Belief in a Fallen World

Robert Pasnau

Abstract: In an ideal epistemic world, our beliefs would correspond to our evidence, and our evidence would be bountiful. In the world we live in, however, if we wish to live meaningful lives, other epistemic strategies are necessary. Here I attempt to work out, systematically, the ways in which evidentialism fails us as a guide to belief. This is so preeminently for lives of a religious character, but the point applies more broadly.

1 Legend and Reality

It is said—or at any rate used to be said—that Adam and Eve, before the Fall, knew everything a human being is naturally able to know. The story, as it usually goes, is that Adam and Eve *knew* things. They were not just opinionated, not just full of disjoint beliefs of uncertain origin. The beliefs had been implanted all right, by their maker, but implanted along with a full understanding, down to first principles, of the reasons why things are as they are. Cognitively, as in other ways, the lives of our putative first parents were wholly and gloriously ideal.

From there, as they say, things went downhill. Although it would be nice to report that we are now on the road to recovery, there is really not much in the world today to encourage that thought. On the contrary, our fallen cognitive natures seem every bit as prone to ignorance and prejudice as ever, and the hope of progress through intellectual enlightenment seems as remote as it was centuries ago.

What, then, is an epistemologist to do? The noble way forward, the way of high ideals, is to redouble our efforts at spreading the truth and exposing lies, and teaching people how to assess their evidence in such a way as to tell the difference. Although this is doubtless work of the first importance, it is not all we might do, because not all our beliefs are formed in accordance with the evidence. And though, in an ideal world, we might firmly insist that all belief *ought* to adhere to the evidence, our world is very far from ideal, and requires a more complex and conflicting set of norms.

In what follows I seek to chart, at least roughly, that complex of non-evidential norms. After fixing some preliminary points on the map (sections 2–4), I demarcate the evidentialist line as I understand it (sections 5–7), and describe a range of plausible counterexamples (sections 8–11). Up to that point, we will be on fairly familiar, if contentious, ground. The difficult task

that lies beyond, for anyone who gets that far, is to locate these assorted counterexamples on a coherent map that describes in a systematic way the whole terrain of norms that govern our beliefs, both pragmatic and ethical (sections 12–18). Such *doxastic values*, as I will call them, are inescapable for anyone who would lead a fully human life in this our fallen world. This is preeminently so for lives of a religious character (sections 19–21), but the point applies more broadly (sections 22–23).

Part I. Fundamentals

2   Ethics of Belief

My concern is not with epistemology proper—understood as the theory of knowledge—but with the more general question of what norms and values govern belief. Although the ethics of belief has received considerable attention of late, the question can hardly even be posed without a few initial words of clarification. First, then, I am going to take for granted that beliefs are subject to at least some normative considerations. I will remain neutral, however, as to the ultimate grounds of these various norms: whether they are all properly moral, or of some *sui generis* epistemic kind, or perhaps simply pragmatic. The issue is deeply important, but it goes too deep to admit of satisfactory treatment here.[1] Although I will ultimately group these norms into three kinds—epistemic, pragmatic, and ethical—I make no claims about where such distinctions might ultimately bottom out. My aim is just to establish that the values at issue have some kind of normative pull on belief.

To claim even this much, however, requires supposing that belief is sufficiently under our control to make normative claims appropriate. Again, however, I am simply going to take for granted that this is so. Difficult questions arise over the extent to which belief is subject to the will at all, and particularly difficult questions arise over whether belief is subject to the sort of extra-evidential considerations that are my focus.[2] Inasmuch as I am doubtful, in even the most paradigmatic cases of voluntary action, about the extent to which we are free in any deep sense, I have little inclination to press the case for doxastic voluntarism. Moreover, it does seem clear that our control over our own beliefs is restricted in important ways. Still, even if it takes intricate and sustained effort to regulate belief, such efforts do seem within our control, if anything is.[3] And if even this much is right,

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[1] See, for example, Wrenn (2007), who argues that epistemic norms are simply ethical norms, and Heil (1983), who argues that epistemic norms are a species of pragmatic norms.

[2] For a thorough recent discussion of these issues, with extensive further references, see McCormick 2015. See also Rinard 2015.

[3] On methods for regulating belief, see Price 1954 and Garber 2009. Further questions arise even about whether control and voluntariness are essential for responsibility. See, for example, Hieronymi 2008.

then that is enough to license the normative questions that I will be asking. So, at any rate, I will be assuming.

3 Ideal Theory

In exploring the norms that govern belief, I will be contrasting the ideal norms we might aspire to, in a perfect world, with the norms we accept for now in a world such as this. Even if ours is not the ideal epistemic world of Adam and Eve, such reflection on the ideal has its uses. By describing the cognitive goals we might ultimately aspire to achieve, we set out a program by which to measure how far we have come, epistemically speaking, how far we still have to go, and where we should aspire to go next. Historically, a great deal of what we now call epistemology has been devoted to constructing just this sort of ideal theory.[4] And just in the way that much of political philosophy has traditionally begun with the state of nature, from which it sought to escape, so epistemology in the Western tradition has often begun with the state of grace that is Eden, and reflected upon how we might work our way back.[5]

Yet, as is well known, ideal theory threatens to lead us astray if the principles it ideally recommends yield the wrong results in non-ideal cases. So the method, if it is to be applied at all, must be applied with care and nuance, in light of the limitations imposed by our imperfect natures and impoverished circumstances. Evidentialism, with its simple cardinal injunction to follow the evidence, fails to heed such limitations, or so I will argue, and as a result it ignores much of the normative territory that circumscribes belief. For other sorts of beings, in other circumstances, *Follow the evidence* might be the only doxastic principle necessary. In this fallen world, however, our cognitive predicament is too fraught to be governed by anything so simple. Instead, we need to take account of, and steer between, many different and competing doxastic values, making the task of postlapsarian epistemology much more complicated, but also more richly interesting, than is ordinarily supposed.

4 Belief

Throughout, I deliberately and narrowly focus on *belief* as opposed to *credences*. This is to say that my concern is with cases where one believes a proposition in full as opposed to partially. What such full belief amounts to is another issue that cannot be adequately dealt with here, but my working assumption will be that to believe a proposition is to be committed to its truth, where such commitment can be understood in terms of a cluster of dispositions involving both practical reasoning and affective states, as

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[4] See Pasnau 2017.

[5] For a readily accessible example, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1a Q94. Even Hume, in the abstract to the *Treatise*, repeatedly invokes the case of Adam as a normative ideal in the cognitive domain (pp. 650–51). For recent philosophical musings on the fall from Eden, see Johnston 2009, 82–88.

well as dispositions toward various actions in certain circumstances. Later (section 16), it will be important that to have a belief is not simply to be in a certain sort of representational state. The dispositions to which belief gives rise are critical to its ethical dimensions, or so I will claim. But one could put these working assumptions more cautiously, and say that if beliefs just are propositions written on the inner chalkboard of the mind, then an ethics of belief will actually be an ethics of belief+, belief as it shapes an agent's broader psychology.[6]

5   Unfounded Belief

Let me now turn to a fuller characterization of my quarry, which I have so far very loosely characterized as evidentialism. In fact, inconveniently, there is no one canonical theory here to which we can confine our attention, but instead a large family of theories resembling each other to varying degrees. One very straightforward way to characterize evidentialism is as the view that we should believe a proposition when and only when we are in possession of sufficient evidence for its truth.[7] An immediate difficulty with this unqualified formulation is that, put so incautiously, it is hard to see how anyone could plausibly endorse it. After all, we can all imagine cases where the planet hangs in the balance, or at least one's little corner of the planet, and where it seems manifestly clear that if you can manage to ignore the evidence and believe some convenient falsehood, you ought to do so. To this extent, the denial of evidentialism may seem hardly even controversial. Only in quite an idealized world would everyone, all the time, have the luxury to think only of the truth.

   Yet even if it is agreed that unqualified evidentialism is untenable, still it seems to be widely supposed that what counterexamples there are can be set aside as marginal to the main business of assessing what it is we ought to believe. My aim is to establish just how pervasive those counterexamples are, and then to reflect systematically on their structure. The epistemologist will be free, in the end, to treat all of this as quite irrelevant to the serious business of *epistemic* inquiry into *rational* belief based strictly on the *evidence*. But I aim to make clear just how much of an idealization that narrow project requires, given the sort of beings we are and the sort of world we live in.

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[6] For a sophisticated account of belief along the dispositionalist lines I favor, see Schwitzgebel 2002; see p. 262 for the "inner chalkboard" of rival representational accounts. In what follows I ignore credences entirely, but not because I think they can readily be assimilated into the story I am telling. On the contrary, I am inclined to think (see Pasnau 2015b) that the norms that govern belief may be very different from the norms that govern our credences, and that something closer to evidentialism is more plausible in the latter case. Rather than take this as a reason to privilege theorizing in terms of credences, I take it as a reason to think that belief is irreducible to credence.

[7] See the similar formulation in Chignell 2010, § 1.1. For a classic statement of evidentialism, and an attack against it along lines congenial to my own, see Meiland 1980.

Here, however, another difficulty arises, which is that, qualified or not, it hard to know how best to characterize the strictures on belief that evidentialism requires. The above formulation relies on 'evidence' to carry this weight, but it is of course difficult to know how to define that vexed notion, and others might prefer to define evidentialism in terms of truth, rationality, or justification. As will become clear shortly, no such simple formulation has much of a chance of succeeding, even by the evidentialist's own lights. But since I mean to take aim at the very heart of the view, it is not necessary to go very deeply into these details. However they sort themselves out, I take such views to agree, at least broadly, on the impermissibility of the following: *that I believe* P, *even while recognizing that, if I were to base my beliefs solely and objectively upon the full evidence available to me, then I would judge* P *more likely false than true*. In describing such an explicit failure to respect one's evidence, I mean to focus my attention on a case that evidentialists as a group are likely to regard as impermissible, however the details of their views may vary.

A natural, though contentious, way to diagnose the impermissibility of the case just described is to say that it represents an egregious failure to *aim at the truth*. Although we will see in section 8 that even the evidentialist will likely need to introduce complications into this simple diagnosis, I will for now, provisionally, for the sake of a starting point, think of evidentialism as requiring that belief, always and everywhere, should aim at the truth. Presumably, when my beliefs fail to aim at the truth, I am motivated by something else, and it is precisely the project of this paper to map out the range of such permissible motivations. Since beliefs of this kind are so central to my project, I will refer to them in general as *unfounded beliefs*. Such beliefs may arise in the absence of evidence, or be supported by inadequate evidence, or they may even, as in the case just sketched, conflict with the best evidence. Setting aside evidence-talk, what distinguishes them is that they are held in a way that explicitly violates the evidentialist's injunction to aim at the truth. Such unfounded beliefs are precisely what I mean to claim are sometimes permissible, and not only in special recherché cases, but in the most ordinary and everyday circumstances.

Of course, we all fall short of the truth from time to time, unwittingly. But, so as to focus on the cases that matter here, I will restrict the domain of unfounded beliefs to those that are held with some degree of self-awareness. It is this feature, of course, that makes such cases particularly impermissible for the evidentialist. A full account of such matters would want to grapple with the varying degrees in which self-awareness might come. Of some people we might want to say only that they are *in a position to recognize* that their beliefs are unfounded; of others we might want to say that they *know it perfectly well*. Again, though, we can set aside such details because I mean to focus on the most apparently egregious such case, of an agent who is fully aware of what the evidence seems to show and nevertheless believes the contrary.

6   Conceptual Evidentialism

Before taking on the normative question, however, something needs to be said about whether such unfounded beliefs are even possible. According to one prominent line of recent evidentialist argument, there is no need even to raise the normative questions on which I am focusing, because the very concept of belief leaves no room for knowingly unfounded beliefs. According to Jonathan Adler, for instance, "any account of the ethics of belief should fit tightly with the crucial fact that it is not possible to regard oneself as both holding a belief and holding that one's reasons for it are inadequate."[8] A good deal of interesting work has been devoted to this complex issue, but here I can only register the concern and attempt gingerly to step around it.

I do need to tread gingerly here, because there is the risk that an unfounded belief, as I have characterized it, will be flatly contradictory, at least when held with the sort of explicit self-awareness I am imagining. To be sure, it would be contradictory for me to believe *P* and believe that *P* is unlikely to be true, since if I believe *P* then I believe that *P is* true. So the sort of explicitly unfounded belief I am imagining has to work somewhat differently. What I am claiming to be permissible is a situation where I believe *P* and so believe that *P* is true, and yet I recognize that, given the totality of information available to me, *P* is more likely false than true. The trick in maintaining such a state of mind is not to give weight to all the evidence.[9]

Cast in such stark and explicit terms, such cases are perhaps unusual, but I think they do occur. A friend once reported encouraging a promising undergraduate to study philosophy, only to have her respond that she could not, because she was a Christian, and she was unwilling to put her faith in jeopardy.[10] From an evidentialist point of view, such an attitude is a shocking betrayal of our doxastic duties, but the student's attitude might well be defensible if belief in God has its own value, independently of its likelihood to be true. To be sure, the case as stated is underdescribed, and so might be variously interpreted. In section 20, I will describe such a case more fully, but I think we have seen enough already to motivate setting aside, at least for the remainder of this paper, conceptual worries about the

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[8] Adler 2002, 25. See also Shah 2006. For extensive critical discussion, see McCormick 2015, ch. 1.

[9] This idea of bracketing information is similar to Michael Bratman's conception of acceptance within a context for the purposes of deliberation (1999, 29). Bratman distinguishes such short-term acceptance from belief, which he characterizes as context-independent and aimed at truth. In effect, my suggestion is that such bracketing might endure across all contexts and be integrated into one's whole life. So is it belief or mere long-term acceptance? I have no wish to argue over the word or the dubious folk-psychological concept. For my purposes, it is sufficient if the agent walks and talks like a believer.

[10] I owe the anecdote to Christopher Shields.

very coherence of unfounded belief. In what follows, I will focus squarely on the normative question of its permissibility.

7 Doxastic Puritanism

Before turning to the counterexamples, it will be helpful to have a more general picture of the dialectic between evidentialism and its denial. The evidentialist, as I am provisionally understanding the view, takes belief to be governed solely by truth. In Nishi Shah's words, "truth is hegemonic with respect to doxastic deliberation" (2006, 490). For anyone who embraces such unqualified evidentialism, the ethics of belief takes on a tremendous austerity, according to which there can be one and only one permissible kind of basis for holding a belief: that the belief seems very likely to be true. Such a stance in the domain of belief looks structurally similar, as others have noted, to utilitarianism in ethics, which similarly supposes that morality can be grounded entirely on one simple rule, the promotion of pleasure.[11] Just as utilitarianism is standardly criticized for oversimplifying, and thus neglecting key aspects of morality, so I will be making analogous criticisms of evidentialism.

There is, however, this important difference. The utilitarian standardly seeks to respond to criticism by accommodating the allegedly neglected values—by showing, for instance, how a special concern for one's family can arise from strictly utilitarian principles. The evidentialist, in contrast, typically seeks no such accommodation. The human proclivity to stray from truth and objectivity in the name of faith, hope, and charity is precisely what the evidentialist seeks to block or at least to marginalize. Rather than try to accommodate the diverse values that are endemic to human psychology, the evidentialist insists on a kind of doxastic puritanism that deliberately sets itself against the values I will be promoting.

Such puritanism makes the debate between evidentialism and its critics starker and less subtle than the analogous debate over utilitarianism, but also in some ways harder to evaluate, because it is not clear how one is to go about arguing for the value of something when one's opponent flatly denies that it has value. The debate here threatens to reach an impasse. When that happens, I have no magic wand to wave. But the paper does have a strategy for avoiding such an impasse. Rather than simply listing counterexamples and counting on them to exert a cumulative intuitive pressure against evidentialism, I will be attempting a systematic account of the values that underlie these cases. Of course, it will still be open to the evidentialist to reject the whole story, root and branch, or to continue admitting these supposedly non-epistemic values only at the margins of the theory. Once we

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[11] For the comparison between evidentialism and utilitarianism, see, for example, Percival 2002 and Berker 2013. In speaking throughout of "values," I risk running afoul of Berker's arguments against a consequentialist framework that simply adds up the values of belief versus non-belief. I mean to be neutral on the question of whether the ethics of belief should be consequentialist, deontological, virtue theoretic, or perhaps something else altogether.

appreciate the interconnected structure of values that motivate the particular cases, I think it becomes harder to remain so cold-heartedly puritanical.

Part II. Counterexamples

8 Counterexamples within Evidentialism

It is easy to list apparent counterexamples, many of them well known, to an evidentialism that focuses narrowly on truth as the only doxastic value. In all, in this part of the paper, I will offer four classes of counterexamples, beginning with those that are both best known and least relevant to my project. This first class encompasses various cases that seem as if they should count as friendly amendments to evidentialism.

- **a.** We value true belief more if it is justified. Indeed, arguably, we value justified false belief more than unjustified true belief. (Alternatively, replace 'justified' with 'rational.')[12]
- **b.** We value justified true belief more if it is also knowledge, thereby excluding Gettier cases.[13]
- **c.** We value knowledge more if it also counts as understanding. (This case might ramify into several sub-cases as we explore exactly what values are associated with understanding.)[14]
- **d.** We value understanding of fewer important things over many trivial things:

    > Watson: I thought you understood everything.
    > Holmes: Of course not, that would be an appalling waste of brain space. I specialise. (Gatiss and Moffat 2016)[15]

Notice, however, that Holmes is not claiming to understand all and only the most *important* things. What he precisely boasts of is being specialized. And that suggests another case.

- **e.** We value a specialized understanding of some one important domain over a more extensive but dilettantish understanding of many things.

Each of these cases points toward an apparent counterexample to evidentialism when understood as valuing only the pursuit of truth. The details here are intricate, and have received considerable attention. For my purposes, though, there is no need to linger, because these are not the sort of cases against which the evidentialist is likely to turn his cold, puritanical shoulder.

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[12] See, for example, Sosa 2007, ch. 4. For the rationality version, see Feldman 2000. Through the present paper, however, I avoid talk of *rationality*, a notion that seems all too treacherous in its range of meanings.

[13] For helpful discussion of this and related points throughout this class of cases, see David 2001.

[14] See, for example, Kvanvig 2003 and Zagzebski 2001.

[15] On the cognitive cost of believing too many truths, see Goldman 1978. On the trivial-truths problem, see Treanor 2014.

Instead, such cognitive achievements are ones that the evidentialist wants to celebrate, and hence will try to accommodate from within the theory. Accordingly, a just appraisal of evidentialism may require conceiving of the theory as concerned with more than simply tracking the truth. I am myself inclined to say that at least **a–b,** and perhaps **c** and **e,** are best understood not as departing from the truth norm, but as describing rules for best pursuing truth. Indeed, to focus on the pursuit of justification or knowledge, rather than truth, seems analogous to defending rule utilitarianism in preference to act utilitarianism (and so might face the same familiar sorts of objections about rule worship). It may be that **d,** at least, requires introducing values that cannot readily be accounted for within the evidentialist framework. Since such cases are not the sort I mean to press against the evidentialist, let me pass on to a second class of counterexamples.

9 Pragmatic Counterexamples

Just as familiar as cases of the above kind are cases where the pursuit of truth seems outweighed by the practical benefits of beliefs that seem likely to deviate from truth and knowledge:

> **f.** If believing you will survive the cancer increases your chances of doing so, even slightly, then it is permissible to have such a belief, even if you are in a position to know that the belief is very likely false.[16]
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> **g.** If believing you will prove the mathematical theorem makes it more likely that you will prove it, then it is permissible to have such a belief, even if you are in a position to recognize that the belief is very likely false.[17]
>
> **h.** If believing in God makes it more likely that you will be rewarded in the next life (or avoid damnation), then it is permissible to have such a belief, even if you lack good evidence for it.[18]

I have framed these three cases in terms of permissibility, rather than making the stronger claim that such beliefs would be obligatory. That seems clear enough at least for **g.** I am inclined, however, to say that a case like **f** would count as obligatory in many cases. Suppose your loving family is counting on your survival. Suppose there really are good reasons to think that positive thinking increases survival rates, and suppose you can see a way forward to inculcating such positive beliefs within yourself. Would it be acceptable to refuse even to try, out of cold-hearted evidentialist scruples? There would, I think, be something wrong with such a person. Something similar would be true for **h,** *a fortiori*, if we could make a plausible case for the assumptions built into that scenario. But like most who have considered

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[16] See, for example, Taylor and Brown 1994.

[17] On the empirical literature in support of the practical value of overconfidence, see McKay and Dennett 2009, 505–506.

[18] See Pascal, *Pensées* n. 680.

Pascal's Wager, I see no way to make these assumptions realistic. (I discuss a reformed version of the wager in section 20.)

Cases of this kind cannot be handled from within evidentialism, no matter how the details of that doctrine are spelled out. But evidentialists can hardly deny that false beliefs have significant practical benefits in certain cases, and so their usual strategy is to recognize such pragmatic cases and then dismiss them as irrelevant to the *epistemic* values that are truly at stake in these debates.[19] If this strategy is allowed, it can be used against any putative counterexample to evidentialism. In some sense there can be no objection to this way of proceeding. We are each free to define our field of expertise as we like and to decline to go beyond its limits. Epistemologists who wish to consider only a certain class of doxastic values are free to do so, and to mark the category as they like. But if this is where the boundaries of the epistemic lie, and if there are doxastic values outside those boundaries, then the epistemologists' line-drawing strategy precludes them from having anything to say about what one might have supposed to be the central question of epistemology: What should I believe? The most the epistemologist would be able to say is that *If your only concern is the truth (or knowledge, etc.), then you should believe* P. Doubtless, this is an important result that is worthy of much of the attention epistemology receives in philosophy today. But only under the most extreme of idealizations—ignoring the actual fallen circumstances in which we live, and the values that we actually hold—can we suppose that epistemic theory, so defined, will serve to answer that most fundamental question of what, all things considered, we ought to believe.[20]

10   Threshold Counterexamples

For evidentialism to prevail, it must exclude more than the purely pragmatic. Consider the following class of cases, which raises various questions about the threshold for belief:

   i. I can maximize my number of true beliefs by believing every proposition, but this would not be good.

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[19] See, for example, Feldman 2000 and Sosa 2007, 44–45. For a powerful recent case against a distinction between the epistemic and the prudential, see Rinard 2017. As remarked in section 2, I mean to take no stand on what it is that grounds these and other doxastic values.

[20] On the distorting influence of idealization, see Mills 2005. Feldman in effect concedes that, on his approach, the epistemologist is unable to answer questions about what we ought to believe all things considered. Rather than modestly flagging this as an inescapable constraint on the epistemologist's art, Feldman goes on the offensive and contends that there is no way even to make sense of such questions. This is so, he argues, because epistemic norms cannot be weighed against prudential or ethical norms (2000, 691–694). Now, no doubt, it is hard to see very far into the grounds for such comparative judgments. But it seems to me incredible that this fundamental human question—what ought I believe?—cannot ever be meaningfully asked. At any rate, in working through particular cases, it often seems quite clear how we ought to weigh the epistemic and the non-epistemic.

    j. I can take maximal care to believe only true propositions by believing only what I am entirely certain of, but this too would not be good.

    k. I can stand halfway between the previous two scenarios by believing everything that looks more likely than not to be true, but this would display a blameworthy credulity on my part. (That this halfway rule goes wrong should be intuitively clear on its face, but becomes especially clear in more contrived cases. For instance, are there an odd number of stars, an even number of stars, or infinitely many stars? If I think the last has some small but non-zero probability, then I would believe that the number is either even or infinite, *and* I would believe that the number is either odd or infinite. But I should not believe either of these disjunctive propositions, let alone both of them.)

These three cases point to a range of difficulties for the evidentialist. Case **i** makes it clear that, just as utilitarians must account for pain as well as pleasure, so evidentialists need to account for falsehood as well as truth.[21] That in itself would scarcely be worth mentioning as a difficulty for the theory, except that—at least in this fallen world—the two values are constantly in tension. It will not do to believe everything, and it will not do to believe nothing, but nor will it do, as in **j**, to believe only what is certain, because no one can live like that.[22] Where, then, does the threshold lie? Not at the halfway point, as **k** shows. The trouble here, for present purposes, is not that it is hard to see how we could arrive at a uniquely correct answer (although that *is* troublesome), but that any answer seems to require an appeal to doxastic values that go beyond simply maximizing true belief and minimizing false belief. A lesson to draw from **k** might be that it is more important to avoid false belief than to arrive at true belief, but what value guides that preference? Nor does it help to suggest that the lesson of **k** is that (going back to **a** or **b**) the evidentialist needs to take account of justification or knowledge. Neither of these rules avoids the threshold problem, because the question then simply turns to *when* justification becomes sufficient for belief, or *when* it becomes sufficient for knowledge. Again the worry is not that these questions are hard to answer, but that any answer would seem to require the introduction of values beyond the narrowly evidentialist.

    These problems multiply when we consider how questions of threshold depend critically on context. The belief described in **k**, for instance, would

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[21] See, most famously, William James: "We must know the truth; and we must avoid error,—these are our first and great commandments as would-be knowers; but they are not two ways of stating an identical commandment, they are two separable laws" (1907, 17).

[22] This is so, at any rate, as I have defined belief in section 4. The ancient skeptics famously thought that one could live without belief. Interpretation of their claims is vexed (see Burnyeat and Frede 1997), but to my mind the only way to defend such a stance would be to understand belief quite differently from how I understand it here.

be worse for an astronomer, delivering her professional opinion, than it would be for a philosopher doggedly persisting in the view that we should believe anything that is more likely than not to be true. Then there is the much-discussed phenomenon of pragmatic encroachment, which gives rise to cases like this:

 l. If ninety percent of the mushrooms around here are edible, and ten percent highly toxic, I should not, knowing nothing more than those odds, believe that this mushroom is edible, even though I am very likely to be right.[23]

This case can perhaps be assimilated to the class of pragmatic cases discussed in the previous section, but this is just the thin wedge of a host of other sorts of contextual considerations that go beyond the merely pragmatic. First, there are cases of belief revision, where the threshold for changing one's belief at least sometimes appears to be greater than the threshold for maintaining one's current beliefs:

 m. I have long believed *P*, and the belief has shaped my life in various ways. Now I acquire evidence suggesting that *Q*, which is inconsistent with *P*, is equally likely. Still, it would be permissible to continue believing *P*.[24]

Here the threshold seems to be higher for changing one's beliefs. One might contend that **m** turns merely on pragmatic considerations having to do with the cost of belief change, but in some cases there will be other factors at play. If I have been a communist since my youth, and this belief has given shape and meaning to who I am, then there seems something commendable about persisting in that belief even in the face of some amount of recalcitrant evidence. (But at what point does admirable persistence become blameworthy obstinacy? Analogous questions arise for many of these cases, and I claim no satisfactory answer, but see section 17.)

 Another subclass of cases trades on interesting differences between kinds of evidence:

 n. If someone stole my bike, and the only possibilities are this man or that woman, I should not form the belief that the man did it, even if statistically speaking men are far more likely than women to steal.[25]

 o. If my bike is stolen, and the police officer knows that it could only be this man or that woman, he should not form the belief that the man did it, even if statistically speaking this is far more likely.

The contextual factors at play in **n** are, first, that the belief involves a charge of wrongdoing and second that the evidence is purely statistical.

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[23] See Stich 1990, 61–62. On pragmatic encroachment more generally, see Stanley 2005 and Schroeder 2012.

[24] For endorsements of this sort of principle, see Alston 1991 and Harman 2003.

[25] See Buchak 2014 and section 13 for further references.

Charges of wrongdoing seem to require a higher threshold of evidence, but it is improper to rely on statistical evidence in a case such as this, even if such evidence makes the conclusion very likely. Compare a case where the statistical evidence makes it 90% likely that the man did it, versus an eyewitness whose testimony makes it 85% likely. It would be appropriate for me to believe the eyewitness and blame the man, but not appropriate (or at any rate less appropriate) to form a belief based solely on the statistical likelihood. If that is not clear enough in case **n**, case **o** should leave no doubt, because here we have the further contextual detail that the agent is a police officer, whose professional obligations—as with the astronomer mentioned earlier—impose higher standards on how he ought to conduct himself doxastically. This class of cases generates a whole swarm of non-evidentialist considerations, crying out for systematic treatment.

11 Value-Laden Counterexamples

The previous two cases introduced the possibility that the *kind* of evidence might influence our doxastic norms, quite apart from the *strength* of that evidence. This will be important in what follows, but of even more importance will be the way in which the sort of *values* displayed by a belief influences those norms. Statistical evidence is inappropriate to rely on in **n** and **o**—or at any rate, more cautiously, we should, and would, hesitate in relying on it—in part because of the value we place on fairness in accusations of wrongdoing. In contrast, if the mail service is 90% reliable, then there is nothing problematic in my believing on the basis of those statistics that the package will arrive today. (Of course, here as elsewhere, the percentages can be adjusted as necessary to suit one's intuitions.)

Building on **n** and **o**, consider the following class of cases:

  p. It is admirable when people are slow to believe the worst of those around them and quick to believe the best, even if there is no reason to believe that they are surrounded by particularly good people.[26]
  q. It is admirable when people display a belief in the overall goodness of humanity, even if there is abundant evidence to the contrary.[27]
  r. It is admirable when people, in their beliefs, set aside negative associations with race and gender, even when they take themselves to have evidence supporting those negative associations.[28]
  s. It is admirable when people hold positive beliefs about friends and family, even in the face of significant evidence to the contrary.[29]

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[26] See Preston-Roedder 2013.
[27] See Preston-Roedder 2013 and Baier 1980.
[28] See Gendler 2011.
[29] See Meiland 1980, Keller 2004, and Stroud 2006. More generally, see Wallace 2012, but see Hawley 2014 for an argument that evidentialism can handle such considerations.

    t. It is admirable when people have the confidence to trust their own particular instincts, intuitions, and ideas, even in the face of disagreement from others.[30]

    u. It is admirable when people have a lesser overall belief in their talents than the evidence warrants. This is the virtue of modesty.[31]

    v. It is admirable when people hold more positive beliefs about their own country than the evidence warrants. This is the virtue of patriotism.[32]

Obviously, the unfounded beliefs in this class are particularly vulnerable to rejection by the evidentialist, and even those prepared to accept some members of the class may reject others. There is a plain tension, for instance, between a heightened self-confidence in particular cases (**t**) and an overarching attitude of modesty (**u**). And the values of resisting racism (**r**) will sit uneasily, for many, with the tribalism associated with patriotism (**v**). Moreover, in all these cases, one may wonder whether our normative judgments are influenced by the encroachment of practical considerations and biological instinct, leading us to see normative value where there is none.

    Here is where the discussion threatens to reach an impasse. At this point, one way forward would be to focus in detail on one or another of the particular cases just listed. As the footnotes indicate, there is a significant literature that does just this. My strategy, however, will be to attempt a more general and systematic account of the values that have so far unspooled in a jumble.

Part III. Taxonomy

12 Initial Taxonomy

It seems most natural to divide doxastic value into three broad categories: epistemic, pragmatic, and ethical.

    Although I have speculated that *epistemic values* might ultimately be grounded in the pursuit of truth, I have barely scratched the surface of the difficulties that arise here (see section 8), and I will continue to skate along in this way, since it seems clear enough that, however the details are to be filled in, no one supposes that all the more controversial cases I am concerned with ought to go into this first category.

    Pragmatic values are concerned not with the truth of the proposition immediately in question, but with an attempt to achieve some further goal. If that further goal happens to be more truth in the long run (as in **g**,

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[30] See Pasnau 2015a and, relatedly, Jones 2012. A similar class of cases concerns intending and promising, where one might think that trust in one's own agency licenses believing one will do a thing even when the likelihood of success is low. See the rich discussion of such cases in Marušić 2015.

[31] See Driver 1989 and Egan 2011, 77–78, for this and several other cases listed here.

[32] See Baron 1989. For a dissent, see Kelly 2005.

mathematical confidence), then the pragmatic spills into the epistemic. If the further goal has a moral aspect to it (as in **f**, surviving cancer for one's family's sake), then it spills into the ethical. I am not much concerned with fastidiously keeping these categories apart, but still I think we can see why it seems natural to mark pragmatic cases off separately: they are concerned not with the intrinsic merits of believing that *P*, but with the consequences of such belief.

If this last suggestion is right, then *ethical values* will concern beliefs not insofar as they are likely to lead to good things down the road, but insofar as something about the belief itself has non-epistemic value. Here lies the heart of the conflict with evidentialism. The evidentialist is not concerned with denying that beliefs have pragmatic advantages and disadvantages. Only a zealot would refuse to acknowledge these, but such pragmatic values are a matter of what consequences a belief has in the world. As for the belief itself, intrinsically, evidentialism as I understand it holds that the only value is epistemic value. Yet if we take seriously the sorts of cases described in **m–v**, then we are forced to say that there is more to be considered in evaluating our beliefs than truth and consequences. Some propositions, even if they are likely to be true, are *bad* to believe, due to features of the belief itself, whereas other propositions, despite being unfounded, are of themselves *good* to believe.

This is not to say that ethical values are intrinsic to belief in any deep sense. Since I have been stressing that such values are contingent on the fallen character of our world, I can hardly suppose that they are intrinsically necessary features of belief. Ultimately, one might hold that even truth is of merely instrumental value to belief. Here I set aside such issues (see section 2). Even so, the class of ethical values seems distinguishable from pragmatic values in that the latter serve as mere tools for an end, independently of any intrinsic feature of the belief itself, whereas ethical values arise from features of the belief itself, or the way it is formed. If that much is right, we should be able to categorize these features, and so let me turn to that task.

13 Source Norms

Without making any claims to completeness, it seems natural to sort ethical value into three kinds: source norms, agent norms, and content norms.

Cases that trigger source norms are those where the nature of the evidence matters to the permissibility of the belief. Here the leading case was **n**, where purely statistical information, even if it is very strong, should not lead me to believe that one person rather than another is the thief. Such principles have been recognized even in law; in various different contexts, American courts have ruled that purely statistical information, no matter how strong, constitutes an inadequate evidential ground. In contrast with **n** (my bike is stolen), suppose there is an eyewitness. We know that eyewitnesses, in many contexts, are highly fallible, yet even so there is a very clear asymmetry in our doxastic norms. It is quite unobjectionable to believe

a reasonably reliable witness, but there is something positively offensive about forming such a belief on purely statistical grounds.[33]

Whereas statistical evidence, in certain cases, should be discounted, we expect other sorts of evidence to be given added weight. If, in a face-to-face conversation, you convey some information to me in earnest tones, I take on an extra obligation to believe it, more so than I would if I heard you convey this information at, say, a large meeting. It is not that I have more reason to believe you are telling the truth in our face-to-face conversation—the norm is not epistemic, or at any rate not entirely so—but still the intimate nature of that conversation creates an obligation on both of us. It would be worse if you were not telling the truth, and worse if I did not believe you—hence the expression: "he lied to my face." The closer a personal relationship there is between us, the more these values are amplified.[34]

Historical factors might play a role in this last case. Suppose you begin our conversation by saying "We've known each other for a long time." That history, again, introduces special obligations on both of us. More generally, certain kinds of historical groundedness give beliefs a stronger claim to be believed, independently of their narrowly epistemic credentials. This was the point of **m**, where I have long believed *P* and that belief has shaped my life in various ways. To be sure, it would not be impermissible to overthrow all that history and follow the evidence where it leads. It is easy to see something admirable in that, but there is also a value in giving preference to the beliefs that have shaped one's sense of self over the years. This is part of why a true-belief pill seems no more appealing in the ethics of belief than a pleasure machine does in ethics more generally. Suppose such a pill could reliably yield truth and even knowledge. Perhaps taking it would be permissible, but surely our doxastic values do not make it obligatory, in part because such a pill would cut us off from our history.

14 Agent Norms

Divisions of labor figure in epistemology just as they do in economics. In **o**, the police officer is under a special obligation to discount the statistical information, and it would be especially problematic for him to form a belief about the case on that basis. When those statistics involve race or other sensitive categories (**r**), the officer has an even more pronounced duty to discount, if not wholly set aside, that evidence, at least as far as his beliefs are concerned.

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[33] For a nice overview of the legal issues and the various sorts of philosophical responses, see Redmayne 2008. There is considerable disagreement over the basis for these legal scruples, and some have argued for a purely evidentialist basis (e.g., recently, Enoch et al. 2012), but I find it hard to avoid the conclusion that there is at least some ethical aspect at work in some of these cases. For the connection to the ethics of belief in particular, see Buchak 2014.

[34] I am indebted to work in progress by Sarah Stroud on the morality of lying. See also Marušić 2015, ch. 7, Hazlett 2017, and Stroud 2017.

In other contexts, an agent may have a particular duty to adhere stead-fastly to *evidential* values. According to Bertrand Russell, this is so in particular for the philosopher: "morally, a philosopher who uses his pro-fessional competence for anything except a disinterested search for truth is guilty of a kind of treachery" (1945, 835). This may be right quite generally for anyone engaged in the business of intellectual inquiry. Cer-tainly, I attempt to adhere to such a standard in all my philosophical work, including this one. But adhering to this standard in a particular context is quite different from endorsing W. K. Clifford's famous claim that "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (1876–77, 295). Perhaps part of the resistance to a philosophical defense of anti-evidentialism arises precisely from the fact that such arguments come in a philosophical context, but a philosopher can adhere to evidentialism even while arguing that it should not *always* be adhered to, just as I can text my son from the ski slopes and tell him to do his homework.

15 Content Norms

Cases **p–v** seem especially value-laden, and in each case the value arises from the belief's content. Here we might draw a further distinction between beliefs directed at *persons* and beliefs directed at *states of affairs*. This difference is illustrated by **p**, where one thinks the best of one's colleagues, perhaps despite some evidence to the contrary, versus **q**, where one believes in the essential goodness of humanity. The first case is naturally understood as a reflection of the moral weight of interpersonal relationships: one ought to think better of those to whom one is personally connected, because one owes it to them. In contrast, **q** is naturally understood as a commitment to an abstract state of affairs: that this is what the world is like. To be sure, either of these commitments on its own goes at least some way toward yielding the other. Starting from **q**, for instance, one might think of **p** as simply its instantiation in particular cases. Although the details here might be variously developed, there do seem to be different sorts of values at stake in these two cases.

Of these two sub-categories, the value of interpersonal relationships is easier to see, because it tracks the familiar objection to utilitarianism that it fails to take account of the special duties we owe to certain people. Perhaps only someone who finds that thesis plausible in ethics will find the analogous thesis plausible here, but the intuition is certainly robust. According to **s**, belief in friends and family (i.e., the belief that they are honest, well-intentioned, etc.) remains admirable even when it runs against the evidence. Disagreements will arise, no doubt, about whether this trust is obligatory or merely permissible, and at what point the strength of the evidence makes the case simply pathetic. However one weighs the value of such trust against other values, it seems hard to resist the conclusion that it does indeed have some moral weight. Cases **t** (self-trust) and **v** (patriotism)

have the same structure, although in these cases it is easier to doubt whether there actually is any such doxastic value.

It is perhaps harder still to see how there can be doxastic value in believing in certain states of affairs. In **q,** believing in the goodness of humanity is admirable because there is something attractive about the world's being like that. In contrast, we may find cynical people amusing, but there is something somewhat repulsive about their conception of the world. Presumably this is not a thought the cynical reader will endorse. So let us consider **r,** where it is admirable to hold beliefs that are neutral with respect to race and gender, even if that requires ignoring certain sorts of evidence. When Lawrence Summers, as president of Harvard, notoriously raised the prospect that gender differences in science might be the result of differences in "intrinsic aptitude," commentators were quick to point out the lack of evidence for any such hypothesis. But even if there had been evidence, there would still seem to be something good about refusing to countenance the hypothesis. Summers himself remarked in that same speech that "I would like nothing better than to be proved wrong,"[35] suggesting that he felt the badness of this state of affairs, but that he felt obliged to entertain it for purely evidential reasons. It would seem, at a bare minimum, not wrong to refrain from beliefs such as this, even in cases where there is some degree of evidence.

16 Unmanifested Belief

In many of the cases under discussion, there is room to wonder whether it is the belief that is good or bad, or whether instead the normative implications arise only when the belief gives rise to speech and action. The police officer in **o** has strong purely statistical evidence, let us suppose, that the man stole the bike. Is there something bad about his *believing* this, or does the badness arise only if he acts on that belief? I claimed that, in addition to the problematic character of the statistical source of his evidence, there are special doxastic norms that arise here because of the agent's professional duties. But one might suggest that these agent norms arise because of the connection to various sorts of actions. It is the police officer's job to interrogate witnesses and suspects, to search for physical evidence, and ultimately to make an arrest. It would be bad for these activities to be shaped by purely statistical evidence. (Most clearly, the officer should not arrest the man simply because he is statistically far more likely to be the thief, but I think the point runs all the way through the case. The police officer would be blameworthy for failing to treat the woman as a genuine suspect, for instance.) Similarly, it is the philosopher's job to teach and write, and these activities should be shaped, if we follow Russell, purely by evidentialist considerations. But, once we divorce belief from action, it

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[35] For a brief account of Summers's verbatim remarks, see Jaschik 2005.

becomes less clear that there is anything wrong about such agents forming *beliefs* of various sorts.

At this point, the most direct way forward would be to insist that the doxastic values under discussion all apply to the beliefs themselves, even if we imagine that such beliefs have no further repercussions. The police officer's beliefs might be thought to be a constitutive part of what he is doing wrong, rather than just its root cause. Yet here I am inclined to make something of a concession to the evidentialist. The officer's beliefs, after all, as described in case **o**, are supported by good evidence. So if we conceive of these beliefs in abstraction, apart from their repercussions for action, I am prepared to allow that they cease to be subject to the broader set of norms I have been describing. In contemplating beliefs that never manifest themselves in action, we wash away the features of belief that give the subject its ethical weight. Beliefs that are merely marks on the mind's inner chalkboard, with no consequences in the world, may well get to abide by a narrower range of purely evidentialist norms.

Yet if this seems to give the evidentialists everything they ever wanted, that result is achieved only by indulging in a fantasy. For it is wholly unrealistic to imagine that beliefs can be abstracted from action in the way just imagined. Beliefs have repercussions. As Frank Ramsey famously put it, a belief is "a map . . . by which we steer" (1990, 146). Even if the officer zealously attempts to conduct his investigation by the books, if he *believes* the man did it, there is constantly the danger that, in some shape or form, that belief will inform how he conducts himself.

At issue here is not how we ought to define 'belief' (see section 4); that question can be left for another time. The point is instead that, whatever beliefs are, they cannot safely be isolated from the rest of an agent's psychology. Once we understand the ethics of belief along these lines, it is easy to see why belief is subject to the sorts of ethical norms I have been urging. There is something bad about beliefs that make negative racial generalizations, because there is something bad about acting in this way. There is something good about believing the best of those one loves, because there is something good about actions that promote one's loved ones. If one can make a case for such norms of action, then there is a straightforward path to extending the norm into the doxastic realm. Given the inescapable tendency of belief to beget action, we rightly think of the beliefs themselves as subject to the broader set of norms that govern the actions themselves.

17 Wishful Thinking and Weighing Values

Some of the belief practices I recommend may look like egregious instances of wishful thinking. That label has inescapably negative connotations, and so I can hardly embrace it. Yet, undoubtedly, the label is sometimes deserved, particularly when the contrary evidence is overwhelming or when the practical consequences are adverse. If I persist for years in writing novels

despite my obvious lack of talent, or if I persist in encouraging a student because I wish he were talented enough to continue, then the damage I do is likely to outweigh any positive element in my belief. Other cases are less clear. Is it wishful thinking to suppose that my colleagues are all basically good people? This might be a type-**p** case, where I believe the best of those around me, and yet one might wonder whether it will have the negative consequence of making me too slow to respond appropriately to their bad behavior. Yet my faith in them may easily have positive consequences, too, fostering a collegiality that will do more for the common good than would my vigilant hostility. To be sure, if things go badly, I might retrospectively blame myself for wishful thinking. If the results are favorable, I might congratulate myself for having maintained a hopeful optimism, even in the face of contrary evidence.

This problem of labeling raises the more general question of how we are to weigh the various doxastic values I have registered. Although I have focused on ethical norms, it would be absurd to suppose that these always override epistemic and pragmatic norms. A belief that is quite admirable in terms of its content may have consequences that are so bad as to make its endorsement wholly irresponsible. Similarly, even with respect to the most ethically praiseworthy of unfounded beliefs, there comes a point at which the evidence is simply too strong to be ignored. At that point one may be obliged to embrace the contrary proposition, no matter how repugnant it seems. How is one to weigh these countervailing influences?

The question needs to be asked, but I do not think it is reasonable to expect a satisfying answer, no more than one would expect an answer in other cases where we are urged to recognize a plurality of disparate values. Exactly how much may I make my family suffer in my pursuit of philosophical beauty? Well, not much, no doubt, but maybe just a little? And how much should I favor the needs of my family over the needs of the global poor? A considerable bit, I take it, but just how considerable? These are good questions, but they are not the sorts of questions that normative theory has any ability to answer, at least not in its current state of development. Hence, I am unapologetic about my inability to provide much guidance in the present case.

18 Fixing Magnitudes

Still, although the weight problem is not tractable in any very satisfying way, one can try to give a sense of the rough magnitude of the weight that these various doxastic values may have. Some anti-evidentialists are very cautious in this regard, allowing for non-epistemic considerations to play the bare role of tipping the scales in cases where the evidence is narrowly divided. This would mean that considerations of truth override other considerations whenever it is reasonably clear what the truth is, and that the sorts of non-epistemic norms I have been describing can play a role only when the truth is in doubt anyway. Effectively, on this approach, it is

permissible to believe on ethical grounds only when one would otherwise suspend belief.[36]

This seems to me too cautious. We can see as much by noticing how the various norms under discussion often come together within a single case and thereby magnify their influence. Combine **o** with **r,** so that we imagine a police officer relying on purely statistical information to reach a conclusion about a person's guilt in a way that trades on negative racial beliefs. Here we have a violation of source norms (statistical evidence), agent norms (a police officer), and both kinds of content norms, inasmuch as the officer is reaching a negative conclusion about a person on the basis of a racially framed worldview. Even in the face of extremely strong statistical evidence, the officer ought not to hold such a belief. Ethical norms are doing much more here than simply tipping the scales in cases that are near ties.

Change the details, and we might get a case where belief and non-belief are both permissible. If, for instance, it is my bike that is stolen (as in **n**), then perhaps it is permissible for me to believe, even in the racially loaded case just described, if the statistical evidence is strong enough. And yet still we would recognize the nobility of my refusing to believe in that context. The evidence would not make belief obligatory. In a case like this, then, there will not be one unique belief that is required by the evidence, because the weight of the various non-evidential norms make it permissible to refrain from belief, without requiring it.[37]

19   God, on Little Evidence

In the racially-loaded stolen bike case, it is at least permissible *not* to believe, despite strong evidence. Such negative cases are easier to accept, because we are used to a certain amount of tolerable subjectivity in how much evidence is enough to ground belief. So let me turn to a positive case, where belief is praiseworthy even in the absence of strong evidence, and maybe even against the evidence. Perhaps surprisingly, the clearest such unfounded belief is the case of believing in God, where the various ethical norms under discussion combine to a remarkable degree. First, with respect to state-of-affairs content norms, theism involves a commitment to the existence of perfect goodness, and to a created world that has been providentially shaped by that goodness. If we agree that believing in the essential goodness of humanity is admirable (**q**), it should be all the more admirable to have this stronger commitment to the ascendance of the good. Second, with respect to personal content norms, believers often take themselves to be in a personal, loving relationship with that perfectly good being. So if a

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[36] See, for example, McCormick 2015, who gives weight to non-evidential factors only when that evidence is inconclusive (see esp. ch. 3).

[37] Uniqueness has been much debated in recent years in the narrow context of epistemic considerations, and especially with regard to credence rather than belief. For a recent discussion that grapples with some of the broader implications of the issue, see Schoenfield 2014.

commitment to friends and family is admirable (**s**), such a commitment to God should be likewise valued.

Turning to source norms, belief in God is not statistical, and indeed it is ordinarily not based on abstract principles of any kind. Instead, religious belief is often grounded on an intimate sense of interpersonal presence, an experience of God in one's life.[38] To be sure, in this life, such experiences are typically very far from counting as face to face, and so they are not quite analogous to cases where one person makes a direct and personal appeal to another (see section 13). Still, the experience is ordinarily felt to have a kind of personal immediacy, and to that extent has a weight that many other sorts of evidence do not. Moreover, in standard cases, the beliefs at issue are deeply grounded in one's life, and entwined with commitment to one's personal history, one's heritage, and one's friends and family. If these are doxastic values in general (**m**), then they would seem to have value in the religious case as well.

Finally, with respect to agent norms, it is a distinctive feature of religious belief that—at the ground level—there is no epistemic division of labor, inasmuch as it is the responsibility of each individual to believe. The special obligations of the police officer in regard to the crime (**o**) are, in a religious context, obligations that we all equally share. To be sure, in any religion, there are endless esoteric matters where the faithful might be excused from taking a view. But when it comes to to the basic question of whether there is a God, everyone is under an equally special obligation.

There is in the religious case, then, a nearly perfect storm of ethical doxastic values that make belief permissible, even in the absence of evidence, and perhaps even granted a certain amount of contrary evidence. To be sure, that contrary evidence cannot be overwhelming. Unfounded religious belief cannot be praiseworthy if it is internally incoherent, or if it requires abandoning too many other well-founded beliefs. As with any sort of belief, at some point the weight of contrary evidence makes a religion seem merely absurd and pathetic, swamping any sort of non-evidential value it might have.

If a religion can be adequately defended against the charge of absurdity, then belief may be permissible, even if the defense never rises to the level of a positive argument *for* belief. I say "permissible" because I do not see how, on even the most favorable statement of my case, a plausible argument could be made that unfounded religious belief is obligatory. For one thing, there are just too many different beliefs, not all of them strictly religious, that might exhibit these various values. Moreover, even all these overlapping values cannot drown out the great value we place on someone who independently makes up her mind to pursue the truth where it seems to lead, against everything she has previously felt or been taught. Yet even

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[38] On religious experience, see the classic discussion of James 1944, which bears out the way I characterize such experiences throughout this section. (Special thanks here to Mark Boespflug.)

in that sort of epistemically heroic case, there ought to be a certain ethical disquiet about what has happened. A particularly vivid depiction comes in Marilynne Robinson's novel *Gilead*, when the eldest son of the small-town preacher returns home for a visit after years of study abroad, an education that had been paid for by the congregation of the small-town church. The son, Edward, now an atheist, refuses his father's request to say a prayer over dinner. To be sure, the father ought to have known better than to have asked it of him. But what is unforgivable, and unforgettable in the novel, is what comes next. When the father upbraids the son for disrespecting the family's customs, Edward replies by quoting 1 Corinthians: "When I was a child, I thought as a child. Now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things." The narrator, Edward's brother, continues the story from there: "My father left the table, my mother sat still in her chair with tears streaming down her face, and Edward passed me the potatoes" (2004, 26).

20   The Reformed Wager

Philosophy's fixation on Pascal's Wager, with its solely pragmatic focus, distorts the real value of religious belief and, accordingly, fails utterly to make a compelling case for such belief. Yet we can now see how the wager might be revised along more promising lines. As in the original version, let the cost of losing the bet be forfeiting the truth in an important domain. Against this we can weigh not the practical advantages of the next life, but the overlapping ethical doxastic values that are gained by such belief. These values are not infinite, as they are in the original wager, but they are also not entirely contingent on the belief's turning out true. What has to be weighed, then, is the high risk of believing something false against the high value of religious belief. Such considerations provide a strong reason for religious belief, even for someone who readily admits that, if one were to judge only on the basis of the available evidence, God's existence would seem quite unlikely.[39]

Even if religious belief runs against the evidence, and even if it proves false, it may retain some value. Analogously, it remains admirable to believe in the goodness of those around one, even if they turn out not to be good, and it remains admirable to put trust in those to whom one is intimately related, even if that supposed intimacy turns out to be wholly unreciprocated. To be sure, there are limits to how badly mistaken one

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[39] The phrasing here is meant to track the discussion in section 6 of how it is possible to believe *P* even in the awareness of the evidence's seeming to support ~*P*.

My Reformed Wager might be compared with Robert Adams's recasting of the wager (1987, 40). The differences, however, are significant, because Adams's wager turns on the great subjective value the believer puts on the state of affairs of his believing in Christianity and its being true. The values on which I focus extend beyond the religious domain, and have some degree of weight independently of whether God exists.

It is ironic that the familiar version of the wager is so closely associated with Pascal, given both that the idea is not original to him and that so much of the *Pensées* displays great sensitivity to the ethical values with which I am concerned.

may be. It is liable to seem pathetic, not admirable, to cultivate a personal relationship with a being who does not exist, and the less evidence of such a being there is, the more pathetic it will seem. Hence, the Reformed Wager remains a true wager. Even if religious belief retains some doxastic value in the absence of God, it can be fully vindicated only if it manages to get the world right in significant respects. Believers who get things wholly wrong will have failed to live up to their doxastic responsibilities. But, as in Pascal's original case, there is risk in both directions. If it is the unbelievers who get things wrong then they will, of course, appeal to the lack of evidence. That may make their failure to believe permissible, but still there will be much of doxastic value to which the non-believer will have been wholly blind.

21 The Fragility of Theism

The evidential situation being what it is, we all must wager either with or against the odds. When the case for religious belief is understood along the lines just sketched—as turning on ethical rather than epistemic or pragmatic considerations—it is easy to see why such belief is so fragile. Its goodness turns on various overlapping considerations, any one of which might easily be dislodged. I myself, for instance, entirely lack the sense of a personal connection to a higher power, and without this what remains, at least for me, is simply an intriguing metaphysical hypothesis, that goodness is instantiated in a perfect living being. Absent any personal relationship to such a deity, disbelief comes easy.

Others do not go even as far as I do, for they lack even the sense that there is a state of affairs that would be worthy of belief. Thomas Nagel, for instance, has written that "I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that" (1997, 130). This line of thought, although characteristic of our modern age, seems to conflate the core tenets of monotheism with various optional add-ons. Many of these add-ons clearly are repugnant, particularly when a faith's tendentious moral and cultural commitments enter into the political sphere and become legally binding on the rest of us. Once we recognize such unfortunate dogmas as marginal to religion, we can recognize that the core idea of monotheism is wholly appealing: that the universe is fundamentally good, and that what makes the universe good, simply by its existence, is not some sort of abstract form, but rather a person, an intelligent being, with the power to shape the universe in its image. It might seem *unlikely* that the universe is like this, but I cannot understand how its being like this could be *undesirable*. Would the complaint be that such a state of affairs is *too* good?[40]

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[40] For a recent development of theism grounded first and foremost in goodness, see Adams 2002. For a classic version, see Anselm's *Monologion*, ch. 1. Just as religious belief has been poorly served by the prominence of the wager, so it has suffered from the way in which

22   Values without God

Having begun in the Garden of Eden, and now having appealed to religious belief as the paradigm case of non-epistemic doxastic value, let us see how far we can get in discharging these theological assumptions. Although none of the counterexamples of Part II turn on religious belief, still it may seem that what ultimately drives the case against evidentialism is just religious apologetics of one sort or another. This is, however, very far from my own view.

Those who reject a personal, supernatural conception of the good must either embrace nihilism—that nothing is good—or else take recourse in some other, non-religious story about the good. The familiar path of the moral realist seeks a domain between the reductively naturalistic and the religiously supernatural, a domain of abstract goodness that somehow exerts a kind of normative pull on our lives. Whether or not this amounts to a new kind of philosophical religion, it shares with religious belief at least this much, that it is almost wholly unfounded from an evidential point of view. To be sure, arguments get made, but ultimately the moral realist must rely on a dilemma: either believe in such normative facts or admit that nothing matters.[41] This is, however, just a variation on the age-old theistic argument that without God everything is permitted. To this, the familiar philosophical response has been that there is nothing in the concept of a deity that makes such a being uniquely well suited to ground morality. That is true enough, but if there are real normative values—if not everything is permitted—then it would seem that the foundation for these values must lie *somewhere*, and it is not clear that appealing to philosophical *abstracta* has any advantage over appealing to a living being. So if the latter hypothesis is to be rejected on evidentialist grounds, then it would seem that the same rules should be applied to the secular moral realist.

What of reductive naturalistic approaches to morality, in the spirit of Hume? It may be that this path requires no domain of entities for which we lack a solid evidential foundation. What is notoriously doubtful is whether there is anything here that gives us reasons of the right kind for our normative beliefs. The worries are familiar enough that they need not be recited, and they are forceful enough as to leave the reductive naturalist about morality in the same place as everyone else: choosing between nihilism and the unfounded belief that there *are*, somewhere, sufficient reasons for the things we value.

Anselm's *other* great opening gambit—the ontological argument at the start of the *Proslogion*—has dominated so much of the discussion. It is not an accident that these are arguments that, as a rule, appeal more to non-believers than to believers.

[41] For the dilemma, see Derek Parfit's already famous remark that, without irreducible normative facts, he and other moral theorists "would have wasted much of our lives," but that this itself would not matter, "since we would have learnt that nothing matters" (2011, II: 367). For the suggestion that this runs the risk of becoming "a strange form of religion," see Street 2016, 317.

With this dilemma we arrive at the most fundamental place where purely evidential values cannot capture the norms of belief. Almost all of us believe that there is meaning in life, that some things have more value than others, and that they have value not just because we subjectively want those things, but because there is something good about them. It is hard to see how we could live without such beliefs, but it is also hard to see that there is anything close to adequate evidence in their favor. We believe out of solidarity with others, and out of solidarity with the lives we have built for ourselves, and we believe because the alternative is repulsive. As for those who would simply follow the evidence, they are welcome to the nihilism that looms.

23   Our Fallen World

The evidentialist's doxastic puritanism describes an ideal we might all devoutly wish for. Yet, as things are, the evidence lies too thin on the ground, and is much too unevenly distributed across society, to allow us the luxury of following the evidence wherever it leads. In cultures shaped by a long history of racial and gender injustice, concern for equality requires other sorts of strategies. In countries where educational and cultural opportunities are unevenly distributed, and where democratic processes can be manipulated by demagoguery, theory has to engage with the realities of how beliefs get formed. An epistemology concerned only with a narrow conception of rationality may maintain its ideology purity, but only at the cost of irrelevance.

Admitting a wider sphere of doxastic values into the discussion does not immediately allow us to refute our enemies, or even to identify who they are. Race and gender get a foothold in the story, but so does patriotism. A cosmopolitan respect for humanity may have value, but so may an otherworldly religion. Trust should not run in just one direction.

Perhaps, some day, things will be different, and the truth will become luminously apparent to all. For now, we must rely on a wider set of strategies for belief.

Robert Pasnau
University of Colorado Boulder
E-mail: pasnau@colorado.edu

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