gives us a way to alchemize an insight about psychology into a claim about reasons. For by the deliberative constraint, if it turns out that there's some immutable feature of agents' psychology that means a particular kind of R cannot function within deliberation about whether to φ in a way that produces that φ, that will suffice to show that kind of R cannot be a reason for that kind of φ. Substituting for belief, if some R cannot move us towards believing p by functioning within deliberation in a characteristically belief-producing way, it cannot be a reason for belief.

Both sides have agreed that non-evidential considerations (e.g. "it would be morally/practically better if I believed p") cannot feature in the deliberation that establishes p, so by transparency they cannot feature in the deliberation that establishes we should believe p. Those considerations are therefore unable to feature in the deliberation about whether to believe p in the characteristic belief-producing way that would be required to be eligible as a reason. Since non-evidential considerations seem unable to get into deliberation about p, they seem unable to get into deliberation about whether we should believe p, and thus unable to serve as reasons to believe p. This is the **argument from transparency.**[50]

[50] The key point here differs crucially from a "wrong kind of reasons" charge which says that moral or practical considerations are not the right *kind* of reason for belief. This is a normative claim, ecumenical on the psychology of whether thinkers can feature moral or practical considerations within deliberation in a way that produces belief. By contrast, the argument from transparency leverages the psychological insight that moral or practical considerations seem unable to explicitly feature in deliberation.

Before we move on to my criticism in §2, let me say something about the significance of using the psychology of deliberation to reach a verdict about reasons for belief. Historically, a rival strategy for discovering the nature of our reasons for belief has been to start from a normative story about what thinkers should do *qua* thinkers and work down. One such popular route to the evidentialist conclusion is to hold that thinkers have the goal to believe true propositions, so that the use of non-evidential reasons would undermine that goal. Another is to claim that beliefs are hostage to a correctness norm (believing p is correct iff p is true), so believing for non-evidential reasons would condemn the resulting belief to incorrectness.[51] Pragmatists have countered with their own normative top-down stories. James' (1897) view is that there can be non-evidential reasons for belief because thinkers should be more interested in believing as many truths as possible than in believing only truths so may leverage practical reasons to 'leap' past the results of reasoning and into certain beliefs. Others hold thinkers have reason to believe in ways that serve their personal ends (Foley 1993), or agential interests in being able to strive and hope in the absence of evidential proof (Chignell 2020, Preston-Roedder 2013) such that these non-evidential reasons can help motivate belief when evidence will not suffice.

The trouble with these normative top-down strategies is that the dispute quickly dead-ends in the normative stratosphere, neither side signing on to the other's story about what thinkers should do *qua* thinkers. The evidentialist says thinkers have this or that norm or goal, and the pragmatist just posits a different one, more compatible with her own verdict. The debate about reasons for belief can seem fated to turn on a bigger, intractable question about our goals or natures as believers (Rinard 2015). By contrast, the strategy of working from the psychological bottom up seems to promise an unimpeachable universality: while the pragmatist might deny that thinkers rationally ought to do this, or are conceptually constrained by that, surely she must admit that when she wonders what to believe about p she simply wonders whether p. A chief advantage of the argument from transparency is thus that its hook is not a normative commitment but the universally shared phenomenology of deliberation.

[51] See e.g. Engel (2013, 204-106).

Transparency does seem like an unavoidable psychological fact. Indeed, David Enoch and Levi Spectre have recently suggested transparency means there is something Moorean about thinkers even attempting to use moral or practical considerations in deliberation about what to believe; imagine a thinker saying to herself, "well, clearly the evidence shows [p], and epistemically this is what I should believe. Still, I refuse to do so, on moral grounds" (2022, 11).

To summarise §1: it seems loopy to say anything but the evidence about p could help resolve whether p. Even pragmatists have agreed. It also seems a basic psychological fact that deliberation about whether to believe p is transparent to — that is, is asked and answered entirely by — deliberation about whether p. In combination with the Deliberative Constraint on Reasons, this seems to show that only evidence can be a reason for belief.[52]

§2. A counter-example: "Not Enough Evidence, God!"

On the other hand, here is something that isn't evidence that seems very much able to feature in deliberation about whether p in a way that produces belief; the thought "I have enough evidence now".

Thinkers can directly consider the sufficiency of their evidence on their way to resolving whether p, because in order to serve its purpose as deliberation, the process of asking "p?" has to be able to move from a question to an answer either way.[53] This point has been emphasised by a number of theorists of inquiry. C.S. Peirce, for instance, holds that the process of asking "p?" always aims to close itself by allowing a thinker to "fix" a belief either way about p; "the settlement of opinion is the sole end

[52] A number of pragmatists have responded to the argument from transparency, for instance Steglich-Petersen (2008), (2013), Leary (2017), Rinard (2015). Many of these valuable responses focus on the deliberative constraint, leaving in tact the claim that non-evidential considerations cannot feature in deliberation about whether p. This is what I'll contest.

[53] Friedman (2013) (2017) (2019). There are a number of accounts of what exactly it *is* to resolve deliberation by concluding p. Perhaps it is a matter of coming to the settled opinion that p (Friedman 2013), using p in reactive sentiments (Buchak 2014), or being willing to rely on p in action or inference (modifying the knowledge-action link from Fantl and McGrath 2002, Stanley 2005). My claim is that whatever exactly it is to conclude p, thought "I have enough evidence now" can play a role in allowing the thinker to conclude p.

of inquiry" (1877/1997, 13). A similar point appears in Friedman (2017, 311), where the end of inquiry into "p?" is marked by the transition to treating the question as closed, and in Levi (1991, 72-74, 2012 32-33), where expanding one's corpus of beliefs to include some hypothesis *h* is in part a matter of whether one takes ~h to be a serious possibility. The goal of asking whether p is to get to an answer.

In the course of getting to an answer, thinkers can use a thought that addresses them in the first person with permission to close inquiry. But this thought is not itself evidence either way about p. It will not track the truth of p, nor be a mark of its truth, nor produce reliably true verdicts about p.[54] It is a reflexive, normative thought about the evidence. So here is a thought that is not evidence about p, that seems able to function in deliberation about whether p! I'll call this thought the **enough-evidence thought.**

This can feel at first like a technicality. As I said at the outset, if I tell you I've found a non-evidential consideration that can appear in deliberation about p and then I show you this one, you are liable to want a refund. What *is* surprising, however, is how quickly we can feel that all along we knew a non-evidential thought like this could work in deliberation about p when just a moment ago we were agreeing that nothing besides evidence could: the only way the argument from transparency rules out non-evidential reasons for belief is if *nothing* non-evidential can feature in deliberation about whether p in a way that produces belief. Philosophers really have felt this is right: *only* evidence can function in this way within deliberation about whether p.[55] I'll try to show that this is one of those moments in philosophy where tweaking a plausible principle to allow

[54] For evidence as a mark see Hacking (1975); for evidence as that which tracks truth see Nozick (1981), Roush (2005). For further discussion of theories of evidence see Kelly (2008). One further way to see why this thought is not evidence is to consider how peculiar it would be to try to believe p on the basis of the thought "I have enough evidence now" alone. For any other putative evidence for p, no matter how small, it does not seem unintelligible to imagine someone believing p on it alone — ill advised, perhaps, or irrational, but not unintelligible.

[55] "While one can choose on the basis of any number of considerations, one can only believe, by contrast, on the basis of evidence … Belief, properly formed, is sensitive only to evidence" (Adler and Hicks, 2013, 166); "[An agent] counts as forming a belief only if, on reflection he would take evidence, and only evidence, as reasons for maintaining or abandoning the attitude" (Shah 2003 468); "Only evidence for and against the truth of p is relevant to the doxastic question whether to believe that p" (Shah 2003 498). "If I know that my object is to form a belief about p, focusing on *anything other than evidence* will be ineffective"; "if I fail to focus *solely on evidence* for and against p, my deliberation will not deliver belief about p" (Shah 2006, 469; 491, italics added).

for one small counter-example turns out to lead us to puzzling territory. For once we allow that thoughts about the sufficiency of the evidence can appear in deliberation about p, it will be difficult to arrest the slide to moral and practical considerations as well. Before I argue for that, I'll start by showing that the enough-evidence thought *can* function in deliberation about whether p.

A crucial disclaimer: I don't claim the enough-evidence thought is required or always occurrent within deliberation about p. So few of our beliefs are formed by conscious deliberation and we so rarely state epistemic principles 'out loud' to ourselves that it will be rare for this thought to appear in the sunlit uplands of the conscious mind. I do claim that thinkers *can* explicitly use it, however, and this is enough to get the puzzle going.[56]

Why think the enough-evidence thought can appear in deliberation about whether p? It helps to prime the pump with a brief interlude about withholding belief. The goal when deliberating about p is to get to an answer either way. Sometimes, however, we don't meet that goal. Instead, we end deliberation about whether p by thinking "my resources are not sufficient to recommend believing either way", and we withhold belief about whether p.

It routinely strikes us as possible for a non-evidential thought about the sufficiency of the evidence to feature in deliberation in a way that produces a doxastic state when the outcome of that deliberation is that the thinker *withholds* belief about p. Recall how Bertrand Russell said he would reply if God were to challenge him on his atheism: "Not enough evidence, God! Not enough evidence!"[57]. Or recall the lottery cases from Hawthorne (2003) — you hold a ticket in a fair lottery that will be called tomorrow night. Right now you correctly believe it is very probable your ticket will lose. On one interpretation, this probability is not yet enough to mean you should believe "my ticket

[56] My argument also suggests that other epistemically regulatory non-evidential thoughts could appear in deliberation about p, such as "the best explanation for X is Y", or "q is evidence for p", or even "I believe p because I should believe what the evidence supports". I will focus on the enough-evidence thought, but plausibly what I say extends.

[57] I am grateful to [removed] for this example.

has lost". You should tune in and watch the winning numbers be pulled, for only then is your evidence sufficient. On this interpretation, the right thing to do before the lottery is drawn is to withhold belief by thinking "I do not have enough evidence now".

It sounds natural in these cases to allow that a non-evidential thought about the sufficiency of the evidence has appeared in the thinker's deliberation about whether p and helped yield the resulting doxastic state. It would be an odd asymmetry for a non-evidential thought about the sufficiency of one's evidence to be able to function in this way within the deliberations that produce withholding belief, but not those that produce belief. We can formulate a parity principle: if a non-evidential thought that I do not have enough evidence can figure in a deliberation that leads to withholding belief, its negation can figure in deliberation that leads to belief, though neither are evidence about p.

Sure enough, here are some cases that suggest that principle is correct: an enough-evidence thought can appear in deliberation about p in a way that leads to belief.

Curmudgeon

> Employer Eddy is vexed by the possibility that a particular worker is stealing from the petty cash. Employees have stolen from him before, and this employee irks him; he hates his blue hair, his piercings. Eddy installs CCTV and marks the petty cash to check the same bills are there at the end of the week. All the evidence suggests the employee never steals. In a moment of reflection Eddy recalls his anger at being taken advantage of before; he recognises that blue-haired youths make him feel old and mistrustful and realises he might be sublimating his history onto the person before him. He says to himself: "Okay curmudgeon, that's enough -- you have more than enough evidence that he's not stealing".

Cult

> Brainwashed Ben spent the first 20 years of his life in a cult. Junior members like Ben were taught that their intuitions and beliefs were unreliable and manifested sin, so they were likely to reach bad verdicts about practical and moral questions. Ben left the cult in adulthood but finds it difficult to shed the habit of withholding belief until

> he can hear from an elder. During a doctor's appointment, Ben wonders whether it is safe to have the treatment his doctor recommends. He has read the pamphlets and sought a second opinion but stays uncertain. While wondering whether the treatment really is safe, he says to himself: *Come on, you don't need to check with an elder — you have enough evidence now.*

If it were true that *no* non-evidential thought could function in deliberation about whether p, we should expect to be affronted or puzzled when thinkers treat it as though it does. In Cult and Curmudgeon, I do not find there is such a reaction. To be sure, the enough-evidence thought works in consort with the evidence, but it seems right to say it appears in deliberation, and mutatis mutandis for whichever story you preferred in §1 connecting the thoughts in deliberation to reasons. It seems the enough-evidence thought is capable of disposing a thinker to believe p (without it Ben would not have the belief); that it is capable of motivating a thinker to believe p (Eddy uses it in just this way), that it can survive reflection, or be a reason *for which* a subject believes (nothing sounds wrong with "I believe p because I had enough evidence that p").

It sounds particularly natural to use an enough-evidence thought in deliberation about things we find hard to believe. For instance, sometimes we have a hard time believing p because our priors were rationally very low, e.g. "Someone's broken in," "The building is under attack," "I've been lied to this whole time". We frequently stay withholding belief about these propositions far longer than we should. In *Curmudgeon*, *Cult*, and real-life cases like this, it seems we sometimes come to belief in the end not only by considering the evidence but by realising it is *enough*.

Query: does the enough-evidence thought really function in the deliberation about *whether p?* Yes! For we should remember that when we ask what goes into deliberation about whether p, we are occupying the first-personal perspective of the deliberator. We are not asking third-personal questions about what in fact explains p. We are asking what plays a role in getting to an answer about p. From that first person perspective, the goal is to *figure out* whether p; to secure the license to move from a collection of evidence to a verdict that p (or ~p) (Friedman 2017, 2019). A thought that allows us

to make that move seems precisely to be featuring in deliberation about p. Put simply: it bears on whether p, because it allows you to conclude that p.

However, if you prefer the diagnosis that the enough-evidence thought is in fact appearing in deliberation about whether to believe p, it is still a counter-example to the argument from transparency. It would show that some consideration could weigh on whether to believe p without weighing on whether p, and thus that the key claim of transparency is false: there can be considerations that can appear in deliberation about whether to believe p without appearing in deliberation about whether p.

It might be objected that the enough-evidence thought should count as evidence insofar as it is eviden*tial;* it keeps a thinker's gaze trained on the facts. But this will save too much. If a consideration counts as evidence in virtue of keeping a thinker considering her evidence, a thought like 'the practical stakes here let me consider p true given the evidence' will also count.

A final defence of the deliberative possibility of the enough-evidence thought can be given by reflecting on the structure of what it would be to provide an answer to the question, "p?". We've said the hope in deliberating about "p?" is to secure an answer. What would it take to provide an answer? At minimum, it seems to depend on having (a) a sense for what would license the conclusion that p, and (b) the ability to tell that one is in those conditions. If a subject were robustly unable to meet either (a) or (b), it is hard to see how they could successfully deliberate to a conclusion about whether p. If prong (a) fails, we will have a maniacal skeptic who cannot accept there could ever be license to believe p. If prong (b) fails, we will have someone who accepts there could be license to believe p but who cannot see that they have it. There seems to be both a normative component and a self-locating component to the ability to conclude p. But the conjunction of these prongs just is the ability to recognise "I, now, have enough evidence." In order to hold that this thought *cannot* appear in deliberation about p, the evidentialist would need to defend the peculiar position that these cognitive abilities, though essential to the task of answering the question whether p, cannot appear within deliberation. This would be a strange result.

From cases and theory it seems we have a thought that is not evidence about p that can appear in the deliberation about whether p in a way that can help produce belief. It seems as implausible to deny that thinkers sometimes consider whether they have enough evidence as it was to hold that the considerations of the wager could help show God exists.

We thus confront the puzzle. The eminently plausible argument we began with was that only evidence is a reason for belief because nothing besides evidence could *work* within deliberation about p. On the other hand, we have a plausible counter-example.

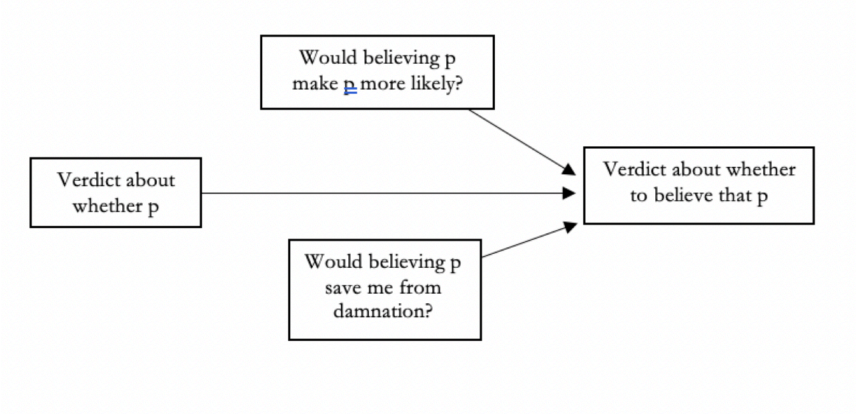
As noted, the evidentialist might feel this is irritatingly pedantic. The kinds of non-evidential thought she said could not feature in deliberation about p were those flatly irrelevant to whether p, like the fact that believing p might save my soul, or make p more likely. "Non-evidential" was the shorthand label for considerations like this, but plainly what we meant was that deliberation about whether p only admits that which is relevant to establishing p. Granting that the enough-evidence thought is relevant to establishing p, perhaps there's no threat to the evidentialist to allow it.

First, we should be careful not to pretend that this was what was meant all along. The widely-repeated view *was* that all reasons for belief are evidence, that this was revealed by the structure of doxastic deliberation, and therefore that a normatively evidentialist verdict could be pulled from the psychological hat.[58] It would be a significant concession if my counter-example prompted the evidentialist to abandon the view that only evidence can feature in deliberation about whether p in a way that produces belief, in pivot instead to the claim that only considerations relevant to establishing p can, where that includes evidence about p and the non-evidential principles that say when evidence is enough. It's just a different view.

[58] See note 47 and note 55 for examples.

More troublingly, it's not clear that we can grant just this one non-evidential thought without opening the door to moral and practical considerations. So far, we have been talking about a Jamesian-Pascalian pragmatism which inserts moral or practical considerations between the question of whether p and the question of whether we should believe p:

Pascalian-Jamesian Pragmatism:



As we saw, transparency puts this kind of pragmatist on the ropes. But there is room in logical space for a kind of pragmatist who does not hold that pragmatic or moral considerations insert themselves *between* the question of whether p and whether to believe p, but in front of the question of whether p. That is, there can be a kind of pragmatist who wishes to hold that *whether the evidence is sufficient to conclude p in the first place* is a matter of the moral and practical stakes.

Encroachers of various stripes are like this. For instance, in the recent literature on moral encroachment, some authors claim that we should believe more generous things of our loved ones than we might of a stranger given the same evidence. A popular case: my spouse, a recovering alcoholic, comes home from a department reception smelling of wine, but says they did not drink. They tell me the smell is because the speaker spilled wine on them while gesticulating. Under similar evidential conditions about a stranger, I might be entitled to conclude "nah, they had some wine". But given the importance of trust in a marriage, we might think that in this case I should not think my spouse drank (Basu and Schroeder 2019), or, stronger, I should think they

did not drink (Jackson and Fritz 2022). The point is not to evaluate this view, simply to note where it sits in logical space.[59]

Similarly, pragmatic encroachment holds that a thinker's practical stakes can affect what she should believe. A classic example: S is wondering whether the sandwich she has just been passed is almond butter or peanut butter. She hears someone say, "it's almond butter". However, S has a fatal peanut allergy. Plausibly, this means that evidence that would ordinarily be sufficient to justify belief – testimony – is in S's case not enough. The practical stakes affect how much evidence she would need to believe p (Ross and Schroeder 2014, 302); two thinkers who each believe p on the same body of evidence can differ in whether their beliefs are justified depending on their respective stakes.[60]

Encroachment views have typically been presented as theses about epistemic status: the stakes affect whether a thinker's belief is justified or counts as knowledge.[61] In fact, some views in the neighbourhood go even stronger than the claim that evidential sufficiency *can* be affected by the moral or practical stakes, and hold that there is no way to supply an answer to the question about whether the evidence is enough *except* with reference to the stakes. For instance, in the philosophy of science, Richard Rudner claims that accepting any given hypothesis involves "the decision that the evidence is sufficiently strong," where "obviously, our decision regarding how strong is 'strong enough' is going to be a function of the importance, in the typically ethical sense, of making a mistake" (1952, 2). Considering the costs of error is part and parcel of resolving whether p. Another example would be Fantl and McGrath (2002): "For S

[59] Other key authors who defend the idea that morality makes a difference to what we should believe include Stroud (2006), Keller (2004), Paul and Morton (2018a), (2018b). Compare Begby (2018), Enoch and Spectre (2022).
[60] Levi makes a similar point in a diachronic setting; "sometimes [S] should give up a proposition because if the costs of error are altered, the standards for adequate evidence [are] altered" (Levi 2012, 185). However, Levi is not an encroacher as traditionally understood. One key point of difference is that moral and practical encroachers are often stringently evidentialist about reasons for belief, whereas Levi is not (see 2012, esp. Ch9). Compare: "[I agree] that the only kind of epistemic reason in favor of any belief is evidence for the content of that belief" (Schroeder 2018, 118); "The view we defend is consistent with denying that there are practical or ethical reasons for belief … [we are not] going so far as to deny that our (nonfoundational) beliefs should be held solely on the basis of the evidence that supports them" (Paul and Morton, 2018b, 178; 190).
[61] E.g. Stanley (2005), Fantl and McGrath (2002), Schroeder (2012).

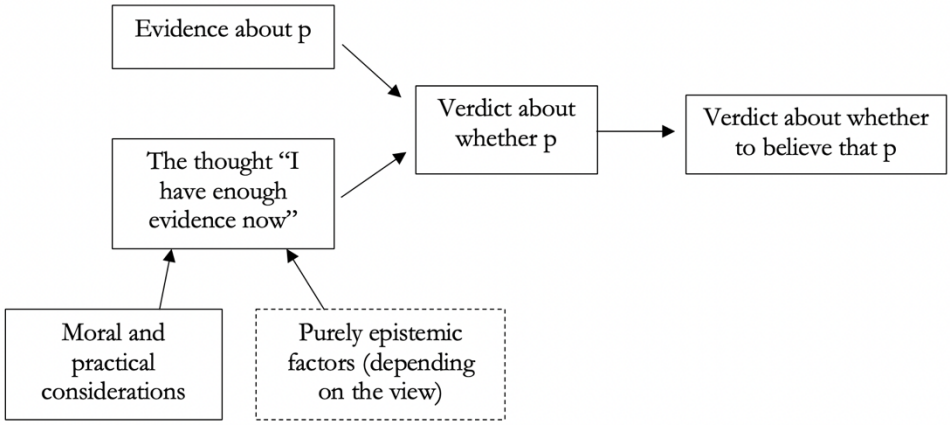
to be justified in believing p, p's credibility must exceed a threshold, but that threshold is determined in part by S's pragmatic situation … There is *no such thing* as a specific credibility value that is both necessary and sufficient for justification, independently of all pragmatic factors" (88, emphasis added).

Though these are theses about justification, the crucial point I wish to add (and I do not think it takes too much liberty) is that they also suggest a new model of deliberation. For if it is right that the sufficiency of evidence is determined by the moral or practical stakes, presumably a deliberator could recognise that fact on the way to her conclusion about p. S could look at her sandwich and think "if wrong about this I could die, so I just don't have enough evidence yet"; the spouse with the wine could think "oh go on, be trusting" as she makes up her mind. That is, thinkers could use a moral or practical *version* of the enough-evidence thought.[62]

Where does this leave us? We now have a new model of deliberation to add to the mix. According to what I'll call **Sensible Pragmatism,** moral or practical considerations can go into supplying the enough-evidence thought.

[62] Pace (2011) seems to suggest that reasoning via moral thoughts is fairly ubiquitous; "an addict chooses the road to recovery believing this time he can chance because he recognizes that to not believe would almost certainly make recovery impossible. A husband and wife struggling with trust issues manage to give each other the benefit of the doubt for the sake of their marriage. A politician chooses a life of public service, believing out of hope … that his contributions can make a difference" (240-241).

Sensible Pragmatism: [63]



Unlike Pascalian pragmatism, this picture of deliberation does not violate transparency by counselling a deliberator that she may first resolve whether p and then separately crack her knuckles and ask whether to believe it. It holds that moral and practical considerations can appear in the process of concluding that p.

Enoch and Spectre charged that it was Moorean to deliberate via a consideration like "the evidence shows [p], and epistemically this is what I should believe. Still, I refuse to do so, on moral grounds" (2022, 11). Sensible Pragmatism does not want or need to allow this kind of thought. Instead, it holds we can use moral or practical considerations in our thinking about *whether* the evidence "clearly shows p", or p is "epistemically what I should believe".

Thus, the evidentialist may have wanted to handle the counter-example of the enough-evidence thought by pivoting to the claim that only evidence and thoughts about its sufficiency can work within deliberation about p. The problem is that once we pivot from the restriction that only evidence can work in the requisite way within deliberation about p to the claim that only considerations *relevant to establishing p* can, the Sensible Pragmatist can just agree. She will say that the moral and practical stakes

[63] The dotted box reflects the distinction that some Sensible Pragmatists hold that epistemic factors alone are capable of resolving whether the evidence is sufficient to justify concluding p, but that moral or practical factors can occasionally weigh alongside them (Paul and Morton 2018a, 2018b), while others hold there is no purely epistemic way to specify when the evidence justifies concluding p.

that alter the sufficiency of the evidence are exactly those considerations that entitle a thinker to call p established.[64]

Obviously, there are ways to reject Sensible Pragmatism. Many epistemologists hold that whether the evidence is sufficient to conclude p is a purely epistemic matter, i.e., insensitive to the practical and moral stakes. Perhaps it is a matter of crossing a certain probability threshold, satisfying safety-and-sensitivity criteria, being an instance of a procedure that reliably produces true beliefs, and so on. One way to respond to the risk that the enough-evidence thought opens the door to moral and practical considerations would therefore be to hold that an enough-evidence cannot legitimately invoke moral or practical considerations. Call this view **Sensible Evidentialism.**[65]

Sensible Evidentialism is not a psychological claim about whether we *can* reason via moral or practical thoughts. It is the normative claim that we should not. The Sensible Evidentialist is also an opponent of the claim that only evidence can psychologically feature in factual deliberation in a way that produces belief, since she also allows the possibility of an enough-evidence thought. The challenge for the Sensible Evidentialist, if she wants to continue the strategy of sourcing normative epistemic verdicts from the psychology of deliberation, would be to explain why only purely epistemic versions of the enough-evidence thought are normatively permissible, when the Sensible Pragmatist's versions of those thoughts seem comparably psychologically possible. I'll return to this in closing.

Here is where we have landed. There turns out to be a clash between the apparently plausible argument that transparency vindicates evidentialism, and the observation that thinkers can sometimes consider the sufficiency of their evidence while deliberating

[64] Importantly, to say that moral or practical considerations could help establish whether the evidence is sufficient to call p established is not to say that the purpose of inquiry or belief boils off to moral or practical values. See Levi (2012, 187): "to maintain that the goals with respect to which changes in belief are justified and multifaceted, and appeal not only to truth value [but] to non-evidential considerations does not imply. That the goals of inquiry are reducible to moral, political, aesthetic goals and values".

[65] Representatives of Sensible Evidentialism might therefore include Swinburne (2011, 195): "' I shall understand by a belief being justified at a time *t* as it being at *t* likely to be true (which I take to be the same as 'probably true' or 'more probable than not"' Neta (2007); Enoch (2016).

about whether p. How should we resolve this clash? Should we try to resist the counter-example, and resuscitate the argument from transparency? Or should we allow the peculiar result that moral and practical considerations can appear in deliberation about whether p? The best strategy is to take the second option.

§ 3. Revisiting the Argument from Transparency

I think the counter-example of the enough-evidence thought reveals that something must have been quite wrong with the argument from transparency. Moreover, the way it fails reveals that transparency is a non-sequitur for the debate over reasons for belief.

For we are now in a position to see that transparency — the observation that deliberation about whether we should believe p is asked and answered entirely by figuring out whether p — does not combine with the Deliberative Constraint on Reasons to produce a valid argument that evidence is the only reason for belief. For that, we'd need an additional premise I'll call ONLY EVIDENCE, which holds that only evidence can function within deliberation about whether p in a way that produces belief. That is, the argument from transparency must have to go:

1 R is a reason for S to φ only if R is capable of functioning within deliberation about whether to φ in a way that leads S to φ (from the Deliberative Constraint on Reasons).
2 The only considerations that can function in S' deliberation about whether to believe p in a way that leads S to believe p are considerations that can function in deliberation about whether p (from transparency).
3 The only considerations that can be a reason to believe p are those that can function in deliberation about whether p in a way that leads S to believe p (from 1, 2).
4 Only evidence can function within deliberation about whether p in a way that leads S to believe p (ONLY EVIDENCE).
C Therefore only evidence can be a reason to believe p.

The enough-evidence thought suggests this is far too strong. Wherever we are in the debate about whether the enough-evidence thought can invoke the moral or practical stakes, we should all be on the same side about whether ONLY EVIDENCE is true: it's not. So despite a widespread feeling to the contrary, it turns out transparency does nothing to establish that evidence is the only reason for belief. All transparency shows is that the considerations that appear in deliberation about whether to believe p must be able to appear in deliberation about whether p. It is a separate, substantive claim that the only thing that can feature in that deliberation is evidence.[66]

It sounds so obvious once said! How could we have missed it? It has been familiar since Hempel (1960), (1970), Quine (1990), and Rawls (2005, 54-58) that the task of working out what's true can require complex adjudications about whole bodies of evidence, and this insight has received substantial treatment in feminist epistemologies and work on the under-determination of theory by evidence.[67] How could we have missed the fact that non-evidential thoughts about the sufficiency of the evidence can sometimes explicitly influence what we believe?

I believe part of the diagnosis is our diet of cases. When ask what goes into deliberating about whether p, we tend to focus on everyday cases that get resolved in the affirmative. What was it like when I learned the Pythagorean theorem (Shah and Velleman 2005, 522), that feathers and bowling balls fall simultaneously in a vacuum, or when I accepted the doctor's diagnosis? Everyday factual deliberation like this frequently only *does* use evidence, so introspection on what it feels like to form a belief will most of the time make it easy to think that we only *can* use evidence.

[66] Again, even if you prefer the diagnosis that the enough-evidence thought weighs on whether we should believe p without weighing on whether p, the argument from transparency still fails. Either the enough-evidence thought appears in deliberation about p, as I have argued, in which case (4) is false. Or it appears in deliberation about whether to believe p, in which case (2) is false. Either way we have broken the connection from transparency through to evidentialism.

[67] For underdetermination of theory by evidence see Duhem (1954), for feminist epistemologies see Zagzebski (1996), Longino (1990), Nelson (1990), Anderson (1995).

Another part of the diagnosis is that it seems to have been sometimes thought that transparency *implies* ONLY EVIDENCE.[68] As we've seen though, transparency is simply the procedural claim that a thinker's process for asking 'should I believe p?' is to immediately open that question, Russian doll-style, to the question of whether p, and that once she has the answer to that factual question there are no more questions to ask.[69] This does not imply ONLY EVIDENCE.

A bigger part of the diagnosis, I believe, is how we have tended to think about the relationship between the categories of "evidential", "non-evidential", and "moral or practical". The category of 'moral or practical' is sometimes taken to behave like an opposite to the category of 'evidential'[70] such that epistemologists who wish to get *away* from the moral or practical considerations can take themselves to be ipso facto going *towards* the evidential. The epistemologist who thinkers there is something deeply psychologically odd about believing p for the reason that it would be morally or practically better to do so can take themselves to be defending ONLY EVIDENCE just in virtue of rejecting the possibility of moral or practical influence. For instance:

> "When one deliberates whether to believe that p, this question not only gives way to the question whether p but does so to the exclusion of any other, competing question, such as whether p would be in one's interest … evidentially insensitive processes, such as wishful thinking, occasionally influence belief … Our claim here is not that deliberation about what to believe *cannot* be influenced by non-evidential considerations; it is that such

[68] Some indications of this thought; "transparency does not imply that non-evidential factors cannot causally influence belief … it implies that we cannot recognize the relevance of such factors in our deliberative reasoning about what to believe" Shah (2003, 463); "Transparency *rules out* pragmatic considerations from being reasons for belief" (Shah 2006, 487); "To explain transparency, the degree of evidence-responsiveness required by the concept of belief has to be such as to *rule out* other influences" (Shah and Velleman 2005, 50, italics added.)

[69] Elsewhere, Steglich-Petersen (2006; 2008; 2013) has given a number of persuasive arguments that this reading of transparency, and even stronger versions, are not capable of securing the things evidentialists should want, such as the distinctive normative force of epistemic reasons (2008); the sense in which one *ought* to believe p given strong evidence that p (2008), or an explanation for why we are willing to form some beliefs on less evidence than others (2006). By contrast, my claim is that transparency is not even adequate for securing the claim that evidence alone weighs on whether p.

[70] For relations of opposition see Berker, forthcoming.

deliberation cannot explicitly treat considerations as relevant to the question what to believe." (Shah and Velleman, 2005, 500-501).

There is a move here from the claim that practical considerations like "whether p would be in one's interest" or "wishful thinking" cannot be explicitly relevant to determining what to believe, to the claim that "non-evidential" considerations cannot be explicitly relevant to what to believe.

But this is too quick. The opposite of evidence is not the moral or practical, it is simply the non-evidential. It is the stuff that isn't evidence. Even if one thinks that practical considerations like what it would be in my interest to believe are not admissible in deliberation about p, this does not of itself suggest that only evidence is. I believe we have overlooked this by tending to take the properties of "evidence" and "moral or practical" to stand in oppositional relation to one another, when in fact, they toggle on different sliders.

Here are three upshots of our critique.

(i) Everyone, no matter what they think of moral and practical influence over belief, should agree that an enough-evidence thought can function within deliberation about p in a way that leads thinkers to believe p. We should all be on the same side of the ONLY EVIDENCE debate, wherever we are in the moral and practical debate.

(ii) The possibility of an enough-evidence thought reveals a way to model how the moral and practical upshots of believing p could appear in doxastic deliberation, without implausibly crowbarring space between the question "p?" and the question of whether to believe that p. Sensible Pragmatists can hold that moral and pragmatic considerations can provide the enough-evidence thought.[71]

[71] Thus in fact, Pascal and James and Foley need not have so easily allowed that such considerations cannot appear in deliberation. Nothing in the Sensible Pragmatist model suggests we can conjure belief by directly

(iii) The psychological phenomenon of transparency turns out to be a non sequitur for establishing a normative conclusion about reasons for belief.

The transparency-evidentialist wanted to highlight the undeniable peculiarity of seeking to believe p for reasons that seem flatly irrelevant to p; those Pascalian or Jamesian reasons we started with that seem blithely unconcerned with the factual question whether p. In this she has a point. It does seem to insult the issue of whether p is true to believe p because things will go better for us that way, or because we might thereby make it true that p.

I think what the transparency-evidentialist meant to say was that *truth*, not evidence, is hegemonic over deliberation.[72] Indeed in Richard Moran's first exposition of transparency, truth is the guiding idea; "what conforming to transparency comes to is the commitment that the beliefs I call my own are beliefs I can endorse as true" (2001, 105).

As we've seen, the mistake is to move too quickly from the claim that *deliberation about whether p exclusively involves that which can establish the truth of p*, to *deliberation about whether p exclusively involves evidence that p*. The risk in trying to capture the former in the language of the latter is that we swing the pendulum too far away from James and Pascal, and wind up with an equally implausible picture of deliberation according to which evidence is *all* we can consider. And the risk for saying that what matters in deliberation is only whether p is true is that the Sensible Pragmatist can just agree; she can hold that moral or practical considerations are part and parcel of recognising whether the evidence is enough to call p true.

considering the moral or practical upshots of believing p — it must be in consort with the evidence, by setting the sufficiency of the evidence. However, this is still some deliberative role.

[72] Shah seems to take these ideas as roughly equivalent; taking the "exclusive role of evidence" (2003, 461) to travel with the fact that "transparency permits only considerations [that] are directly relevant to determining the truth value of p" (2003, 453, see also 455). See Steglich-Petersen (2008, 546).

§4. Ways Forward

I now want to close by asking how we should move forward in the two related questions of (i) whether there can be moral or practical reasons for belief and (ii) whether we will be able to source our answer to that normative question from the psychology of deliberation. Where does what I've said so far leave us in the dispute over moral or practical reasons for belief? Does the possibility of moral or practical versions of the enough-evidence thought give a positive argument that there can be moral or practical reasons for belief?

Not quite. The deliberative constraint is a necessary condition. It states that if some fact R cannot feature in S' deliberation about whether to φ in a way that leads S to φ, R cannot be a reason for S to φ. I have argued, that substituting for belief, the structure of deliberation does not in fact rule out non-evidential reasons after all, because there is not that crucial psychological barrier to moral or practical considerations featuring in deliberation in a way that produces belief. The dialectical upshot is that nothing about deliberation rules out moral or practical reasons for belief, because moral and practical considerations do not after all fail a sort of 'psychological inertness' test.

However, to show that moral or practical considerations can feature in deliberation in a way that produces belief does not automatically show that there can be moral or practical reasons for belief. To pull that bolder pragmatic result from the psychological hat, we would need the deliberative constraint on reasons to give a sufficient condition, such that the fact that R *can* feature in S' deliberation about whether to φ in a way that leads her to φ suffices to show that that R can be a reason for S to φ. I do not know of anyone who defends this stronger claim, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to defend it.[73] What I have hoped to show is that as a matter of psychology, deliberation

[73] Though see Levi (2012), especially 178-183. Levi argues that when thinkers expand their corpus of beliefs to include some hypothesis h, this is not only a function of recognizing evidence for h; "evidence … alone does not quality as the reason" (179). Thinkers also transition to believing h because of the relative informational value of h, such as explanatory value, predictive power, coherence, etc, where this dimension of informational value is "not relevant to the truth of h" in the way that evidence is (180). Levi is un-shy about calling these considerations "reasons" for adopting a belief.

about p seems like it can explicitly use all kinds of consideration in ways that produce belief; evidential, non-evidential, moral, practical. Given that, the facts of deliberation do not show that evidence is the only reason for belief. Equally, however, because the deliberative constraint is only a necessary condition, we are not able to pull the pragmatist verdict about reasons for belief from the fact that a multitude of considerations can feature in deliberation in ways that produce belief. Frustratingly, deliberation is a wash; the facts of deliberation leave us back at square one with respect to the debate over reasons for belief.

Plainly, there are legitimate normative criticisms of the Sensible Pragmatist's vision of allowing moral or practical considerations to affect when thinkers can think that their evidence is enough. For instance, we might think that the process of S figuring out whether p is in some ways a contribution to the group exercise of persons learning about the world (Harman 1986, 51). Perhaps tinkering with the evidential standards on which I am willing to accept a proposition in light of the moral and practical situation that confronts *me* exhibits a kind of myopic narcissism — I am not sufficiently attuned to the way that my belief that p will contribute to (or contaminate) the collective knowledge pool. Or we might worry that the Sensible Pragmatist's position is not actually sensible. Once we allow moral or practical versions of the enough-evidence thought, how can we block the Pascalian from plugging their original considerations into the format? Subjects could think, "that's enough evidence to believe p, because I don't want to go to hell". This seems an unwelcome result. We should want thinkers to close their deliberations because they genuinely have enough evidence, not because they have enough problems.[74]

But the point of the strategy we've been investigating is to try to get answers about the normativity of belief from the psychological bottom up. That was what allowed the debate to progress past the normative stratosphere. The question is not whether there are any normative grounds to think that moral or practical considerations are ineligible to supply enough-evidence thoughts. The question is whether there is any feature of

[74] See Worsnip (2021, 4) for similar discussion.

the psychology of deliberation that can vindicate that view. It seems the answer is no; when we thought about the allergic person considering whether their sandwich is peanut, or the spouse making up her mind about whether their partner drank, it sounded perfectly natural to allow that explicitly thinking of moral and practical considerations can affect whether we take ourselves to have enough evidence to call "p?" answered. Anyone who thinks this is poor reasoning has to admit it's poor reasoning we are psychologically able to carry off.

However, although we are back at square one with respect to the question of whether there can be moral or practical reasons for belief, what we have said so far allows us to progress on the methodological question of whether we can expect to find the answer from within the structure of deliberation: it seems we cannot. Although I do not have space to argue for this in full, I think this is not a wholly surprising result. We have reason to be pessimistic about the possibility that anything universal to the psychology of deliberation will give the answer to the normative question about reasons for belief.

The strength of the psychological-bottom-up strategy was that it was supposed to exploit a universal feature of all human reasoning. However, it's reasonable to expect that from any feature of deliberation that is genuinely universal enough to be a feature of *all* doxastic deliberation, we will be unlikely to find the norms of *good* doxastic deliberation. We are, as Peirce notes, imperfect reasoners; we are "in the main logical animals, but we are imperfectly so" (1877/1997, 10). The psychology of deliberation varies significantly across the population, both in the principles thinkers treat as guiding, and in how well we cohere with those principles. "None of us can perfectly fulfil our [epistemic] commitments. We need advice, therapy and training in order to improve our capacity to implement these prescriptions" (Levi 2012, 194-5). So it is perhaps not surprising that when a feature (such as transparency) is genuinely universal across all human deliberation, it turns out not to support a rich normative conclusion about how things will look when they are going well.

Elsewhere in philosophy, moral constructivists have also recruited the strategy of reaching normative verdicts by examining the structure of thought. They hold that the content of our moral obligations can be deduced from the structure of practical agency (Korsgaard 1992). A frequent objection to this method is that from anything thin enough to be a universal feature of human agency, nothing thick enough to be morality can be extracted (Peterson and Samuel 2021, 87, see also Schafer 2015). I think it is reasonable to expect there is an epistemic version of this problem; from anything thin enough to be common to all reasoning, we cannot pull a normative principle thick enough to tell us what not to do. Whatever the psychological features are that are genuinely common to all deliberation, they do not seem to be enough to prevent us from believing badly, or to having different evidential thresholds depending on our attitudes to a variety of risks and values. Absent persuasive argument to the contrary, I do not see reason to hope that psychological features common to *all* instances of reasoning about p will be instructive about how *good* reasoning should go.[75]

Instead, I think the place to conduct the dispute about reasons for belief is back in the normative stratosphere. The most interesting way forward for the debate would thus be for all sides to abandon the view that only evidence functions within deliberation about p, despite the widespread consensus on this point, and to abandon the strategy of sourcing normative verdicts about reasons for belief from the psychology of deliberation.

Full exploration of this dispute will have to wait. My aim in this paper has been to show that despite widespread consensus, evidence is not all that appears in deliberation about p. Moral and practical considerations can appear in that deliberation after all. This is fatal to the view that the psychology of deliberation vindicates evidentialism about reasons for belief. In fact, when we examine the psychological structure of

[75] Moral constructivists typically hold that the fact that something is a necessity of practical agency is a *source* of its binding normative force (Korsgaard 2021). It is not clear that the epistemic version of this strategy needs to make the same commitment. Deliberation may reveal, rather than account for, epistemic norms. See Friedman (2020) for the claim that some norms of doxastic deliberation may be all-out in tension with epistemic norms.

deliberation, we see thinkers asking themselves the same question that animates epistemologists: the question of what allows us to conclude that p.

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