

The Ethics of Belief

Berislav Marušić*

Brandeis University

Abstract

The ethics of belief is concerned with the question what we should believe. According to evidentialism, one should believe something if and only if one has adequate evidence for what one believes. According to classic pragmatism, other features besides evidence, such as practical reasons, can make it the case that one should believe something. According to a new kind of pragmatism, some epistemic notions may depend on one's practical interests, even if what one should believe is independent of one's practical reasons. In this paper I recount and briefly assess the debate between evidentialism and pragmatism.

The ethics of belief can be understood as broadly concerned with the question what we should believe. More precisely, it can be understood as concerned with the question which doxastic attitudes we should adopt. Examples of doxastic attitudes are belief, disbelief, and withholding, though belief plays a central role since other doxastic attitudes can be defined in terms of it. Thus, *S disbelieves p* if and only if *S* believes that *p* is false. *S withholds p* if and only if *S* considers *p* and refrains from either believing or disbelieving *p*.¹ In the following, I will focus on belief, though what I say should carry over to the other attitudes. Furthermore, belief and other doxastic attitudes can be understood either as outright or as graded. Both ways of thinking about belief are important. Within a framework of degrees of belief, we can model rational belief on the axioms of probability, and we can thus assess the implications of probabilistic evidence – which much of our evidence is – for what we should believe. Within a framework of outright belief, we can formulate principles that connect belief to other outright notions, such as assertion or reasoning from a premise.² It is quite clear that we need both frameworks, yet it is very difficult to say how they are related – a difficulty that I cannot solve here.³ In the following, I will use the notion of outright belief, though what I say should, with minor modifications, carry over to graded belief.⁴

The question what we should believe can be specified or modified in the following three ways. First, one could ask what we are *justified* in believing, what it is *rational* to believe or what we have *reasons* to believe. Depending on how one understands these notions, these questions will be equivalent to asking what we should believe or they will be weaker, asking only what we *may* believe. I shall leave open how to understand these notions. What I say about the question what we should believe will also hold if the question is understood in weaker terms. Second, one can take 'should' to be ambiguous between an epistemic sense and an all-things-considered sense. Thus, one can ask what we epistemically should believe or what we should believe all-things-considered. Third, one can understand the question what we should believe as synchronic or as diachronic – either as the question which beliefs we should hold at a particular point in time or which beliefs we should form over time. I will consider these ambiguities in due course.

In this paper I will be concerned to recount and assess the main debate in the ethics of belief between evidentialism and pragmatism. According to evidentialism, one should

believe something if and only if has adequate evidence for what one believes. Such a view is held most famously by John Locke, David Hume, and William Clifford. Thus, Clifford claims that 'it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence' (1877, 77).⁵ According to classic pragmatism, other features besides evidence, such as practical reasons, can make it the case that one should believe something. Classic pragmatism is held, most famously, by Blaise Pascal and William James.⁶ However, I will also consider a distinct, though related debate in which pragmatism is understood differently. According to a new kind of pragmatism, proposed by Jeremy Fantl and Matthew McGrath, John Hawthorne, and Jason Stanley, some epistemic notions may depend on one's practical interests, even if what one should believe is independent of one's practical reasons.⁷ I will proceed as follows. In section one, I will reconstruct the debate between evidentialism and classic pragmatism. In section two, I will discuss the new pragmatism. In section three, I will raise an additional challenge for evidentialism. Finally, I will conclude by briefly addressing the philosophical importance of the ethics of belief.

There are five questions that bear on the ethics of belief that I shall set aside in the present discussion. First, one can wonder what evidence is. In particular, one can wonder whether evidence is propositional or whether, as it has been held in traditional British empiricism, it can consist of subjective episodes.⁸ For present purposes, I will simply help myself to a notion of evidence, and I will leave open how it is to be understood. Second, one can wonder what it is to *have* evidence – in virtue of what it is that one possesses evidence. This, too, is an issue that I will leave open.⁹ Third, one can wonder how strong one's evidence must be to be adequate. In particular, one can wonder whether only evidence that is sufficient for knowledge is adequate.¹⁰ Much of the recent debate that pertains to this issue has been carried out over norms of *assertion* rather than belief.¹¹ However, if, as Timothy Williamson plausibly suggests, 'occurently believing *p* stands to asserting *p* as the inner stands to the outer' (2000, 255), this debate will carry over to belief.¹² For present purposes, I will simply speak of *adequate* evidence, leaving open how strong the evidence has to be. Fourth, one can wonder how evidentialism, in particular, can account for *a priori* beliefs. For instance, what is one's evidence for the proposition that everything is identical to itself? This is a pressing question if one thinks that such beliefs aren't held on the basis of evidence, because evidence is to be understood in terms of subjective episodes and would have its place in the domain of the empirical. For present purposes, I shall be concerned with empirical beliefs, and I will assume that an evidentialist has a way of accounting for *a priori* beliefs, if such a distinction is to be drawn at all.¹³ Finally, fifth, one can wonder how the ethics of belief is possible at all since belief largely isn't under our voluntary control. This question arises in response to a paradox.¹⁴ Thus the following three propositions all seem true but are inconsistent:

1. It is sometimes the case that one should or shouldn't believe something.
2. If it is the case that one should or shouldn't φ , then one has voluntary control over φ . (Famously, 'ought' implies 'can'.)
3. We do not enjoy voluntary control over belief.¹⁵

For present purposes, I will assume that this paradox has a solution, which preserves the truth of (1) and hence makes it possible to ask in virtue of what it is that we should believe something.¹⁶ It seems to me overwhelmingly plausible that we sometimes should and sometimes shouldn't believe things. However, I cannot attempt to offer a solution to the paradox here.¹⁷

1. Evidentialism and Classic Pragmatism

In this section I will first consider an argument for evidentialism. Second, I will consider an argument for classic pragmatism. Finally, I will consider whether, and to what extent, these arguments are really in conflict since the question what we should believe is ambiguous.

The main argument for evidentialism that I will consider is based on the following observation:

The Evidentialist Observation: One cannot deliberately believe something on the basis of non-evidential reasons, that is, in full awareness that these are one's reasons.

By 'evidential reasons' I mean reasons that consist of one's total evidence.¹⁸ By 'non-evidential reasons' I mean reasons that don't merely consist of one's total evidence but may include practical reasons.

Let me illustrate this observation with Thomas Kelly's example (2002, 169–70). No matter how strong your practical reasons are for believing that your kids are home, you cannot deliberately believe on the basis of them that your kids are home. Thus, you cannot reason from the fact that you are anxious that your kids are out and that it is extremely important for you not to be anxious right now that your kids are indeed home. The only reasons that you can deliberately base your belief on are evidential reasons. Of course, one can be engaged in wishful thinking and in fact believe something on the basis of practical reasons. However, once one becomes aware that one's reasons for belief are practical, one will normally give up the belief.

An evidentialist can use this observation to defend evidentialism on the following grounds: The fact that we would suspend a belief we hold for non-evidential reasons if we realized that we do so shows that we should believe something only if we have adequate evidence for it.¹⁹ Similarly, the fact that we would be prepared to criticize someone else's belief – even if the other has very strong practical reasons for holding the belief – suggests that we should believe something only if we have adequate evidence for it.²⁰ Neither is true for beliefs we hold for evidential reasons, which suggests that in those cases, our belief is as it should be. Hence we should believe something if and only if we have adequate evidence for it.

Let me turn now to an argument for classic pragmatism. A classic pragmatist will hold that practical and other non-evidential reasons do bear on the question whether one should believe something. To defend this view, the pragmatist will put forward the following observation:

The Pragmatist Observation: Practical and other non-evidential reasons bear on the question whether one should *get oneself* to believe something.

For example, if you have strong practical reasons to believe that your kids are home, then you should get yourself to believe it – for instance, by calling home.²¹

Indeed, Pascal, a champion of classic pragmatism, saw this. In putting forward his famous wager, he argued that one is practically better off believing in God than not believing. Yet he did not propose to believe in God *on the basis of the wager*. Rather, he held that the wager shows that one should *get oneself* to believe in God:

You want to be cured of unbelief and you ask for the remedy: learn from those who were once bound like you and who now wager all they have. These are people who know the road you wish to follow, who have been cured of the affliction of which you wish to be cured: follow the way by which they began. They behaved just as if they did believe, taking holy water,

having masses said, and so on. That will make you believe quite naturally, and will make you more docile. (Pascal 1670, 152)

Pascal held that one will form the belief in God not as an inference from the wager but by engaging in religious practice and emulating those who believe.²²

The Pragmatist Observation allows the pragmatist to maintain that in an important sense of ‘should,’ we should believe what we have practical reasons to believe. Practical or other non-evidential reasons bear on whether we should or shouldn’t get ourselves to believe something – for instance, by seeking certain evidence. Yet the question what we should get ourselves to believe is closely related to the question what we should believe. Thus consider, for comparison, the question whether one should get prepared. Surely, this question is closely related to the question whether one should be prepared. If one concludes that one should get prepared, then one will think that, sooner or later, one should be prepared. By parity, if one thinks that one should get oneself to believe something, one will think that, sooner or later, one should believe it.²³ Hence, it seems plausible that in some sense of ‘should’ we should believe things for practical reasons.

However, it might be felt that the conflict between evidentialism and classic pragmatism is overstated. For, the Evidentialist and the Pragmatist Observations are compatible. The two views are concerned with two different, even if related, questions: The evidentialist is concerned with the synchronic question what we should believe at a particular point in time, and the pragmatist is concerned with the diachronic question what we should get ourselves to believe over time. Perhaps, then, disambiguating the question could resolve the issue. In the following, I will consider three ways of disambiguating the question.

First, let me start with what I take to be the most plausible interpretation for the evidentialist. A prominent evidentialist in the contemporary debate, Richard Feldman, understands the ethics of belief as concerned with the *synchronic* question what we *epistemically* should believe. He writes,

Evidentialism is best seen as a theory about synchronic rationality. It holds that the epistemically rational thing to do at any moment is to follow the evidence you have at that moment. It doesn’t address questions of how to conduct inquiry over periods of time. Thus, it does not address questions about how to gather evidence, when one ought to seek additional evidence, and so on. In my view, these diachronic questions are moral or prudential questions rather than epistemic questions. (2000, 189)

Furthermore, Feldman denies that it is coherent to speak of what we *should* believe in an all-things-considered sense (2000, 192). On Feldman’s view, then, the classic pragmatist’s question what we should *get ourselves to believe* – which is a diachronic question – need not be of concern for the ethics of belief at all.²⁴ It is a question for the theory of practical rationality or for normative ethics.

A second, only slightly different interpretation of the question what we should believe advocates a more conciliatory view. On this view, the question is simply ambiguous between an epistemic-synchronic and a practical-diachronic reading. The evidentialist and pragmatist give correct answers to different questions. The evidentialist is right that, at any point in time, we epistemically should believe whatever we have adequate evidence to believe and nothing else, and the pragmatist is right that, over time, we practically should believe what we have practical reasons to get ourselves to believe. There is no further sense of an all-things-considered ‘should.’ Hence, there is no sense in which either of these ways of understanding the question is more fundamental or of greater importance for the ethics of belief.

Finally, third, one could hold – as I think the classic pragmatist most plausibly would – that the question what we should believe is to be understood as a *diachronic* question about what we should believe all-things-considered. If the question is understood in this way, then the pragmatist can maintain that the Pragmatist Observation settles the central question in the ethics of belief. The Evidentialist Observation – that we cannot deliberately believe something on the basis of non-evidential reasons – is, on this view, an observation about the nature of belief but does not reveal anything of great importance for the ethics of belief. It merely tells us something about our capacity for belief formation and retention but not about what we should believe.

I confess to be sympathetic with the third interpretation of the question. It seems to me that there is an all-things-considered sense of ‘should’ in terms of which the question what we should believe can be asked. Indeed, I think that that’s the question we really care about. It might be very difficult to answer this question in some cases – just as it might be difficult to answer the question what one should do when one faces a dilemma between moral and prudential considerations.²⁵ However, I do think that this sense of ‘should’ is central. Although I cannot argue for that here, I hold that disambiguations of ‘should’ are conceptually posterior to the all-things-considered notion. That is to say, I hold that our grasp of an ‘epistemic should’ and a ‘practical should’ presupposes a prior grasp of an ‘all-things-considered should.’²⁶

Furthermore, it seems to me that diachronic questions should have an important place in the ethics of belief. In support of this view, let me raise a philosophical problem that, I think, should be seen as an issue for the ethics of belief. For that purpose, let me loosely define two notions: First, it is plausible to characterize *enquiry* as a course of action in which one engages to acquire evidence. Second, let me define the artificial notion of *unquiry* as a course of action in which one engages to lose evidence. One could *unquire* in this sense by exposing oneself to misleading evidence – such as testimony from others – or by getting oneself to forget certain pieces of information. The philosophical problem, then, is this: Why shouldn’t we engage in *unquiry* if it were shown that we have strong practical reason to hold certain beliefs and suspend others? For example, suppose it were shown that people with a certain set of beliefs, which from our perspective strikes us as completely unfounded, are significantly happier or have a greater quality of life than we do.²⁷ Should we, then, engage in *unquiry* in order to acquire this set of beliefs and lose our current beliefs according to which that set is unfounded? – Of course, the particulars of the example would have to be filled in. However, it is very plausible that this question could arise. And it strikes me as a limitation on an ethics of belief if it simply has nothing to say about it. Indeed, I think that *unquiry* strikes us as deeply wrong. If this intuition is correct, it seems to me to be a project for the ethics of belief to vindicate it and provide a theoretical foundation for it.

2. The New Pragmatism

I turn now to a different way of understanding the debate between evidentialism and pragmatism. According to a new kind of pragmatism, which is sometimes called a pragmatic encroachment view, epistemic notions such as knowledge and epistemic justification depend on our practical stakes. In this section, I will first explain the new pragmatism in terms of the thesis that whether one knows *p* depends in part on one’s stakes in *p* and then assess its implications for the dialectic with evidentialism.

To explain the new pragmatism, I will discuss the following case, due to Fantl and McGrath.²⁸ Imagine that two subjects, Matt and Jeremy, are considering the proposition

the train is a local. Suppose that Matt fallibly knows it, that is, he knows it but there is still an epistemic chance of error that he is wrong. Suppose furthermore that Jeremy is Matt's epistemic twin in the following sense: Jeremy's epistemic chance that the train is a local is exactly the same as Matt's. They can be said to be 'alike in their strength of epistemic position' (2009, 84). Suppose, finally, that Matt is in a low stakes situation in which it doesn't matter much whether the train is a local, whereas Jeremy is in a high stakes situation in which life and death depend on whether it is. We can imagine that Matt is going to a destination at which both the local and the express trains are stopping and he prefers a slightly slower but more scenic journey, whereas Jeremy is going to a destination at which only the local train is stopping, and it is a matter of life and death that he gets to this destination with the next train.

Our intuitions about this case, which Fantl and McGrath go on to defend,²⁹ are the following: First, Matt should board the train. There is no point for him to check whether the train is, indeed, a local. Second, Jeremy, however, should not board the train without double-checking that it is, indeed, a local. That is because the chance of error for him is too great, given that his taking the next local train is a matter of life and death, and double-checking would decrease the chance of error. Fantl and McGrath hold that, though Matt knows, Jeremy doesn't know that the train is a local. Since the only difference between them is that Jeremy's stakes are high and Matt's are low, the example suggests that knowledge in part depends on one's practical stakes.

Fantl and McGrath further argue that the argument carries over to epistemic justification. Just as Matt should board the train, Matt is epistemically justified in believing that the train is a local. And just as Jeremy should not board the train, he is not epistemically justified in believing that the train is a local. Hence epistemic justification, too, depends on one's practical stakes. And since Fantl and McGrath understand epistemic justification as an obliging notion, they also hold that Matt epistemically should believe that the train is a local and that Jeremy epistemically should not believe that the train is a local (2009, 89–93).

It is worth noting how Fantl and McGrath's new pragmatism differs from classic pragmatism. According to the classic pragmatist, the fundamental question in the ethics of belief is what one should believe all-things considered, and practical reasons bear on this question. Hence, the classic pragmatist denies importance to a distinction between the practical and the epistemic. According to Fantl and McGrath, practical stakes affect what one *epistemically* should believe. This is compatible with denying that what one practically should believe bears on the question what one should believe all-things-considered. Thus, Fantl and McGrath emphasize that they do not reject the distinction between, as they put it, pragmatic and epistemic justification (2002, 83–84). Rather, they argue that epistemic justification depends on one's practical stakes. One's practical stakes determine how good one's evidence must be in order to make one epistemically justified in believing something.³⁰

There are two ways to defend evidentialism against the new pragmatism. First, and most straightforwardly, one can deny that knowledge and epistemic justification depend on practical stakes and defend an alternative interpretation of Fantl and McGrath's case.³¹ Second, one can hold that the notion of evidence itself depends on practical stakes.³² On this line of thought, Jeremy and Matt have different evidence precisely because their stakes are different. Somewhat perversely, evidentialism thus turns out to be true because the epistemic always in part depends on the pragmatic. Of course, it remains a substantial task to vindicate such a thesis about evidence.

3. *A Challenge for Evidentialism*

I turn now to a further challenge for evidentialism.³³ This challenge concerns only a particular set of beliefs, namely beliefs about some of our own future actions. To raise the challenge, I would like to develop a discussion from Richard Feldman, which he takes to have ‘absolutely no epistemological significance’ (2000, 169). Feldman observes that there are certain beliefs over which we enjoy voluntary control. We enjoy voluntary control over a belief if we enjoy voluntary control over whether to make it true. To illustrate this point, Feldman offers the following example: ‘If the department chair announces that she’ll give a raise to all and only those members of the department who in 30 seconds believe that the lights in their office are on, I’ll head for the light switch and turn on the lights to make sure that I have the belief’ (2000, 171). Whenever we can form the belief that *p* by ensuring *p* and thereby acquiring adequate evidence for it, we enjoy voluntary control over the belief. However, since this observation holds true only of a special class of beliefs, Feldman thinks that it is of no epistemological significance.

What Feldman doesn’t discuss is a closely related, but slightly different class of beliefs, namely beliefs about some of our future actions. To vary his example we could imagine that the department chair offers a raise to all and only those who believe that the lights in their office *will* be on in two hours. Feldman could form the relevant belief simply by deciding to turn on the lights when he gets back to his office. This, too, would be a belief over which he enjoys voluntary control, though he wouldn’t have to make the belief true in order to form it.

This example isn’t problematic for the evidentialist, because one still has adequate evidence to believe that the lights will be on since, presumably, in virtue of deciding to turn them on one acquires adequate evidence for believing that they will be on. To raise the challenge to evidentialism I have in mind, we should consider cases in which we seriously decide or sincerely promise to do something that we know is *difficult* to do. We often make such decisions and promises and we often form the belief that we will do what we have decided or promised to do. For example, we may decide to quit smoking or to lose weight, and we may promise to spend all the days of our life with our spouse. It is plausible that when we seriously decide or sincerely promise to do these things, we come to believe that we will in fact do them. Indeed, if we didn’t believe them, our decisions wouldn’t be serious and our promises wouldn’t be sincere. However, such beliefs seem to go *against* the evidence – precisely because we know that it is difficult to do what we have decided or promised to do. For instance, we know that people tend to fail in their attempts to quit smoking or to lose weight and that divorce rates are fairly high. Nonetheless, such beliefs do not seem to be wrong. Indeed, I think that our most important promises and our most important decisions are of this kind, and they require that we act and form beliefs without adequate evidence.

Beliefs about future actions which we know are difficult to perform seem to me to be counterexamples to evidentialism. We can see this most clearly if we take the perspective of an outsider who is forming a belief about our future action. In virtue of knowing that our action is difficult to perform, she should believe that more or less likely – depending on how difficult it is to perform the action – we will fail. For instance, our doctor should believe that likely we will fail in our attempt to quit smoking, and our wedding photographer should believe that somewhat likely we won’t keep our promise. However, we may not form the same belief lest we render our decision unserious or our promise insincere – even though we know that such an outsider’s position is available! Belief against the evidence seems to be required if we are to think of ourselves as capable of doing

something that we know is difficult to do. Hence evidentialism cannot be the correct account of the ethics of beliefs about such future actions.³⁴

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me briefly address what I take to be the importance of the ethics of belief. Belief, as Bernard Williams famously put it, aims at truth (1973). The ethics of belief is concerned with the question how we should aim at truth. The debate between pragmatism and evidentialism, in particular, raises the fundamental question whether we should strive for the truth because it is of instrumental value to us or whether we should strive for it for its own sake, even if we'd be better off without it.

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Short Biography

Berislav Marušić has research interests in the ethics of belief, skepticism, and the nature of reasons. He is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Brandeis University. He received his PhD from U.C. Berkeley and his A.B. from Harvard University.

Notes

* Correspondence: Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Brandeis University, Rabb 303/MS 055, Waltham, MA 02454, USA. Email: marusic@brandeis.edu.

¹ I owe this terminology to Bergmann (2005, 420).

² See Fantl and McGrath (2009, esp. 77–82) for an argument that reasoning from a premise is an outright notion.

³ Christensen (2004) considers three possibilities but finds all of them wanting: First, one could identify outright belief with degree of belief 1; second, one could identify outright belief with a, possibly variable, threshold degree of belief; third, one could deny that the two frameworks can be integrated at all. The problem with the first strategy is that there are many things we believe outright which we don't seem to believe to degree 1 – that is, of which we are not certain. The problem with the second strategy is that it is incompatible with a plausible version of the conjunction principle for outright belief: if we outright believe p and outright believe q we also outright believe p and q – at least when we are considering whether p and q . Yet if our degrees of belief in p and in q are just above the threshold, our degree of belief in p and q would be under the threshold, and hence the conjunction principle would be violated. The problem with the third strategy is that it is implausible that our degrees of belief are entirely disconnected from our outright beliefs. Thus lowering one's degree of belief will often get one to suspend one's outright belief.

⁴ It is plausible that the ethics of belief should be understood as concerned with the conditional question which doxastic attitude we should adopt, if we are to adopt one at all. As Harman (1986, 5–6) argues, we often may refrain from adopting a doxastic attitude even if we have overwhelming evidence for the truth of a proposition. For instance, we have strong evidence for trivial logical consequences of propositions that we have strong evidence for. Yet it doesn't seem that we *should* come to believe them: Someone who doesn't isn't exhibiting a failure; she may simply never have thought of them. – For ease of exposition, I will omit this complication.

⁵ For some contemporary defenses, see Conee and Feldman (2004), Adler (2002), and Shah (2006).

⁶ For some contemporary defenses, see Plantinga (1983), Foley (1987, ch.5) and Nozick (1993, ch.3, esp. 85–89).

⁷ See Fantl and McGrath (2002, 2007, 2009), Hawthorne (2004), Stanley (2005) and Hawthorne and Stanley (2008). See also Owens (2000, ch.1).

⁸ For an excellent overview of these questions, see Thomas Kelly's article on evidence in *Philosophy Compass* (2008).

⁹ See Conee and Feldman (2004, ch.9) and Schroeder (2008).

¹⁰ For a defense of this view, see, for instance, Williamson (2000) and Adler (2002).

¹¹ See, for instance, Williamson (2000, ch.11), Adler (2002), Weiner (2005), Douven (2006), Lackey (2007).

¹² See also Adler (2002) for discussion of the connection between belief and assertion.

¹³ A related difficulty for evidentialism, especially if evidence is not understood in terms of subjective episodes, is to account for immediate beliefs, such as beliefs about what we are perceiving or remembering, which do not seem to be based on evidence.

¹⁴ See Alston (1988) for an influential formulation of the paradox. As Feldman (2000) points out, some beliefs are under voluntary control. I discuss them in section three below.

¹⁵ See Chrisman (2008) for an overview and discussion of the paradox.

¹⁶ In his defense of evidentialism, Jonathan Adler seems to reject (1) and presents evidentialism as a doctrine about what we *can* believe. Though Adler's defense of evidentialism is one of the most thorough and sustained ones in the contemporary debate, his position on this particular issue strikes me as elusive. Thus, Adler writes,

I am concerned to reject the implication...that the relation between belief and evidence is a contingent one, which requires shoring up from tendentious doctrines of ethics, epistemology, or rationality. In particular, we do not specify the basic doctrines of the ethics of belief in 'deontological' terms of 'ought's and duties. The [version of evidentialism here defended] is not about how one ought to believe (rationally, wisely, or ethically). Rather,

One's believing that *p* is proper (i.e. in accord with the concept of belief) if and only if one's evidence establishes that *p* is true.

On the conceptual or intrinsic approach, normative judgments ('ought's) are not directed to belief.... If, under ideal conditions, I cannot help but believe (not believe) when I recognize that the evidence establishes (fails to establish) that *p*, it makes no strict sense to say that I ought (or that it is not the case that I ought) to believe *p*.

Because judgments of what one cannot believe are conceptually grounded, they are simultaneously normative and descriptive. (2002, 51, italics mine).

What strikes me as elusive about Adler's view is that he both affirms that 'it makes no strict sense to say that I ought (or that it is not the case that I ought) to believe *p*' but that nonetheless 'judgments of what one cannot believe are...normative.' He holds that his version of evidentialism is not about how one ought to believe, yet it still specifies when it is *proper* to believe – but presumably one ought to do what is proper and one ought not to do what is improper. Clearly, Adler would rule certain kinds of belief, such as wishful thinking, as wrong, and he would allow that, therefore, there are some beliefs that we should not hold. Presumably, if there are other beliefs that are not wrong, he would think that we should hold them. In fact, he would think that we *must* hold them – and 'must' here implies 'should'. For criticism of Adler's view on this issue, see McCormick (2005).

¹⁷ A further question is how the ethics of belief is related to questions of morality. See Haack (1997).

¹⁸ Even if part of one's evidence supports a belief, another part may undercut or defeat it. That is why beliefs are assessed in light of one's total evidence. See Kelly (2008) for further discussion.

¹⁹ See Adler (2002) and Shah (2006) in particular. For criticism, see Reisner (2009).

²⁰ This observation can be taken to provide even better support for the view that one should believe something if and only if one's belief is *based* on one's evidence (and not just if and only if one has adequate evidence for). For, it is in virtue of the basing relation that a belief is 'rationalized', that is, made rational by the evidence (cf. Kelly 2002). However, according to Conee and Feldman, who are prominent proponents of evidentialism, beliefs that are in accord with one's evidence without being based on it are justified, even if they are in a sense 'epistemically defective' (2004, 93).

²¹ Kelly (2002). Cf. Hieronymi's (2006) helpful distinction between evaluative and managerial control.

²² Pascal's view is that we should make ourselves more docile – the verb he uses is 'abêtir' which is literally 'to make oneself into a beast' (cf. Kelly 2002). I should note, though, that Pascal's use of the verb could be ironic. For discussion of Pascal's use of 'abêtir', see Howells (1984, esp. 58–60).

²³ For different accounts of how these relations are to be understood, see Mills (1998) and Chrisman (2008).

²⁴ Notably, this is not the only way to understand evidentialism. Clifford, for instance, suggests that evidentialism is to be understood as a diachronic view. For, he holds that the ship owner who sent his ship to sea after disregarding evidence that it might be unsafe is blameworthy. Clifford writes, 'He had acquired his belief [that the ship would be safe] not by honestly earning it in patient investigation, but by stifling his doubts. And although in the end he may have felt so sure about it that he could not think otherwise, yet in as much as he had knowingly and willingly worked himself into that frame of mind, he must be held responsible for it' (1877, 71, italics mine).

²⁵ Mills (1998) holds that there can be no conflict between what one epistemically and practically should believe. As he puts it, one cannot be practically justified and epistemically unjustified in believing something, or vice versa. However, even if the conflict is not as direct, it seems hardly controversial that one could be in a situation in which one should believe something because of one's evidence and should get oneself to suspend belief because of one's practical considerations, or vice versa. For a different account of the conflict between what one epistemically and practically should believe, see Reisner (2008).

²⁶ For a different view, see Foley (1993, ch.3, esp. 102–3). Foley defends the view that egocentric, or subjective, epistemic rationality is the conceptually prior notion and that rationality all-things-considered can be defined in

terms of it. For further discussion of this point, see Fumerton (1995). I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing me to this view.

²⁷ That false belief could be advantageous is suggested by cognitive dissonance theory: False belief reduces the tension produced by cognitively dissonant choices or actions. See Cooper (2007) for an overview. That true belief could be disadvantageous is suggested by studies of depressive realism: Some studies suggest a correlation between depression and a more accurate view of oneself and the world. See, for example, Alloy and Abramson (1979) and Dobson and Franche (1989).

²⁸ Fantl and McGrath (2009, 84–88). A very similar case is presented in their earlier ‘Evidence, Pragmatics, and Justification’ (2002, 67).

²⁹ That is to say, Fantl and McGrath offer a theoretical basis for these intuitions. They hold that, in conjunction with some plausible premises about the connection between knowledge and action, pragmatism follows from fallibilism.

³⁰ Cf. Owens (2000, 25–27).

³¹ Cf. Conee and Feldman’s (2004, 103–4) response to Fantl and McGrath (2002).

³² This is the view that Stanley endorses, though without defending it (2005, esp. 181–2).

³³ I put forward this challenge in my ‘Belief and Difficult Action.’

³⁴ Conee (1987) and Foley (1991, 1993, ch.1.5) raise another potential problem for evidentialism (cf. also Kvanvig (1996) for a related discussion). They hold that what one should believe is distinct from what one has evidence for, because, as Foley puts it, ‘Belief in accordance with the evidence can itself affect the evidence, and when it does, evidence and epistemic reasons for belief can come apart’ (1991, 99). Let me illustrate this point in terms of Kvanvig’s example (which I choose for ease of exposition): It may be that one has adequate evidence to believe that one has never considered the proposition that the square root of 625 is 25 (1996, 291). Yet if one comes to believe that one has never considered this proposition one gains conclusive evidence that one has, in fact, considered it. Hence it may seem that what one should believe and what one has adequate evidence for come apart. However, it seems to me that the evidentialist has a good response to this problem. She can just grant that one should believe the problematic proposition before one actually believes it, and hold, further, that when one comes to believe the proposition, one should no longer believe it. Thus, the evidentialist can hold that initially one should believe that one has never considered the proposition that the square root of 625 is 25 and, furthermore, that as soon as one does believe it, one no longer has adequate evidence for this proposition and hence shouldn’t hold the belief anymore. For further discussion of Foley’s case, see Hetherington (1996). – I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing me to this problem.

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