The Opinions of Others and the Role of Rational Belief
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Abstract: Should we believe our controversial philosophical views? Recently, several authors have argued from broadly conciliationist premises that we should not. If they are right, we philosophers face a dilemma: If we believe our views, we are irrational. If we do not, we are not sincere in holding them. This paper offers a way out, proposing an attitude we can rationally take toward our views that can support sincerity of the appropriate sort. We should arrive at our views via a certain sort of ‘insulated’ reasoning – that is, reasoning that involves setting aside certain higher-order worries, such as those provided by disagreement – when we investigate philosophical questions.

Here is what seems to be a fact about our discipline: Some of us really believe the controversial philosophical views we advocate.¹ Some of us really believe that it can sometimes be rational to have inconsistent beliefs, that seemingly vague predicates must have precise application conditions, or that a person would survive if each of her brain cells were replaced with an artificial functional duplicate.

Here is another fact about our discipline: There is widespread disagreement among philosophers surrounding these issues.² Given certain assumptions about the nature of these philosophical disagreements, and given certain assumptions about the epistemic import of disagreement more generally, one might come to doubt that our controversial philosophical beliefs are rational – insofar as we have them. Indeed, numerous authors have developed arguments along these lines.³ The details of their arguments need not concern us, but it will be useful to examine briefly one argument in outline, which will serve as a representative simplification of what they have said:

Conciliationism: A person is rationally required to withhold belief in the face of disagreement – given that certain conditions are met.⁴

Applicability: Many disagreements in philosophy meet these conditions.

No Rational Belief: Philosophers aren’t rational to believe many of their controversial views.

¹ DeRose (forthcoming) argues that we do not genuinely believe our controversial views in philosophy, offering an intriguing story about what we might be doing instead. While I suspect that at least some of us do genuinely believe our controversial views, the arguments given here do not depend on any such assumption.

² The Bourget and Chalmers (2013) survey asks philosophers for their views on thirty questions that are taken to be central to the field. For virtually all of these, we do not observe anything like consensus.


⁴ Although there is some debate over how these conditions should be characterized, it suffices for us to note that they typically involve the person’s having good reason to consider her disagreeer(s) equally trustworthy, with respect to the disputed sort of issue, as she considers herself (and her agreeers).
The first premise, Conciliationism, enjoys ample precedent. Its strengths and weaknesses have been thoroughly explored. I will not rehearse the debate here. The second premise, Applicability, is somewhat less familiar, however, so it may be helpful to see what has been said about it. Here is how Christensen motivates the position:

I do have good reason to have as much epistemic respect for my philosophical opponents as I have for my philosophical allies and for myself... In some cases, I have specific information about particular people, either on the basis of general knowledge or from reading or talking to the particular epistemologists in question. [...] But another reason derives from the group nature of philosophical controversy. It seems clear that the groups of people who disagree with me on various philosophical issues are quite differently composed. Many who are on my side of one issue will be on the other side of different issues. With this structural feature of group disagreement in philosophy in mind, it seems clear that it could hardly be rational for me to think that I’m part of some special subgroup of unusually smart, diligent, or honest members of the profession. (Christensen 2014, p. 146)

Kornblith takes a similar view, at least with respect to one specific debate:

Disagreements within philosophy constitute a particularly interesting case... Consider the debate between internalists and externalists about epistemic justification. I am a committed externalist. I have argued for this position at length and on numerous occasions. [...] At the same time, I recognize, of course, that there are many philosophers who are equally committed internalists about justification[.] It would be reassuring to believe that I have better evidence on this question than those who disagree with me, that I have thought about this issue longer than internalists, or that I am simply smarter than they are, my judgment superior to theirs. It would be reassuring to believe these things, but I don’t believe them; they are all manifestly untrue. (Kornblith 2010, p. 31)

In light of these observations, Applicability, too, can seem to be a fairly attractive position.

This paper takes both Conciliationism and Applicability for granted (along with their consequence, No Rational Belief) in order to investigate what sense we can make of philosophy if they are true. If we philosophers –in an effort to be more rational – suddenly decided to withhold belief about all philosophically controversial matters, would the
practice of philosophy be in any way diminished? As we will see, there is some cause for concern.7

1 The Sincere Philosopher’s Dilemma

On the face of it, it is not immediately clear why giving up our philosophical beliefs should lead to any problems. Take competitive debate. It is surely quite common for a debater to defend a view she does not, strictly speaking, believe. And this fact hardly serves to undermine the practice of debate. Why should it be any different in philosophy? Perhaps we arrive at certain views, somehow or other, and then defend them as ably as we can manage – without necessarily believing them to be true. Might this be a reasonable way for philosophy to operate?

I find myself somewhat uncomfortable with this picture. In particular, it seems to me that if philosophy were to operate this way, something important would be missing: namely, the sincerity with which we defend our preferred positions – a distinctive kind of sincerity that is often lacking in the context of competitive debate.

The kind of sincerity that I have in mind is a way in which I suspect many philosophers identify with the views they defend. The thought is that, for many of us, our views seem right to us, in some important sense. When I reflect on the relevant issues, my thinking leads me to certain conclusions. And if I were, for some reason, obligated to defend other views (perhaps because they were assigned to me by some governing body), these other views would not be as sincerely held. In defending the assigned views, I would not necessarily be calling the shots as I see them; my own thinking would not have led to them.

This is supposed to capture, intuitively, what it takes for one’s views to be sincerely held.8 My claim is not that philosophers ought to hold their views sincerely, but rather, that many philosophers do experience this sincere commitment toward their favored views and would prefer to be able to continue doing philosophy in this sincere manner. And this may be more than just a personal preference for the feeling of sincerity. It is plausible that for many of us, doing philosophy well – energetically and creatively – comes most naturally when we do sincerely identify with the views we defend.

If this is right, then we ‘sincere’ philosophers have a potentially serious problem on our hands. There seems to be a tension between this sincerity desideratum, on the one hand, and No Rational Belief, on the other. We can put the point as a dilemma:

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7 The following discussion is indebted to Goldberg (2013b). Goldberg’s view will be discussed in detail later.

8 My choice of the word ‘sincere’ should not be taken to indicate that philosophers who lack this feeling toward their views are being insincere, in some problematic way. I am simply pointing out a way in which many of us identify with the views we defend.
Sincere Philosopher's Dilemma: Either we philosophers will believe our controversial views or we will not. If we do, then we will be irrational. If we do not, then our views will not be sincerely held.

The main task of this paper is to show how this challenge can be met. But first, the challenge should be strengthened. The worry that gives rise to the challenge is that belief is required for the relevant kind of sincerity. But this claim is probably too strong.

To see this, assume a Lockean account of belief, according to which outright belief just is confidence above a certain threshold, say .75. Let us imagine that I often spend my time working out difficult math problems, replete with tempting pitfalls that frequently trip me up. Over the years, my success rate on these problems is only .74, and I know this fact about my reliability. As a result, when I arrive at an answer to any one of these problems, my confidence in the answer I reach tends not to be quite high enough for belief. Despite my lack of outright belief in my answer, the answer I arrive at still seems right to me, in an important sense. My own thinking led me to it. And even though I recognize that there is a good chance I erred, overall, I regard my answer as more likely to be correct than not. In such a case, I find it natural to say that my commitment to the answer I arrived at is sincere in the relevant sense. If this is right, then outright belief in one’s view is not necessary for sincerity.

Perhaps this is right. Even if so, it seems to me that the dilemma proponent need not be terribly concerned, for she can reply as follows:

Perhaps I was too quick in suggesting that outright belief was the only doxastic attitude capable of supporting sincerely held views. A fairly high credence probably can do the trick. But this observation hardly saves the sincere philosopher, for it is doubtful that we can rationally maintain high credences in our controversial views. The same considerations that gave rise to No Rational Belief (i.e. Conciliationism, Applicability) are sure to entail a parallel No Rational High Confidence principle, which will forbid the high credences present in the alleged counterexample. So here’s a more general challenge: Tell us specifically which attitude you will take toward controversial views that can get you both rationality and sincerity.

This reply seems to me to be exactly right. The challenge is not simply to demonstrate how to achieve sincerity without belief, but rather, to demonstrate that there is some attitude, or some set of attitudes, which allow for sincere and sensible participation in philosophy. The next section examines one potential answer, due to Sanford Goldberg.

2 Philosophical Views as Speculations
Goldberg has explored nearby territory in a series of recent papers (2013a, 2013b). He defends a version of No Rational Belief, and so he is concerned with a question similar to the one we are considering. He writes:

Unless we want to condemn philosophers to widespread unreasonableness (!), we must allow
that their doxastic attitude towards contested propositions is, or at any rate can be, something other than that of belief. (Goldberg 2013b, p. 282)

Though Goldberg is not explicitly concerned with allowing that philosophers can sincerely hold their views in the sense discussed in the previous section, he is sensitive to nearby issues, such as the sincerity of philosophical assertion.

Goldberg thinks that there is indeed an attitude that we philosophers can and should rationally take toward our views: ‘[T]here is an attitudinal cousin of belief which is reasonable to have even under conditions of systematic disagreement and which captures much, if perhaps not all, of the things that are involved in “having a view” in philosophy’ (Goldberg 2013b, p. 284). The relevant state is called ‘attitudinal speculation’:

**Speculation:** [O]ne who attitudinally speculates that \( p \) regards \( p \) as more likely than \( \neg p \), though also regards the total evidence as stopping short of warranting belief in \( p \). (Goldberg 2013b, p. 283)

Goldberg goes on to suggest that this attitude is what is required for sincere and proper assertion in the context of philosophy. The picture of philosophy being recommended (henceforth, ‘the speculation picture’) is, I think, a fairly natural one: Advocates of Incompatibilism, say, should hold their view to be more likely than its rival; at the same time, they should acknowledge that the total evidence (including evidence from disagreement) does not permit sufficient confidence in Incompatibilism for outright belief.

This picture is most attractive when applied to philosophical issues that divide philosophers into exactly two camps. Goldberg’s picture may require refinement, however, in order to handle debates consisting of three or more rival positions. For example, take normative ethics. Oversimplifying dramatically, let us suppose that Consequentialism, Deontology, and Virtue Ethics are equally popular, mutually exclusive views exhausting the plausible options. According to the speculation picture, my being a Deontologist will require me to have a credence in Deontology exceeding .5. There are two potential worries here.

First, it is not clear that such a high level of confidence in Deontology can be rationally maintained, on a broadly Conciliationist picture. Admittedly, the version of Conciliationism discussed in the introduction, which dealt with all-or-nothing beliefs, would be silent about this question. But some versions of Conciliationism do place rational constraints on one’s level of confidence, and in general, they would demand that one’s level of confidence in Deontology be roughly \( \frac{1}{3} \) in a case like this.\(^9\)

\(^9\) In the case described, the three views were supposed to be about equally popular. So about \( \frac{2}{3} \) of my peers reject Deontology and opt for one of the other two views. If I have every reason to think these opponents are, in general, as philosophically reliable as my fellow Deontologists (and myself), then I will not be rationally permitted (from within a broadly Conciliationist framework)
Second, one of the most attractive features of the speculation picture — its ability to allow us to favor our own view very slightly — seems to disappear in cases like this one. Suppose that my confidence in Deontology is .4, while my confidence in each alternative is .3. It would seem to make sense to classify me as a Deontologist, but, according to Goldberg’s view, this would be a mistake. My confidence in Deontology is, apparently, too low. So the attractive feature of the speculation picture disappears in cases like this.

With the foregoing problems in mind, we might modify Goldberg’s view as follows:

**Speculation**: One who attitudinally speculates that \( p \) regards \( p \) as the likeliest option (given some set of options), though also regards the total evidence as stopping short of warranting belief in \( p \).

This amended version seems to capture the spirit of Goldberg’s proposal nicely, allowing us to lean slightly toward our preferred positions even when there are multiple incompatible ones on offer.\(^{10}\) Can the revised account provide an answer to our dilemma? Specifically, can speculation* be the doxastic attitude underlying our philosophical commitments?

3 **Obstacles for the Speculation Account**

In assessing his own account, Goldberg points out that attitude of speculation may not be sufficient for having a view in philosophy, since proponents of a philosophical view are ‘typically more motivated to persist in defense of the view when challenged, than is one who merely speculates that \( p \)’ (Goldberg 2013b, p. 284). In response, he suggests that speculation should be taken to be a necessary condition on having a philosophical view, not a sufficient one (Goldberg 2013b, p. 284).

But there is reason to worry that speculation (and even speculation*), may not be a necessary condition, either. There seem to be cases in which one can sensibly have a view, despite regarding it as less likely, all things considered, than some rival view. Anticipating this complaint, Goldberg asks whether it ever makes sense for one to defend a view she regards as a ‘long shot.’ Ultimately, he suggests, though, that there is something ‘slightly perverse’ about one’s holding a view even when she does not think that the view will, in the end, be better-supported by the total evidence (Goldberg 2013b, p. 283 fn. 5). While I
to think my side is more likely right than not on this occasion. See, e.g., Elga (2007).

\(^{10}\) It is also worth noting that speculation* incurs a problem of individuation from which the original speculation is immune. Suppose that my confidence in Consequentialism is .4 and that my confidence in each of the others is .3. Since I regard Consequentialism as likelier than the other options, it seems clear that I do take the attitude of speculation* toward Consequentialism. But we might carve the options up differently: If instead we say that there are two views on the table — Consequentialism and non-Consequentialism — then I cannot be said to take the attitude of speculation* toward Consequentialism after all. We can set this difficulty aside, however, for I will suggest that both versions of the speculation picture are susceptible to a more pressing problem.
share the intuition, thinking about certain cases suggests to me that this is not as problematic as it might seem. Consider an analogy:

**Logic Team:** You are on a five-player logic team. The team is to be given a logic problem with possible answers \( p \) and \( \text{not-}p \). There is one minute allotted for each player to work out the problem alone followed by a ten-second voting phase, during which the team members vote *one by one*. The answer favored by a majority of your team is submitted.

You arrive at \( p \). During the voting phase, Vi, who is generally more reliable than you are on problems like these, votes first, for \( \text{not-}p \). You are next. Which way should you vote?

Given a broadly Conciliationist view, it is not rational for you to regard your answer of \( p \) as more likely than its negation, after seeing Vi vote. But there is, I think, still pressure on you to vote for the answer you arrived at, rather than the one you now regard as most likely to be correct.

We can illustrate this by adding a bit more information to the case. Suppose that Vi’s reliability is .9, that the reliability of each other team member is .75, that each team member is statistically independent of each other, and that the team is aware of this information. If everyone were to defer to Vi during voting, the team would perform sub-optimally in the long run.\(^{11}\) So in this collaborative truth-seeking context, there is nothing troublesome about ‘defending’ a view while thinking that it is more likely incorrect than not. More generally, we can see that, in this context at least, one’s all-things-considered confidence is no sure guide to what view one should put forward as one’s own.

Does this point carry over to philosophy? Perhaps. Within a broadly Conciliationist framework, how popular a position is (among some group of trustworthy evaluators) partly determines how much confidence one should have in that position, all things considered. But it seems doubtful that the philosophical popularity of a view should have much impact on whether a given philosopher should hold that view herself. Consider an example.

**Turning Tide:** Physicalism seems right to Pat. She finds the arguments for Physicalism to be persuasive; she is unmoved by the objections. And at present, Physicalism is the most popular view among philosophers of mind/metaphysics. On balance, she considers herself a Physicalist.

Later, the philosophical tide turns in favor of Dualism. Perhaps new arguments are devised; perhaps the familiar objections to Physicalism simply gain traction. In any case, Pat remains unimpressed. She does not find the new arguments for Dualism to be particularly strong, and the old objections continue to seem as defective to her as they always have.

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\(^{11}\) Following this strategy, the team’s reliability would just be Vi’s reliability: .90. If each team member votes without deferring, the team’s reliability can be shown to be considerably higher: approximately 0.93.
What should Pat’s view be, in a case like this? If Pat is a Conciliationist who happens to regard other philosophers of mind and metaphysics as generally trustworthy about philosophical matters (which we’ll suppose she is), her all-things-considered confidence in Physicalism may well decrease as Dualism becomes the dominant view, perhaps dipping below .5. But what seems strange is that once Pat’s all-things-considered confidence in Physicalism falls low enough, and once her all-things-considered confidence in Dualism rises high enough, she should stop being a Physicalist (and perhaps become a Dualist) — solely on the basis of its popularity, and despite that, when she thinks about the relevant arguments and objections, Physicalism still seems more plausible to her. Perhaps there is a special role for one’s own consideration of the issues to play in contexts like these.

4 Disagreement-insulated Inclination

Thinking about the preceding examples suggests a different approach altogether: As a philosopher, my views should be informed only by the way that some of the evidence seems to me to point. In particular, I should set aside the evidence I get from the agreement and disagreement of other philosophers in thinking the issues through. The views that strike me as correct, with this disagreement evidence set aside, are the views I should hold. Of course, the evidence I get from agreement and disagreement remains epistemically relevant to my all-things-considered beliefs. But for the purposes of the larger project of which I am a part, in order to arrive at my views, I reason as if it is not.

A good way to get a handle on the proposal is to think about how one typically reacts to a perceptual illusion, such as the one below.

Viewers almost always incorrectly judge the lettered regions to be different in shade. Importantly, the apparent discrepancy between these identically shaded regions tends to remain even after the viewer has become convinced of their constancy. The viewer continues to have the seeming or inclination, but does not endorse it.

12 While this paper is about philosophy, the idea may have broader application to other collaborative, truth-seeking disciplines, such as in the Logic Team example.

13 The seeming prompted by this illusion may involve alief, a representational mental state that can conflict with one’s explicit beliefs. See Gendler (2008). For the purposes of this paper, the oper-
An analogous phenomenon occurs when one gains evidence that one’s own reasoning about a given topic is likely to be defective in some way. Consider a case involving judgment-distorting drugs:14

**Deducing While Intoxicated:** Basil works through a non-trivial logic problem and comes to believe \( p \). She then learns that, before she attempted to solve the problem, she ingested a drug that impinges on one’s deductive reasoning skills. It causes ordinarily reliable thinkers to miss certain logic problems (such as the one she just tried) at least half of the time. She rereads the problem and finds herself inclined to reason as before: The information given still seems to her to imply \( p \). But she refrains from endorsing this seeming and suspends belief.

In the story, Basil is, in some sense, *inclined* to accept a certain claim as true, but opts not to endorse the inclination because of evidence that the mechanisms that produced it may be epistemically defective in some way. This evidence about one’s own cognitive capacities is widely known as ‘higher-order evidence’ (evidence about one’s ability to evaluate evidence). Notice that the ‘seemings’ or ‘inclinations’ that persist despite what is learned are, in some way, not sensitive to this higher-order evidence. In some sense, one can retain the ability to see things as if the higher-order evidence were not there, or were not relevant.

But how is this observation relevant to philosophy? Evidence from disagreement (and agreement) is thought to provide higher-order evidence, too.15 So the suggestion, to put it roughly, is this: Philosophers should favor the views that seem right to them, ignoring certain bits of higher-order evidence (including evidence from disagreement/agreement). David Chalmers helpfully characterizes a related idea:16

[A] level-crossing principle... is a principle by which one’s higher-order beliefs about one’s cognitive capacity are used to restrain one’s first-order beliefs about a subject matter. [...] We can imagine a cognizer—call him Achilles—who is at least sometimes insensitive to this sort of level-crossing principle. On occasion, Achilles goes into the mode of insulated cognition. When in this mode, Achilles goes where first-order theoretical reasoning takes him, entirely insulated from higher-order beliefs about his cognitive capacity. He might acquire evidence that he is unreliable about mathematics, and thereby come to believe ‘I am unreliable about arithmetic’, conditional belief, not alief.

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15 See Kelly (2005) and Christensen (2007) for influential early discussions that take this viewpoint.
16 Others have made reference to an idea like this as well. Schoenfield (2014, pp. 2-3) defines your ‘judgment’ as ‘the proposition you regard, or would regard as most likely to be correct on the basis of the first-order evidence alone.’ Horowitz and Sliwa (2015) make use of an idea in this vicinity in their discussion of one’s ‘first order attitude’. While these attitudes are close to the one I will rely on, the first-order/higher-order distinction turns out not to be quite right for the purposes of this paper.
but he will go on drawing conclusions about arithmetic all the same. (Chalmers 2012, pp. 103-104)

This idea of ‘insulated reasoning’ will be useful. The thought is that in philosophy (and in other collaborative truth-seeking contexts), we should try to reason in a way that is insulated from certain evidence, including the evidence we get from disagreement, in determining our views. For reasons we will discuss, it will turn out that we do not want to be insulated from all higher-order evidence, as Achilles is in Chalmers’ example. But before we can discuss which evidence we will want to wall ourselves off from, we will need to say a bit about what ‘walling off’ or ‘insulation’ amounts to. As it stands, it is unclear from Chalmers’ discussion whether insulated reasoning is supposed to be something that we humans ever do or are even capable of.

The relevant sort of reasoning is of a quite familiar variety: conditional reasoning. We reason conditionally when we reason as if, or supposing, or on the condition that our evidence were different than it actually is. Conditional reasoning can be divided into additive and subtractive varieties. In additive cases, we introduce a supposition over and above whatever evidence we already have, and then reason accordingly (e.g. ‘Supposing we get to the DMV by ten, I think it’s likely that we’ll be out of there by noon.’). Subtractive cases are less common. In such cases, we focus only on a subset of our evidence, ignoring or bracketing some of the evidence we already have, reasoning as if it were not there. Trial jurors are sometimes expected to engage in this kind of reasoning when a piece of evidence is deemed inadmissible. Suppose, for example, that unambiguous video footage of a defendant’s crime was collected without a search warrant. A juror who becomes aware of the video might well be instructed to assess the likelihood that the defendant is guilty – setting the video evidence aside altogether. Of course, the verdict she reaches may differ markedly from her all-things-considered opinion about the guilt of the defendant.

In both additive and subtractive cases, a person evaluates which way some body of evidence (which may or may not be the evidence she in fact possesses) seems to her to

17 There is some impulse to understand claims of the form ‘Conditional on evidence E, I think p’ counterfactually: ‘Were I to acquire evidence E, I would think p’ This impulse should be resisted. An example from Horowitz (2015) can be used to illustrate this. Imagine that Ivan becomes severely irrational whenever he believes that spiders are nearby. But let us add, realistically, that Ivan can suppose that there are spiders nearby without any significant problems. What Ivan does think, on the supposition that there are spiders nearby, may turn out to be quite different from what he would think, were he to learn that spiders are nearby.

18 It is worth noting that subtractive conditional reasoning is, formally, more problematic than the additive conditional reasoning. We understand conditionalization; can we make sense of ‘de-conditionalization’? See Joyce (1999) and Christensen (1999).

19 Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this example.
point. For ease of expression, if a certain body of evidence \( E \) seems to me to support \( p \), we will say that I am \textit{inclined}, on \( E \), toward \( p \).

We can now put the driving thought this way: When one is doing philosophy with the aim of determining her philosophical views, she should not be evaluating all of the evidence she has. Instead, she should be focusing on a special subset of this evidence. Her views should be determined by her inclinations on this evidence (i.e. by the way this evidence seems to her to point). What is the special subset of evidence? Provisionally, we will say that the relevant subset is: All of the evidence minus that from disagreement and agreement of fellow philosophers. So, on this picture, a person’s philosophical views should be her \textit{disagreement-insulated inclinations} (i.e. the positions that seem to her supported by the evidence not from agreement and disagreement of her peers). To see how this should work, we can apply it to the Turning Tide example that caused some trouble for the speculation picture.

At the end of the Turning Tide example, the available arguments and evidence seemed to Pat to support Physicalism, but the field was dominated by Dualists. On the current proposal, in arriving at her philosophical views, Pat is supposed to think about all of the evidence except for the evidence from disagreement and agreement. This body of evidence includes the arguments and objections with which she is familiar, and which, on balance, seem to her to support Physicalism. In other words, Pat’s disagreement-insulated inclination is toward Physicalism. This makes her a Physicalist.

This is not to say that she should \textit{believe} Physicalism to be true, or even that she should be more confident of Physicalism than she is of its negation. If she had to bet on one of the two positions, it would be wiser for her to bet on Dualism, given its popularity among philosophers whom she has good reason to respect. So her all-things-considered confidence in Physicalism may be rather low, since it is sensitive to \textit{all} her evidence, which includes the evidence from disagreement. But the key point is that, as a member of the philosophical community, one’s holding of a view and one’s all-things-considered level of confidence in the truth of that view can come dramatically apart.

5 Answering the Dilemma

We began this paper seeking an attitude that would enable us to practice philosophy in a sincere, rational way. Disagreement-insulated inclination is an appealing candidate for the elusive attitude we sought. This section explores how well the attitude fares with respect to the sincerity and rationality desiderata, and discusses the role that these inclinations should play more broadly.

\textit{Sincerity}: Can disagreement-insulated inclination support sincerely held philosophical views? The Physicalism example discussed at the end of the previous section provides some reason to think so. For Pat does seem to be a sincere Physicalist – both before and
after Dualism becomes the dominant view. It should be recognized, however, that there is one way in which Pat’s commitment is less than fully sincere: She regards Dualism as more likely to be true, all things considered. Nonetheless, it seems clear that Pat’s commitment to Physicalism remains sincerely held, in an important sense. When we characterized the sincerity desideratum initially, we wanted it to be the case that the views we hold would trace back to our own consideration of the issues. We wanted our views to seem right to us, in some important sense. And Pat’s commitment to Physicalism meets these conditions with flying colors. So, at least in this case, disagreement-insulated inclination seems well suited to support the desired sort of sincerity.

Of course, there is a real question about why disagreement-insulated inclination is able to support sincerity. After all, disagreement-insulated inclination is a special case of subtractive conditional reasoning (i.e. reasoning that involves bracketing some of one’s evidence). And subtractive conditional reasoning does not generally foster sincerity of the relevant sort: Think of the juror who judges the defendant to be innocent only because she bracketed overwhelming video evidence ruled inadmissible during her deliberation. This juror is inclined, on the admissible evidence, toward the conclusion that the defendant is innocent. But, presumably, this juror’s inclination would not be sincere, in the relevant sense. Why should we expect that, as a rule, our philosophical inclinations will be more sincere than the juror’s inclination in this example?

In thinking about this, it is important to note that the view on the table is decidedly not that any old use of subtractive conditional reasoning will deliver sincere inclinations. Given a body of evidence, one can take any chunk of it and set it aside in one’s reasoning. When one does this, the inclinations one has will certainly not always ‘seem right’ in any important sense at all. It will matter crucially which evidence one sets aside. But, then, what makes disagreement evidence so special? Why does bracketing evidence from disagreement tend to result in seemings with which we sincerely identify?

As it happens, this property is not unique to disagreement evidence: It is a feature of higher-order evidence more generally. Very often, bracketing higher-order evidence will tend to facilitate sincere inclinations of the relevant kind. Recall the example of Basil and the judgment-distorting drug. There, Basil arrives at $p$ by reasoning herself through the logic problem directly. In the end, she declines to trust the output of this reasoning, because of information about the likely effects of the drug she took. All things considered, Basil might well regard $p$ and $\neg p$ as equally likely to be correct. But even if she regards both propositions as equally likely, she does not necessarily harbor identical attitudes toward the two propositions. Importantly, Basil still has access to her direct thinking about this question, which led her to $p$. As a result, if asked to defend $p$, Basil will have some-

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20 Thanks to an anonymous referee for posing this question.
thing sincere and substantial to say – even if it turns out to be incorrect. If asked to defend not-\( p \), she may not have much to say at all – and if she were to try, it might well feel to her as though she is trying to trick her audience. The key point is that a certain kind of sincerity remains connected to Basil’s first-order judgment, even when she admits that the first-order judgment is likely to be mistaken.

Higher-order evidence leads one to doubt one’s own direct thinking about some core body of evidence. But there can often be a kind of seeming produced by that direct thinking – whether or not one trusts it. Even after one acquires evidence that the direct thinking is not reliable, the direct thinking does not tend to vanish; it will still be there, and it may even be correct. And when the direct thinking is still there, we will be in a position to advocate for the conclusion it produced in a way that bears important hallmarks of sincerity: The position will seem right to us in a psychologically gripping way, and we will have something substantial to say in support of it, which we can see no flaw in. In short, because disagreement is a species of higher-order evidence, it seems plausible that bracketing disagreement will tend to support the kind of sincerity that No Rational Belief seemed to place in jeopardy.\textsuperscript{21}

\textit{Rationality:} Let us now turn to rationality. There are two important questions to address here. First, is the attitude of disagreement-insulated inclination rationally assessable? And, second, can we be rational in taking this attitude toward our controversial philosophical views? There is good reason to think that the answer to both questions is ‘yes.’ Evidence from disagreement is, in general, what precludes us from rationally believing our controversial philosophical views. With the disagreement evidence set aside, being inclined toward a view can indeed be rational – so long as the view one is inclined toward is in fact the view that the remaining evidence supports. A modified version of the judgment-distorting drug case discussed earlier can be used to illustrate the operative rational norm.\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{Deducing While Intoxicated 2:} Basil and Sage both attempt to solve a challenging logic problem with correct answer \( p \). Before attempting the problem, each logician learned that she ingested a drug that impinges on one’s deductive reasoning skills. During past experimentation, Basil and Sage discovered that they tend to answer challenging logic problems correctly about half the time, after having ingested the drug.

On this occasion, Basil correctly deduces \( p \), while Sage loses track of a negation symbol, and arrives at \( \sim p \). After obtaining these results, both immediately temper their confidence in their respective answers considerably, because they suspect that their logical reasoning facul-

\textsuperscript{21} Here, one might be tempted to ask: Why only bracket disagreement evidence in one’s philosophical reasoning? Why not just bracket all higher-order evidence? These questions lead to some interesting complexities, which will be addressed in §6.

\textsuperscript{22} See Christensen (forthcoming) for discussion of closely related questions.
ties were off-kilter. Indeed, despite having reached different answers, both logicians end up with the same level of confidence in $p: .5$.

Basil and Sage ended up at the same place. But intuitively, we want to say that Basil’s reasoning was totally rational and that Sage’s was not (since Sage’s reasoning was based importantly on a mistake). Thinking about this case in terms of inclination can help us to account for this intuition. Even though Basil and Sage have the same attitude toward $p$, all things considered, notice that setting aside evidence about the drug, Basil and Sage are inclined toward different positions. (Basil might say: ‘If this drug’s a dud, then definitely $p$.’ Sage might say: ‘If this drug’s a dud, then definitely $\sim p$.’) And notice that because the non-drug evidence really does support $p$, only Basil’s inclination is fully rational. So it does seem to make sense to say that insulated inclinations can be assessed for rationality.

We should think of this situation as analogous to the situation that we philosophers are often in. With respect to our all-things-considered attitude, philosophical disagreement may compel us to be at the same place: agnosticism. But setting the evidence from disagreement and agreement aside, we will still have our inclinations, and these will differ from person to person. Some of us are like Basil, rationally inclined toward the position the relevant evidence supports. Others of us are like Sage, mistakenly inclined toward some other position. So it will not turn out that all philosophers who take the attitude of disagreement-insulated inclination are fully rational in holding their views. But so long as one’s inclination is directed toward the position that is in fact supported by the relevant evidence (i.e. the evidence not from disagreement), one can be rational in holding that position as one’s view. While it may be irrational to believe one’s controversial philosophical views, it is not necessarily irrational to be inclined toward them, setting disagreement aside.

The Role of Inclinations: At this point, we have seen that the prospect of holding controversial philosophical views in a sincere, rational way can survive the threat posed by disagreement – provided that we philosophers take the right kind of attitude toward our controversial views. But if we adhere to this guideline – if the attitude underlying our philosophical commitments is that of disagreement-insulated inclination – one might wonder about the status of any actions based on those commitments.

A person’s philosophical commitments are rarely wholly inert; they may lead a person to make assertions or to pursue courses of action. This raises difficult, important questions. If we are supposed to harbor two distinct attitudes toward certain philosophical propositions – our all-things-considered credence and our dispute-insulated view – on which should we rely when we teach our classes, when we advocate for public policies,

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23 Kelly (2010, pp. 122-124) discusses a case with a similar structure (though no drugs are involved).
when we vote, or when we directly influence public policy in other ways?²⁴

Though it may not be possible to answer these questions in a uniform or categorical manner, it will be instructive to consider several different contexts, to illustrate how these questions can be answered, and the kinds of considerations that are relevant, in thinking through these issues. To start, consider a medical example:

Doctors: Holly is one of fifty doctors who are all concerned with a specific illness. These doctors have two distinct responsibilities related to this illness: They treat patients who are suffering from the illness, and they also perform research into how the illness should be treated.

There are two main drugs available for treatment and research: X and Y. Though there is a large body of data available concerning the efficacy of these drugs, the data are not fully conclusive. Forty-five of the doctors are inclined to think that X is more effective, but the other five – including Holly – are inclined to think that Y is more effective. For medical reasons, it is not possible to administer both X and Y to a single patient safely. And, in addition, it is not possible for a doctor to research more than one of these drugs at a time.

Holly knows all of this and is trying to determine both how she should treat the patients she sees and where she should focus her research efforts.

Given certain assumptions about the above case, it seems clear that all the doctors – Holly included – should administer X to their patients. To see this, suppose that Holly does not see herself as any more likely to make accurate assessments of drug efficacy than the other doctors. Indeed, in the past, when there has been an absence of consensus among the doctors about which of two drugs is most efficacious, the larger group has tended to be right nine times out of ten. Given this track record, and given that a great majority of the doctors judged X to be more effective on this occasion, it would seem irresponsible for Holly (or any other doctor possessing the same evidence) to do anything other than administer X to an ailing patient.

At the same time, it may well make good sense for Holly to investigate the efficacy of Y in her research. As a member of the research community, Holly should do whatever will aid the group in its efforts to determine conclusively which drug is most effective. Toward this end, it may not be optimal to have all fifty doctors devoting their research efforts to the same drug – even if that drug is currently the most promising one. Instead, it may be more efficient to have a majority of the doctors researching the most promising drug, with the rest researching alternatives that still have a decent chance of turning out to be the best.²⁵ If we add that the doctors, as a rule, tend to produce their best research

²⁴ Thanks to the Editors of *Mind* for raising these questions.
²⁵ See Ch. 8 of Kitcher (1993) for a thorough defense of the epistemic advantages bestowed upon a scientific community by this kind of diversity. One intuitive takeaway of Kitcher’s discussion is that communities that rapidly approach consensus can be at a disadvantage, since inevitably they will occasionally converge around a mistaken opinion – which turns out to be quite ineffi-
when they are permitted to investigate whichever drug sincerely seems to them to be the best, then it will make sense for Holly to research Y (even though she will be administering X to her patients).

With this example in mind, we can consider another structurally similar example, in the realm of public policy. Suppose that Gavin is an expert on some issue of public importance and is assessing the merits of a policy, which may soon be enacted. When he thinks about the issue directly, he finds himself inclined toward the view that the policy is likely to have a quite positive impact. But, like Holly, Gavin is in the minority. The vast majority of other experts hold that the policy will, if enacted, have a quite negative impact. In the past, when Gavin has been in the minority like this, he has tended to be wrong much more often than right. As a result, he adopts two distinct attitudes toward the policy: He harbors a sincere, disagreement-insulated view that the policy would be beneficial, while his all-things-considered opinion is that the policy is more likely to be detrimental. When it comes time to take action, on which of these attitudes should Gavin rely? Naturally, the answer to this question will depend on the specific act he is contemplating.

If Gavin is the governor and thereby has the ability to enact or veto this policy entirely on his own, it is clear that he should veto the policy. The case is relevantly similar to the one involving Holly’s treatment of her patients. Gavin, like Holly, should pursue the course of action that is likeliest to bring about a favorable outcome, given all the information available. It would seem irresponsible to enact unilaterally a policy that the vast majority of experts deem likely harmful.

In contrast, suppose that Gavin and the other experts are all members of a committee tasked with assessing the likely effects of the policy in question. Here, it is important for Gavin to advocate for his insulated viewpoint, describing the direct considerations that incline him to think that the policy is likely to bring about a favorable outcome. If Gavin is wrong, then, with any luck, the rest of the committee will be able to identify direct considerations that outweigh or undermine the ones he raised. Of course, there is some chance that his advocacy will sway the group to favor the policy. As long as the other experts on the committee are generally reliable in making these sorts of direct assessments, this change of opinion ought to be more likely to occur when Gavin happens to be right. If Gavin were to stay quiet in such a case, then the committee would be less likely to correct itself.

Voting contexts raise still different issues. First, consider a jury that votes. One reason for jurors to rely on their disagreement-insulated attitudes in determining how to vote is that doing so will tend to make the group more accurate. As we saw in the Logic Team...
example, a group can have a higher probability of reaching the right verdict when the group members reason and vote independently than if they all defer to the most reliable individual person in the group. And insulation from disagreement can serve to enforce this kind of independence, thereby making the group more accurate.

Let us turn to citizen voting. Suppose that Gavin is now contemplating whether to vote for or against the policy mentioned above. This is a particularly complex case. On the one hand, there is some intuitive pressure to say that if Gavin really does regard the policy as likely to be detrimental, all things considered, on the basis of expert testimony, then he should vote against the policy. On the other hand, the considerations about group accuracy discussed in the context of jury voting, which count in favor of insulation, also seem applicable in this case. So there is a tension here that cannot be resolved in the abstract, without reference to the particulars of a given case.

The context of teaching also raises difficult and important issues. In one’s efforts to portray a controversial philosophical issue honestly and fairly to one’s students, is it better to rely on one’s insulated attitude or on one’s all-things-considered attitude? It is worth noting that one need not rely on only one of these attitudes in all aspects of one’s teaching. For example, a philosopher should not present her controversial views in the same way that an introductory science teacher would present an established scientific theory: She should make clear to the students that there are well-qualified philosophers on both sides. But a teacher’s own inclinations can play a role in her teaching: She may tell her students how things look to her, when she considers the matter directly. And she may encourage the students to work out their own views by directly considering the relevant arguments. Similarly, these attitudes may figure in complex ways in other decisions a teacher might make (e.g., in deciding what to put on the syllabus, or in designing exams).

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26 Condorcet’s (1785) jury theorem shows this. The Logic Team is, in a way, an application of the theorem.

27 Insulation can prevent herding – congregating around a particular opinion – which is a natural result of properly accounting for disagreement evidence. See Lackey (2013) for a discussion showing that independence in belief-forming contexts is a tricky issue to resolve.

28 One layer of complication stems from the fact that the body of voters might not properly be regarded as a ‘truth-seeking body’ in the way that juries can be. Instead, we might think of voting as a fair way to reconcile our incompatible preferences. On this picture, Gavin is entitled to vote for the policy he would prefer to see enacted, quite apart from its likely consequences for society at large. To circumvent this worry, we can suppose that Gavin would prefer to enact the policy if and only if it is likely to have a positive impact, on the whole. See, e.g., Estlund (2008) for discussion of these issues.

29 For example, one issue that arises here is that of expertise. In citizen voting, a person may not think that her fellow voters are particularly reliable with respect to the issue being voted on. The strength-in-numbers consideration discussed previously is applicable only if the other voters are sufficiently reliable, with respect to the disputed issue.
There are certainly going to be many other contexts in which it may not always be clear which of one’s attitudes one should rely on. This should not trouble us. In a real-world medical context, the treatment of patients and the research into potential treatments may not be cleanly separable (as was supposed in the Doctors example). Such a case would make it difficult to determine whether and to what extent any of the doctors should be acting on their insulated views. Real-world cases are messy, and we should not assume that there is bound to be a clean way to handle them. Nonetheless, we can often identify some of the considerations that are relevant to making these kinds of determinations.

Broadly speaking, we have observed two distinct benefits that can be associated with relying on one’s disagreement-insulated attitude (rather than on one’s all-things-considered attitude): First, a distinctive kind of sincerity can be enabled. Second, the efficiency of a deliberative, truth-seeking body can be enhanced due to the way that insulation can foster a valuable sort of cognitive diversity. Which attitude a person may choose to rely on in a given context will depend on which of these benefits can be obtained and on the extent to which she values them in that context. A philosopher may place a high value on sincerity; a doctor seeing patients may not.

Insulated inclination is not a general substitute for belief. It is a separate item in our epistemic toolkit, to be used when the task before us makes its use appropriate. I suspect that there is no simple rule precisely describing the conditions that warrant reliance on an insulated attitude. But it does seem that, in the context of doing philosophy, employing a certain kind of insulated reasoning does make good sense.30

6 Inclination, insulated from what?

I will conclude by exploring whether disagreement evidence is the only kind of higher-order evidence from which our philosophical reasoning should be insulated – for there is a compelling case to be made that our philosophical reasoning should be insulated from at least some other kinds of higher-order evidence as well.

While disagreement in philosophy can be used to argue persuasively for No Rational

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30 It might be thought that the foregoing picture runs into difficulties when accounting for philosophical assertions – particularly if it is assumed that warranted assertion requires knowledge or rational belief. There are two important observations to make about this worry. First, it should be noted that this is not a special problem for the insulated inclination picture described here; it arises as soon as No Rational Belief is assumed. Second, it is worth pointing out that there may be some divergence between philosophical norms of assertion and ordinary norms of assertion. See Goldberg (2013b) and DeRose (forthcoming) for discussions that explore this idea. If norms of assertion are contextually sensitive in this way, it should be possible to generate norms of philosophical assertion that are compatible with the picture outlined in this paper. One specific such suggestion is that, in the context of philosophy, an assertion is warranted just in case it is based on a rational inclination, insulated from the appropriate evidence.
Belief, it is by no means the only route to this conclusion. Suppose that Erika, a committed Conciliationist, is philosophizing in her office. She discovers a philosophical question that, as far as she knows, has never been investigated by philosophers before. Since there is no disagreement (that she is aware of), her disagreement-insulated inclination and her all-things-considered opinion will match. After some reflection on this new question, she finds that \( p \) seems right to her. But then she pauses, thinking about how much confidence she should have in \( p \), given that it seems right. And it is not at all clear that Erika can, all things considered, regard \( p \) as likelier than its competitors. Here is one route Erika might take to a more agnostic position on \( p \):

**Expected Disagreement:** Although there is no disagreement about whether \( p \) yet, Erika expects there soon to be some. She thinks that this question is exceedingly likely to provoke disagreement from philosophers whom Erika respects (though she may not be able to predict exactly who will be on which side). She decides that she needn’t wait for anyone to say the words ‘I disagree.’ In anticipation of the disagreement, she divides her confidence equally between \( p \) and \( p \)’s soon-to-be competitors.

The above reasoning can be transformed into a more general argument for agnosticism about difficult issues in philosophy. So there might well be disagreement-independent reason to refrain from having much confidence in some of one’s philosophical views. And if there is, then for certain philosophical questions (such as those which are likely to engender substantial disagreement), disagreement-insulated inclination cannot fully deliver on its promise: It cannot allow us to arrive at firm, rational opinions about how these philosophical questions should be answered.

One way to react is to recognize that ‘evidence from expected disagreement,’ like evidence from actual disagreement, constitutes higher-order evidence of a certain sort. (The knowledge that fellow philosophers are likely to disagree with one, about a particular question, is some evidence that one’s own thinking about this question is likely to be somehow mistaken.) Perhaps the next move is to demand more insulation – insulation from all higher-order evidence. Let’s call an inclination based solely on first-order evidence ‘fully insulated.’ So on this new proposal, our philosophical views should be our fully insulated inclinations. This would allow Erika to have the view that \( p \), since

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31 There are other higher-order routes to agnosticism in philosophy that make no essential reference to actual disagreement. Ballantyne (2014) pursues one such route, which appeals to the merely could-have-been disagreement of “counterfactual philosophers” (people who likely would have disagreed with your philosophical views, had they chosen to pursue philosophy). Frances (2016) discusses a different route, which involves being aware of one’s past philosophical failings. Yet another route may flow from thoughts about the difficulty of philosophical questions.

32 Recall that this was the kind of insulated reasoning that Chalmers (2012) and others seemed to have in mind.
seemed correct to her before considering certain higher-order worries. Unfortunately, this revised proposal is too simple. The problem is that, sometimes, higher-order evidence does not seem to be evidence that philosophers should set aside in their thinking about the issues.

Consider an analogy. Imagine that a member of an admissions committee learns that she is prone to implicit bias: Her (perhaps fully insulated) inclination is, often, to regard male applicants as being more deserving of admission than relevantly similar female applicants. This information constitutes higher-order evidence, since it concerns the committee member’s ability to competently evaluate first-order evidence. But it does not seem to be evidence that she should set aside, in arriving at an independent judgment about a given applicant’s merit. Intuitively, she should attempt to compensate for her bias to some extent. And this will preclude her being fully insulated.

Let us move to an example from philosophy. One can imagine learning that, in weighing a theory’s elegance against a theory’s resistance to potential counterexamples, one tends to overvalue one of these virtues, relative to the other. This information constitutes higher-order evidence, since it is evidence about one’s capacity to evaluate competing philosophical theories. But once someone did discover this about herself, I think it quite natural to think that she would be justified in compensating accordingly in reasoning about these theories. If she knows that she ordinarily tends to overvalue elegance (say), then she might respond by settling on a less elegant theory slightly more often than she otherwise would have. This does not seem immediately problematic. If anything, it would be problematic to ignore this information. So it seems clearly acceptable, at least sometimes, not to bracket higher-order evidence in our philosophical thinking.

From what, then, should our philosophical reasoning be insulated? In trying to answer this question, we should think again about why insulation can be useful in the first place. Insulation has in part been motivated by sincerity. But in the previous section, we discussed a second advantage: It fosters cognitive diversity. Plausibly, philosophy progresses most efficiently when various distinct positions are being investigated. We could, perhaps, imagine a variant of the Logic Team case, in which each team is trying to find a proof of a theorem as quickly as possible. Other things equal, the team might well be better off if its members are not all trying the same type of proof. One might think that something similar could be true for philosophy too: If there is something valuable out there to be discovered (an argument, a counterexample, etc.), a group might be more on the whole likely to find it if the group’s members pursue many different paths.

Suppose that the above is right: Cognitive diversity is indeed desirable in philosophy. This insight can help us to determine which higher-order evidence to set aside in our philosophical reasoning. Specifically, if some higher-order evidence tends to undermine cognitive diversity (when properly accounted for), then that counts in favor of setting it
aside. And if the higher-order evidence guarantees cognitive uniformity, then that counts strongly in favor of setting it aside. Does higher-order evidence ever tend to breed cognitive uniformity in this way? It can. Evidence from disagreement is the most straightforward case. When two groups of philosophers disagree, Conciliationism will recommend that both sides suspend judgment – a uniform outcome. Evidence from expected disagreement functions in a similar manner. Like evidence from actual disagreement, it tends to support suspension of judgment. If all philosophers were to account for the expectation of disagreement in their reasoning (even if their reasoning were insulated from actual disagreement), a uniform agnosticism would result – at least with respect to certain difficult issues. So it makes sense to ensure that our philosophical reasoning is insulated from disagreement and expected disagreement (and other kinds of higher-order evidence that would guarantee uniformity, if properly accounted for).

But what about evidence about one’s own bias toward elegant theories? It is worth noting that that evidence about one’s elegance bias is unlike evidence from disagreement in an important respect: Correctly compensating for it in no way guarantees uniformity: A disagreement between two philosophers could easily persist, even after one or both of them compensated for an elegance bias afflicting them. At the same time, compensating for a pernicious elegance bias can undermine diversity in at least some cases: If I am the only one afflicted by the bias, then (before compensating) I might be inclined toward certain (particularly elegant) positions that others find less plausible. After compensating, I might come to dismiss those positions, too, making the overall distribution of views more uniform. If diversity were all that counts, then it would seem clear that I should not compensate (i.e. my reasoning should be insulated from evidence of this bias).

But diversity is not all that counts. Yes, my bias might lead me to pursue views that no one else would. But since the bias is a pernicious one, it is likely making me less individually accurate. And individual accuracy counts, too. So our concern for diversity should be tempered by our concern for accuracy.

One might worry, though, that a concern for accuracy could be used to motivate taking account of disagreement evidence, as well. After all, taking proper account of disagreement evidence also makes one more accurate in the long run. Setting it aside makes one less accurate. (This was especially dramatic in the Logic Team example.) In the case of both bias evidence and disagreement evidence, insulating facilitates diversity at the cost of individual expected accuracy. Why insulate in one case but not the other?

To see the difference, we should notice that there are three values we are simultaneously trying to promote: (1) individual expected accuracy, (2) cognitive diversity, and (3) sincerity. In trying to determine which of our inclinations should underlie our philosophical views, we should consider the extent to which each of these values may be promoted or undermined by a given policy, were everyone to adopt it.
Start with evidence from disagreement. Ensuring that philosophers reason in a way that is insulated from disagreement evidence will hurt everyone’s individual expected accuracy (as insulation always does). But it will enable sincerity to a great extent (as we saw in Turning Tide), and it will facilitate cognitive diversity to a great extent (for if everyone were to take account of disagreement evidence, complete uniformity – suspension of judgment by all parties – would result). So while there is a cost associated with insulating from disagreement evidence, there are substantial benefits (such as the avoidance of complete uniformity).

The case for insulating from bias evidence is weaker. With respect to values (1) and (3), accuracy and sincerity, the case for insulating from bias evidence may be as strong as the case for insulating from disagreement evidence: After all, insulating from bias evidence hurts personal expected accuracy (just as insulating from disagreement evidence does), and insulating from bias evidence may enhance sincerity (since bias evidence does constitute a kind of higher-order evidence). But while insulating from bias evidence may enhance cognitive diversity to some extent (depending on the details of the case), it will not enhance diversity to the extent that insulating from disagreement evidence does. Properly accounting for bias evidence would not guarantee uniformity in the way that accounting for disagreement evidence would. Even if every philosopher learned tomorrow that she harbored a bias toward elegant theories and compensated accordingly, it is very doubtful that consensus would result. So there are reasons to favor insulating from disagreement over insulating from biases.

This is not to offer a clean-cut rule telling us precisely when to insulate and when not to. But it is not obvious that any such rule should be given. I am tempted to think that we philosophers might have some flexibility in certain cases, due to the fact that philosophers value sincerity to varying degrees. Suppose for the moment that both of the first two values (individual expected accuracy and cognitive diversity) tell in favor of accounting for one’s elegance bias (i.e. not reasoning insulated from it). Still, I think that it might well make sense for a philosopher to adopt the view corresponding to her inclination insulated from the bias. Perhaps this philosopher is better able to defend her views when she finds herself sincerely committed to them. Or perhaps she finds that she is most creative when she argues on behalf of views that ‘seem right’ to her in the relevant sense. Even if, other things equal, the community might prefer (on accuracy and diversity grounds) to have a philosopher defending view A rather than view B, it could turn out to be more valuable to the philosophical community to have a creative and persuasive advocate of B rather than a lackluster advocate of A. So while there do seem to be some general observations we can make (e.g. insulating from disagreement is typically a good idea), we may not be able to delineate the bounds of insulation in philosophy with perfect precision. Indeed, there may well be cases in which the philosopher has a choice: It will be acceptable to insulate, and
also acceptable not to. Since we are trying to promote several different values that can diverge, this permissiveness is not a problem – in fact, it is just what we should expect.

7 Conclusion

We began by assuming that philosophical belief in controversial claims was irrational, in order to see what sense we could make of philosophy if this were so. We saw that the ‘sincere’ philosopher – the philosopher who holds views that seem correct to her – faces a dilemma: Either she may believe her views irrationally or else abandon an important kind of sincerity underlying her philosophically controversial commitments. This paper has proposed that, if careful, the sincere philosopher can retain most of what she might want. In thinking about philosophical questions, the sincere philosopher should set some of her evidence aside – including the evidence provided by disagreement. She can sincerely and rationally advocate the views that she is inclined toward, with this evidence set aside. Though she may not believe her controversial views, all things considered, she can hold views that seem correct to her, in an important sense.

This is the view I am putting forward for your consideration. I fully expect to encounter dissenting opinion, and I confess that this expectation prevents me from having high confidence in the proposal, all things considered. Nonetheless, I can say sincerely that it seems to me to be correct.

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29–52.


Belief Dependence: How Do the Numbers Count?

Abstract: In some sense, it is clear that the numbers count. That is, it is clear that the number of thinkers on a given side of a disputed issue is typically relevant to the degree of support their opinions provide. It is natural to think that numbers cannot be all that matter, though, for the extent to which the opinions are independent also seems to have substantial epistemic import. It is difficult, however, to capture explicitly the type of dependence and independence that can play this epistemic role. This paper investigates the issue, putting forward an expectational account of belief dependence and independence – one that can be applied whether we think in terms of credences or in terms of all-or-nothing beliefs.

1 Introduction

While taking a logic exam, you encounter a problem you don’t know how to do. So you decide to cheat. Your friends Anna, Beth, and Chad are seated close by, and you know that they are all quite good at logic – about equally good, in fact. You peek at their answers and find that they did not all agree: Anna answered not-\( p \); Beth and Chad answered \( p \). What do you do?

Other things the same, it seems clear that you should go with \( p \). You have two reliable sources against one. But suppose that you saw Chad copy off of Beth. Given this information, it seems clear that you do not have reason to favor \( p \). Even though the case can still be described as ‘two against one,’ Chad’s opinion is dependent on Beth’s, in some important sense. And, for this reason, it seems to lack epistemic significance (that is, it seems not to provide additional support for \( p \) beyond that provided by Beth’s opinion). To accommodate cases of this kind, we might offer the following general principle: When one opinion is totally dependent on another, the dependent opinion does not provide any additional support for the jointly held proposition.

It is difficult, however, to characterize precisely the type of belief dependence that can play this epistemic role. Lackey (2013) canvasses various attempts to capture the relevant type of dependence, arguing that all are unsuccessful. Ultimately, she goes a step farther, boldly rejecting the received view that completely dependent opinions lack epistemic significance. This paper has two goals. The first is to defend the received view from Lackey’s thought-provoking critique. The second is to offer an account of belief dependence – that is, an account of when additional opinions count and when they do not. The account offered is expectational: According to it, one opinion is (completely) dependent on another when learning about the latter allows one to predict the former (with certainty). Later, we will see that this expectational account can be extended to cover partial dependence and independence and that it can be applied regardless of whether we understand a person’s opinions in terms all-or-nothing beliefs or in terms of credences. Before
exploring such subtleties, though, we must say a bit more to motivate investigation into this issue.

2 The Importance of Belief Dependence

One reason to care about this issue is its connection to disagreements involving shared evidence – a topic that has received substantial attention. Much of that controversy turns on just how we should see the interaction between ordinary evidence (e.g. the information given in the logic problem) and the evidence provided by the opinions of others. On the one hand, ‘conciliatory’ views demand that a person revise her opinion when she encounters disagreement from a reliable source who shares her evidence – even if she had in fact responded perfectly to the shared evidence in the first place. On the other hand, ‘steadfast’ views hold that those who actually respond correctly to the shared evidence should not revise their beliefs in light of disagreement.

Given this distinction between views, it is tempting to think that the interest of the belief dependence issue is limited to conciliationists. But this is a mistake. Virtually everyone, whether conciliationist or not, should allow that outside opinions can have some evidential force, when such opinions are the only evidence a person has about some proposition. (Everyone should allow, for example, that a reliable meteorologist’s predictions, other things equal, provides some evidence about whether it will rain.) As long as one admits that outside opinions can provide evidence sometimes, one will need to be able to handle questions involving belief dependence. We can ask, for example: How much more evidence is provided by the agreement of independent experts than is provided by that of dependent experts? Though the issue of dependence can seem especially pressing to conciliationists, it is clear that questions surrounding dependence should be taken seriously more generally.

In order to focus in on the issue directly, we will concentrate on cases that allow us to stay neutral on how to adjudicate the disagreement debate. So, for instance, in the logic exam case, we will not ask: What should Anna think, in light of the information given in the logic problem and the disagreement from Beth and Chad? Answering this question would require us first to decide what Anna should think, in light of the logic problem information and disagreement from Beth alone, which is a controversial matter. Instead, we will ask: What should an outsider think, given Anna’s, Beth’s, and Chad’s opinions, and importantly setting aside any evidence provided by the logic problem itself?33

33 In the original story, we imagined that you had seen the logic problem but were unsure how to solve it. In the cleanest version of the case, we would stipulate that you had not even seen the logic problem but were still trying to determine its solution through the efforts of your classmates.
3 Lackey’s Argument

In the logic exam case, it seems clear that Chad’s opinion should not count for much, if it is true that he simply copied off of Beth. On the basis of this judgment, it seems reasonable to posit the following general principle:

Belief Dependence: When one opinion is totally dependent on another, the dependent opinion does not confer any additional support for the jointly held proposition.

Precedent for such a principle is easy to find. Here is Elga:

[A]n additional outside opinion should move one only to the extent that one counts it as independent from opinions one has already taken into account. (2010, p. 177)

Elga regards this claim as “completely uncontroversial” and suggests that “every sensible view on disagreement should accommodate it” (2010, p. 178). Kelly, writing from the other side of the disagreement debate, shares Elga’s outlook:

[E]ven in cases in which opinion is sharply divided among a large number of generally reliable individuals, it would be a mistake to be impressed by the sheer numbers on both sides of the issue. For numbers mean little in the absence of independence. (2010, p. 148)

But despite the widespread appeal of Belief Dependence, Lackey (2013) argues, persuasively, that it is tricky to characterize the type of dependence operative in this principle. Indeed, she goes a step further, suggesting that there is simply no good way to do it. Let’s take a look at Lackey’s argument.

Lackey restricts her attention to cases involving epistemic peers (who, for Lackey, are “evidential and cognitive equals” with respect to the issue at hand34). On the face of it, it may seem strange to invoke peerhood here. After all, Belief Dependence states simply that if one person’s belief is dependent on another person’s, then the dependent belief does not confer additional support for the opinion shared. Peerhood seems irrelevant to the issue.

Though Lackey does not engage this concern, I think that it is clear how it can be addressed. In assessing the import of incoming opinions, it important to distinguish two questions: (1) How strong are the respective epistemic credentials of the sources of these opinions? (2) To what extent do these sources depend on each other in their thinking? Since, presumably, the relevant sort of dependence can occur when the involved people are on equal epistemic footing, it seems better, methodologically, to focus on cases of this type. Framing the question in terms of epistemic peers allows us to control for a confounding variable. So, following Lackey, let us focus on a more restricted version of Belief Dependence:

34 See Lackey (pp. 243-245). We will discuss the role this assumption plays in the next section.
Belief Dependence for Peers: When a person’s opinion is totally dependent on a peer’s opinion, the dependent opinion does not confer any additional support for the jointly held proposition.

Lackey considers several ways one might try to understand this notion of dependence so as to render the principle true. But she argues that each is no good. Ultimately, Lackey argues that this widely held principle cannot be sustained, suggesting instead that dependent beliefs do tend to confer additional support:

I shall show that where one disagrees with two (or more) epistemic peers, the beliefs of those peers can be dependent in the relevant sense and yet one cannot rationally regard this as a single instance of disagreement when engaging in doxastic revision. (2013, p. 245)

It would seem that Lackey is rejecting flat out the intuition elicited by the logic exam case – provided that peerhood between Beth and Chad is stipulated. With peerhood in place, Lackey’s view seems to entail that, contra appearances, Chad’s opinion, together with Beth’s, somehow counts for more than Beth’s opinion does alone. And if we add that Anna, too, is a peer of Beth and of Chad, then it seems to follow that you, the cheater, would have reason to favor Beth and Chad’s joint answer (not-p) over Anna’s answer (p) – even if you were certain that Chad got his answer directly from Beth.

Lackey offers an intriguing diagnosis of this result. She points out that the case is underdescribed. Though we know that Chad’s opinion was, in some sense, grounded in Beth’s, we are not told whether Chad was at all critical in his decision to endorse Beth’s opinion. Here, Lackey distinguishes what she calls autonomous and non-autonomous dependence:

The autonomous version of this dependence involves a subject exercising agency in her reliance on a source of information, critically assessing its reliability, monitoring for defeaters, and comparing the content of the belief that she forms with her background beliefs. This, I take it, is the minimum required for rational belief formation. (2013, p. 249)

It is worth noting that Lackey’s version of the principle is slightly different (p. 244): When A disagrees with peers B, C, and so on, with respect to a given question and A has already rationally taken into account the disagreement with B, A’s disagreement with C, and so on, requires doxastic revision for A only if the beliefs of C, and so on, are independent of B’s belief.

This version is more closely intertwined with the issue of disagreements involving shared evidence, for A must weigh the import of incoming opinions while maintaining her own point of view. In this paper, we set this complication to the side. Lackey’s arguments apply equally to both versions of the principle.
Applying this distinction to the case at hand presents two possibilities: Either Chad was autonomous in his reliance on Beth or he was not. Whichever way we go, Lackey thinks, we will not need to endorse anything like Belief Dependence for Peers to deliver the correct verdict.

First, suppose Chad was autonomous in his decision to copy Beth. So we can presume either that Chad engaged in some double-checking of Beth's answer or, at the very least, that he thought about whether Beth was a reliable source, prior to copying her. Consider each option in turn.

**Double checking**: If Chad engaged in a bit of double-checking before endorsing Beth's answer of \( \neg p \), then it seems plausible that his agreement does confer at least some additional support upon the answer they both favor. After all, Anna's answer was not double-checked, and it seems clear that a double-checked answer is a better bet than an un-double-checked one, from an outside point of view. So Chad's opinion must be providing some support of its own.

**Copying a vetted source**: What if Chad did not double-check Beth's answer, but did at least confirm Beth's reliability before resolving to trust her? Here, too, we can make it plausible that Chad's agreement should carry some epistemic weight. To see this, imagine, realistically, that your own reliability assessments of Anna and of Beth are less than certain: You have good reason to regard each as reliable, but you recognize that these assessments may be off base. Under these conditions, learning that Chad agreed with Beth is evidence that Chad assessed Beth's reliability favorably – which does seem to render their shared opinion at least slightly more credible than Anna's opinion. After all, we now have more evidence for Beth's reliability than we do for Anna's.

In either case, we find that – so long as Chad’s reliance on Beth was autonomous – Chad’s apparently dependent opinion seems still to have some epistemic significance. But what if Chad’s reliance on Beth was not autonomous? What if, to use Lackey’s term, Chad simply *parroted* Beth? Here, Lackey agrees that Chad’s opinion does not provide additional support for the position he and Beth share. But Lackey notes that we do not need to appeal to Belief Dependence for Peers to explain this. Since Chad is non-autonomous in his reliance on Beth, he would defer to her even if she were thoroughly unreliable; he would adopt her beliefs even if they were patently false. On this issue, Chad’s belief-forming process is manifestly irrational. And, for Lackey, this makes it the case that Chad is not a peer of Anna or Beth – in which case, the situation is irrelevant to the principle at

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36 One could object that, by making Chad’s reliance autonomous, we have rendered his opinion at least partially independent of Beth’s. I am sympathetic to this point of view; section 6 discusses an account of belief dependence that can deliver this result. However, I still see an intuitive sense in which Chad’s opinions still are dependent on Beth’s (e.g. causally), and, in this sense, Lackey’s verdict seems to be exactly right.
Lackey also considers what would happen if we stipulate that Anna and Beth are just as irrational as Chad. In such a case, she points out that none of their opinions would have much epistemic significance at all, for reasons that have little to do with belief dependence. The key point is that – no matter how we describe the case – we do not need to invoke anything like Belief Dependence for Peers to explain why Chad’s parroted opinion lacks epistemic significance.

The logic exam case seemed to illustrate the need for some kind of Belief Dependence principle. Taking into account Lackey’s insights, it is not clear that such a principle is needed to accommodate this case. More generally, it is tempting to think that we can get by without ever appealing to Belief Dependence – at least in cases involving epistemic peers. The next section discusses some reasons for thinking that we do still need a principle closely resembling Belief Dependence while respecting Lackey’s observations.

4 Rationality, Accuracy, and Dependence

There is something attractive about the argument discussed in the previous section. In many cases that seem, at first, to exhibit a problematic sort of belief dependence, the distinction between autonomous and non-autonomous dependence is an important one to draw. But the argument deserves a bit more scrutiny. In particular, it is important to note a way in which the argument depends on a particular conception of epistemic peerhood.

Christensen (2014) distinguishes two ways to think about epistemic peerhood: Two people are said to be rationality peers, with respect to some issue, if and only if they are equally likely to form rational beliefs about that issue; In contrast, two people are said to be accuracy peers, with respect to some issue, if and only if they are equally likely to form accurate beliefs about that issue (2014, p. 586).

Of course, these two notions will quite often coincide, since rational beliefs tend to be quite accurate. Rationality peers tend to be accuracy peers, and vice versa. But the two notions can come apart. Compare two math students – one who solves certain problems properly and correctly, and another who regularly commits a pair of errors that cancel each other out. The two students might well be accuracy peers (scoring equally well on exams, perhaps) without being rationality peers (since one of them makes so many mistakes).

Let us apply this distinction to one step of Lackey’s argument. Return to the case in

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37 One way to react to Lackey’s argument is to retreat to a weaker thesis: To the extent that one opinion is dependent on another, the dependent opinion provides less additional support for the jointly held proposition. Lackey rejects even this more cautious formulation of the position, suggesting that “the amount of doxastic revision required in the face of disagreement does not track the amount of independence possessed by the target belief” (p. 265). We set this issue aside, as, in the end, the paper will aim to salvage a position resembling the original, unweakened, Belief Dependence.
which Chad copies Beth non-autonomously. That is, he copies her opinion blindly – without any regard to her reliability and without any regard to the plausibility of the belief copied. Further, let’s suppose that Beth, unlike Chad, is quite rational and reliable in her thinking about the relevant sort of issues. Given these details, the intuition elicited is clear: Chad’s “parroted” opinion adds nothing to Beth’s.

Lackey’s answer to this case was to point out that Chad and Beth are not epistemic peers (rendering the case irrelevant to the principle under consideration). If we are thinking about rationality peerhood, then Lackey’s answer seems just right: Chad and Beth are not equally likely to form rational beliefs about the relevant issue. But, if instead we are thinking about accuracy peerhood, then we will have to say that Chad and Beth are epistemic peers, with respect to the relevant issue, since the two are bound to be equally accurate, given the setup. So the argument against Belief Dependence is unsuccessful, if an accuracy-based notion of peerhood is assumed.

Importantly, this observation need not be construed as a major objection to Lackey’s argument: Lackey goes in for a rationality-based notion of peerhood explicitly (2013, p. 243). But since some of the targets of her critique – such as Elga (2010) – do favor accuracy-based notions of peerhood, it is worth observing how both varieties of peerhood interact with belief dependence.

The first lesson, then, is that whether a Belief Dependence principle is required to explain ‘parrot cases’ will depend on which type of epistemic peerhood we employ. If we think in terms of rationality, then we may be able to explain why parroted opinions lack epistemic significance without appealing to any Belief Dependence principle. But if we think terms of accuracy, then such a principle does seem necessary to deliver the correct verdicts in such cases.

At this point, one might wonder: Are parrot cases the only cases that call for (or at least allow for) some kind of appeal to Belief Dependence in order to derive the intuitive verdict? If this is so, we may be able to get by without ever invoking this principle, simply by insisting on rationality-based measures of epistemic credibility. But as it turns out, there are cases that demand some kind of appeal to Belief Dependence which do not require us to think in terms of accuracy to appreciate their force.

5 The Indispensability of Belief Dependence
Consider the following (highly unrealistic) case.

**Chicken-Sexing:** A chicken-sexing heuristic is a reliable, but fallible method that can be used to discern the sex of a chicken by examining a certain superficial fact about how it looks or moves.

Dawn knows a heuristic – method A – that uses the chicken’s head movements as a guide. Millions of other people know a different heuristic – method B – that uses the
chicken’s strut as a guide. Everyone has equal evidence for the efficacy of their respective method. As it happens, both method A and method B are 90% reliable at determining a given chicken’s sex.

A chicken walks by. Dawn, using her method, judges it to be female. Everyone else, using the other method, looks at the same chicken and judges it to be male. You’re staring at the chicken and have no idea which sex it is. You do not know how to apply either method, but you do know all of the above information. How confident are you that the chicken is male?

Not 99.9999% confident, presumably. Despite that you have millions on one side and only one person on the other, it seems clear that the chicken could quite easily be male or female. Indeed, if we idealize the case so that both heuristics can never be misapplied, then, plausibly, we can make it reasonable for you to afford equal confidence to the female and male hypotheses.

We can give a quick argument for this result. Given the assumptions made, we can be certain that each heuristic was correctly applied. In this case, they produced divergent judgments. So we know that one of the heuristics gets this chicken wrong. Presumably, there are some chickens that are misclassified by method A but not by method B while there are other chickens that are misclassified by method B but not by method A. There must be about as many chickens in each of these groups – otherwise one of the two methods would be more reliable than the other. Absent any reason to suspect that the mystery chicken was pulled from one of these groups, it is reasonable to split one’s confidence equally between both options.

If we trust this result, it is worth exploring how it bears on the issue of belief dependence. For it is clear that all of the chicken-sexers in the story are epistemic peers with respect to chicken-sexing – both accuracy-wise and rationality-wise. If it were really true that numbers mattered, even in the absence of independence, then we would be forced to conclude that the male hypothesis was somehow more credible in the imagined situation. Since this is not a very plausible result, it seems that we will want to hold onto some version of Belief Dependence to explain what is going on in a case like this.

An opponent of Belief Dependence for Peers can push back against this case, though. The setup suggests that Dawn has some evidence for method A, while everyone else has evidence for method B. Doesn’t this imply that they have different evidence? And if so, wouldn’t this undermine the suggestion that the case is relevant to the principle in question (since the involved parties are not all epistemic peers)?

In response, there are two points worth making. First, it should be noted that one may be able to avoid this objection by revising the case. Suppose that all of the chicken-sexers have access to both heuristics, but, for whatever reason, Dawn uses method A, while the
others all use method B. So imagined, Dawn and her counterparts may well be peers, despite having used different methods on this occasion.

But leave this point aside. Even if we leave Dawn out of the story altogether, there still seems to be a clear need for some kind of Belief Dependence principle. For, compare two situations: in the first, we learn that millions of chicken-sexers (using method B) all judged the chicken to be male; in the second, we learn that a single chicken-sexer (using method B) judged the chicken to be male. If we again idealize so that method B can never be misapplied, is there any more support for the male hypothesis in the first situation? Clearly not. In both situations, it seems reasonable to have a confidence of .9 that the chicken is male. But this can be true only if the additional agreeing opinions confer no additional support.

No matter how you slice it, we need to be able to make sense of a certain sort of belief dependence – one that can render additional dependent opinions epistemically inert. The next section investigates the nature of this dependence.

6 Belief Dependence

6.1 An Expectational Account of Complete Dependence

Dependent beliefs do sometimes lack epistemic weight. In the chicken-sexing example, Dawn’s opinion is worth just as much as is the shared judgment of the many method B users. But an important question remains: In what sense are the opinions of the method B users really dependent? After all, their opinions are not necessarily causally dependent: These chicken-sexers may well have been causally isolated from one another, perhaps all discovering method B separately. Even if this condition is stipulated, the evidential import of their shared opinion does not change. So long as we know, in advance, that they are using the same method (and that the method cannot be misapplied), it seems to follow that their shared opinion should ‘count as one.’

If causal dependence is not what matters in these cases, where should we look instead? Here is one angle. In determining whether two sources are dependent in the relevant sense, what matters is not whether one causes the other, but rather, whether they

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38 The expectational account of dependence and independence discussed in the following sections are in broad agreement with remarks made by Jeffrey (1987, p. 392), Goldman (2001, pp. 99-101), and Elga (2010, p. 177). The task at hand is to develop a complete account of dependence, independence, and everything in between – along the way exposing a number of subtleties not discussed by these other authors.

39 In light of this observation, one might worry that the discussion in the previous section is unfair to Lackey’s position. But Lackey does not only want to reject causally-based dependence principles – for example, she examines and rejects Goldman’s account of dependence, which does not cast dependence in causal terms (pp. 257-260). And apart from questions about the details of Lackey’s view, it is important to emphasize the non-causal character of the type of belief dependence that can serve to render agreeing opinions evidentially inert.
should be expected, in advance, to reach the same conclusion.\(^4\) When Chad copies Beth’s answer uncritically, we can see in advance that the two students will come away with the same opinion. In the chicken-sexing example, too, we can see in advance that all of the method B users will issue the same judgment about the sex of the mystery chicken. The best way to capture the relevant sort of dependence should, I think, appeal to this observation. With this in mind, consider the following account.

**Complete Dependence:** C’s belief (about some proposition \(p\)) is completely dependent on B’s belief (about \(p\)) just in case, in advance, it is rational to be certain that C would arrive at his belief (about \(p\)) if B arrived at her belief (about \(p\)). When this condition is met, the two beliefs will together provide just as much evidence for or against \(p\) as would be provided by B’s belief, on its own.\(^4\)

It is worth pausing to clarify two key aspects of this view before applying it to the familiar cases we have examined. First, this account of complete dependence is expectational. It makes essential reference to what it would be rational for someone to predict, given certain information. So, on this view, whether a given belief is completely dependent on another will turn on what information an evaluator possesses.

Second, it is worth pointing out that there are different ways in which one belief can be dependent on another. Most commonly, complete dependence can occur when it can be seen in advance that two sources will inevitably agree about some proposition (e.g. when Chad blindly copies Beth). We can call this ordinary complete dependence. But, notably, complete dependence can also occur when it can be seen in advance that two sources will inevitably disagree about some proposition (e.g. when Chad the contrarian blindly negates all of Beth’s answers, perhaps – after all, knowing Beth’s opinion would still enable us to predict Chad’s opinion with certainty here). We can call this perverse complete dependence, since it is impossible for two sources to exhibit this kind of dependence and still both be reliable (that is, to answer correctly more than half the time). Though certain forms of perverse dependence will arise later on, ordinary complete dependence is more relevant to the cases we have examined.

**Chicken-Sexing:** Recall the chicken-sexing example. In assessing whether the joint opinion of the method B users should count for more than one of their opinions alone, we

\(^4\) Vavova’s (2014) paper makes a similar observation. There, Vavova argues that, other things equal, a dissenting opinion is significant to the extent that it is surprising.

\(^4\) It is worth clarifying what is meant by the qualifier “in advance”. The purpose of that provision is to block the following kind of reasoning: “Yes, I can predict Chad’s opinion with certainty, because I already know for a fact that he ultimately came to believe \(p\). So his opinion must be dependent on Beth’s.” The relevant assessment is supposed to be made in a way that sets aside (or “brackets”) information about what Chad actually concluded.
must ask: In advance, how likely was it that the method B users would all agree? Given the setup – in particular, given that their shared heuristic cannot be misapplied – it was certain that they would all arrive at the same verdict. So, this is a case of complete dependence – and for this reason, their shared opinion counts only as heavily as any one of their opinions would.42

Logic Exam – Blind copying: Recall the version of the logic exam case in which Chad blindly copies Beth. Chad adopts Beth’s opinion uncritically – without any regard to Beth’s reliability or to the plausibility of the opinion adopted. In assessing whether their jointly held opinion should count for more than Beth’s opinion alone, we must ask: In advance, how likely was it that Beth and Chad would agree? Given the setup, it was certain that Chad’s opinion would match Beth’s. This is another instance of (ordinary) complete dependence – for this reason, their shared opinion counts only as heavily as Beth’s would alone.

Each of the previous two examples clearly exhibits ordinary complete dependence. Considering Lackey’s variations on the simple copying example brings out important subtleties.

Logic Exam – Copying with double-checking: Recall the version of the logic exam case in which Chad copies Beth, but only after reflecting at least somewhat critically on the solution he steals from her. In assessing the significance of their shared opinion, we ask: In advance, how likely was it that they would agree? Here, there are two cases to consider.

On the one hand, we might know that when Chad double-checks a stolen answer, he never actually changes it. If we are aware of this fact, then this case is not importantly different from the blind copying case, for we will be able to see, in advance, that Chad and Beth will surely come away agreeing. Chad’s agreement would not confer any additional support.

On the other hand, we might know, somewhat more plausibly, that Chad does sometimes revise stolen answers during the double-checking process. Specifically, let us suppose that he has a 50% chance of discovering and correcting a mistake – when there is a mistake. Given this setup, we cannot be certain, in advance, that Beth and Chad will end up agreeing – since Beth may make a mistake, and Chad may find it. For this reason, Chad’s opinion is not completely dependent upon Beth’s, according to the expectational account. This explains why Chad’s agreement with Beth – if indeed they do end up agreeing – would have its own epistemic significance, as Lackey rightly suggests.

42 Additionally, it is worth noting that even if we had learned about the details of the setup after learning about the distribution of opinions, we would still have equal reason to regard this as a case of complete dependence. Once we are in possession of all relevant information, we can see that the method B users were, in advance, sure to arrive at the same conclusion.
Logic Exam – Copying from a vetted source: Finally, recall what might seem to be a problematic version of the logic exam case. In this version, Chad copies Beth without double-checking Beth’s answer at all. However, Chad’s deference is not totally blind, as he does assess Beth’s reliability in general before resolving to copy her answer. At first, it seems that this case is quite problematic for the account being considered. Given the setup, we can see in advance that Beth and Chad will come away agreeing. Nonetheless, as Lackey points out, it is intuitive that we would gain additional reason to trust Beth’s answer after learning that Chad agreed with her. Isn’t this a problem?

Despite appearances, this case actually confirms the expectational account of complete dependence. There are two versions of this case. In both, we know, going in, that Chad will assess Beth’s general reliability, resolving to copy her answer if his assessment is a favorable one. In one version of the case, though, we do not know, in advance, how Chad’s reliability assessment turned out. In the other version, we know, going in, that Chad did deem Beth reliable. Let us discuss each version in turn.

In the first version, Chad’s agreement with Beth tells us something important. It gives us some evidence that Chad did assess Beth favorably. This is epistemically significant, and it may well provide additional support for Beth’s answer, as Lackey suggests. But notice that the dependence condition is not satisfied in this case: Given the information we had, in advance, we could not be sure that Beth and Chad would end up with the same opinion. Chad might have deemed Beth unreliable, in which case the two could have disagreed. Since there was some probability of disagreement between Beth and Chad, their opinions are not completely dependent. Chad’s agreement – should he agree – can and does confer additional support.

In the second version, we know in advance that Chad vetted Beth and found her to be trustworthy. This version does meet the condition provided: Given the setup, we can see in advance that Beth and Chad will inevitably agree. According to the view under consideration, it would seem to follow that Chad’s agreement should not confer additional support upon Beth’s answer. But this turns out to be the appropriate result. To be sure, Chad is providing us with a reason to be more confident of Beth’s answer. But what is doing the work is Chad’s favorable assessment of Beth – not Chad’s agreement with her. And, importantly, these two bits of information can be pulled apart: Chad might be sick and miss the exam (and so he might never actually come to agree with Beth). Nonetheless, so long as we know that Chad assessed Beth favorably, we would have some reason to place more confidence in Beth’s answer. Whether Chad happens to be healthy on the day of the exam (and is therefore able to copy Beth’s answer) is evidentially inert. So the expectational account handles this case effectively.
6.2 Tricky Cases – Group Dependence and Noisy Copying

Though the expectational account of dependence has been able to handle the cases considered so far, we must pause to deal with a pair of troublesome complications. First, consider the following case, which involves dependence upon a group.

**Group Dependence:** Before answering a logic problem, Dawn surveys the answers of her reliable friends – Anna, Beth, and Chad – who all work independently. In the end, Dawn comes to believe whichever answer is most popular among her three friends.

Given the setup, Dawn’s opinion is not completely dependent on Anna’s, nor on Beth’s, nor on Chad’s. After all, her opinion cannot be predicted (with certainty) purely on the basis of any single friend’s opinion. And, given the setup, it is clear that Dawn is, in general, reliable. Indeed, she may be the most reliable member of her group. So Dawn’s opinion is not completely dependent on any other opinion, and she is reliable in general. Still, her opinion is worthless, so long as the other three opinions are already known. Provided we know, in advance, how Dawn operates, learning her opinion tells us nothing new.

What this shows is that an opinion can be completely dependent on the opinions of a group without being completely dependent on the individual opinion of any one group member. This type of dependence is expectational, just as individual dependence is: One’s opinion is completely dependent upon the opinions of some group if it can be predicted with certainty, given full knowledge of the opinions of all group members. So Dawn’s opinion is completely dependent upon the group opinion, and this is why it does not provide additional evidence.

The second complication can be illustrated by way of an example involving a type of dependence that is mixed with random noise.

**Noisy Copying:** Before answering a logic problem, Chad rolls a fair, six-sided die. If the result is anything other than a six, Chad copies Beth’s answer. If the result is a six, Chad “anti-copies” Beth (i.e. goes with the opposite of whatever Beth put down).

Given the setup, Chad’s opinion is not completely dependent on Beth’s. After all, his opinion cannot be predicted (with certainty) solely on the basis of Beth’s opinion. And, given the setup, it is clear that Chad is reliable: ⅖ of the time, he copies Beth; ⅕ of the time, he anti-copies her. On balance, Chad will be right more than he is wrong. So Chad’s opinion is not completely dependent on Beth’s, and he is reliable in general. Still, his opinion is worthless, so long as Beth’s opinion is already known. Provided we know, in ad-

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43 Thanks to an anonymous referee for posing questions that illustrated the need for this section’s inclusion.

44 This fact relates closely to the Condorcet’s (1785) jury theorem.
vance, how Chad operates, learning his opinion tells us only whether he rolled a six with his die, which is not relevant to the issue at hand.45

What the preceding example illustrates is that an additional opinion can be evidentially worthless even when it is not completely dependent and comes from a generally reliable source. This should not trouble us. Broadly speaking, an additional opinion can be evidentially worthless for either of two reasons. First, it may come from an untrustworthy source (that is, a source whose opinion is not an indicator of the truth). Second, it may be dependent on opinions that are already known. The interesting upshot of the Noisy copying case is that an opinion can suffer from a mixture of these defects. In such cases, the opinion in question will not provide any additional evidence. So, in effect, Chad’s opinion contains information about two sources – Beth and the die. Beth’s opinion is already known, and the die’s “opinion” isn’t relevant.

To conclude this section, it will be instructive to consider an example that combines group dependence and noisy copying.

Random Copying: Before answering a logic problem, Chad flips a coin. If the result is heads, he copies Anna (whose opinions are right 90% of the time); if the result is tails, he copies Beth (whose opinions are also right 90% of the time, and whose opinions sometimes differ from Anna’s).46

Given the setup, Chad is reliable. Like Anna and Beth, Chad’s opinions will be true 90% of the time. And, given the setup, Chad’s opinion is not completely dependent on Anna’s or Beth’s, nor is his opinion completely dependent on the group. After all, his opinion cannot be predicted (with certainty) solely on the basis of information about either or both of their opinions. However, Chad’s opinion is still evidentially worthless, so long as Anna’s and Beth’s opinions are already known. Why? Chad’s opinion carries information about three things – Anna’s opinion, Beth’s opinion, and the result of the coin flip. Anna’s opinion and Beth’s opinion are known, and the coin flip isn’t relevant.

In this section, we have seen that, by analyzing dependence expectationally, we can accommodate a wide range of cases – parrot cases, cases of autonomous copying, cases involving people that employ identical methods, cases involving randomness, and cases involving dependence on groups. But, a wider project remains. The sorts of cases we have so far examined comprise only a small portion of the cases we might encounter in real life. Sometimes, the evidential value of an incoming opinion might be diminished, but not entirely eliminated, in light of other opinions we already know. A full treatment of belief

45 It is worth noting that while Chad’s opinion is worthless, given Beth’s, the reverse is not true. Just as it can be helpful to obtain an original document, even after you have in hand a photocopy, it could be helpful to learn of Beth’s opinion even after you are aware of Chad’s.

46 Thanks to an anonymous referee for proposing a version of this example.
dependence should do more than describe when an opinion is worthless; it should tell us just how much additional are opinions are worth. The remaining sections of this paper take preliminary steps toward completing this wider project.

7 Belief Independence

7.1 An Expectational Account of Complete Independence

The previous section observes that two beliefs are completely dependent when, in effect, learning one belief tells you what the other is. In turn, we might be tempted to conclude that two beliefs are completely independent just in case information about the content of one of them tells you nothing at all about the likely content of the other. (Note that under ordinary circumstances, separate coin flips will have this very same property.)

But while this condition may capture an important kind of independence, it cannot be the kind of independence we are seeking. Why? Because the beliefs of sufficiently reliable thinkers will never ever meet this condition.47 To see this, suppose that Beth and Chad are known to be highly reliable: Each tends to answer correctly ⅖ of the time. From this alone, it follows that their judgments will be well correlated, in a certain sense: They will reach the same conclusion at least ⅔ of the time. And, therefore, information about the content of, say, Chad’s beliefs will tell us a lot about the likely content of Beth’s beliefs – solely because they are both so reliable.

Still, this incomplete approach serves as a helpful step toward the goal of characterizing complete independence of the salient kind. There are two kinds of cases we would like to be able to distinguish: On the one hand, there are cases in which Beth and Chad are correlated because one is copying the other, or because they are applying relevantly similar heuristics; on the other, there are cases in which Beth and Chad are correlated only because they are both reliable. The latter case is one of complete independence. With this observation in mind, we can offer the following.

Complete Independence: C’s belief (about some proposition p) is completely independent of B’s belief (about p) just in case:

(1) In advance, on the supposition that p is true, learning that B arrived at his belief (about p) does not raise or lower the probability that C will arrive at her belief (about p).

(2) In advance, on the supposition that p is false, learning that B arrived at his belief (about p) does not raise or lower the probability that C will arrive at her belief (about p).

When these conditions are met, the two beliefs – as long as B and C are reliable – pro-

47 This point should be attributed to Jeffrey (1987, p. 392). Goldman (2001, p. 101, fn. 18), citing Jeffrey, also emphasizes this point.
vide more evidence than is provided by either belief, on its own.

Let’s take a look at a few variations on the usual example to see how this condition can be applied and to see just how much agreeing independent beliefs are worth.

7.2 Variations on the Two-Person Case

Suppose that Beth and Chad each answer correctly $\frac{5}{6}$ of the time. And suppose that we learn that Beth arrived at $p$. At this point, our confidence in the truth of $p$ is $\frac{5}{6}$. Suppose that we are about to learn of Chad’s answer, and we are wondering: If Chad ends up agreeing with Beth, how much should our confidence in $p$ increase?

To answer this, we must assess whether Chad’s belief is completely independent of Beth’s. For simplicity, let’s suppose that $p$ is true.\(^4\) In effect, we want to know how (if at all) the fact that Beth answered correctly bears on the probability that Chad will answer correctly. Given the setup, the probability that Chad gets it right would seem to be $\frac{5}{6}$. When we take into account the fact that Beth answered correctly, does the probability of Chad’s success change?

Of course, here it will depend on what else we know about Chad and Beth. Obviously, if we know that Chad blindly copies Beth always, then Chad’s probability of success increases from $\frac{5}{6}$ to 1. In other cases, the path forward may be less obvious. Suppose we know that neither Beth nor Chad copies off the other. However, we also know that their teacher tends to teach certain topics extremely clearly and effectively, while teaching other topics somewhat confusingly. As a result, all the students tend to get the same problems right/wrong. In this case, too, learning that Beth got a given problem right would raise the probability that Chad also got it right (though it would not guarantee Chad’s success). After all, if Beth answered correctly, the question is more likely to have been about the well-taught material, in which case, Chad is more likely to have answered correctly. So here, Chad’s opinion would not be completely independent of Beth’s.

One might wonder, then: Under what conditions would Chad’s opinion be independent of Beth’s? Let’s suppose that we have elaborate track records for both students. Suppose we survey all of the cases in which Beth answered correctly and find that, in those cases, Chad answered correctly $\frac{5}{6}$ of the time. Here, we would have good reason to think that the information about Beth’s having answered correctly has no bearing on Chad’s probability of success. So in this case, Chad’s opinion would be completely independent of Beth’s.

But we aren’t done. We began this section trying to determine how much the agreement of completely independent thinkers is worth. In this case, we want to know how much support for $p$ Chad’s completely independent agreement would provide. Recall that

\(^4\) Strictly, to assess independence, we would have to consider the case where $p$ is false, in addition. But in most cases (including the one at hand), it suffices to consider just one of the two cases.
our all-things-considered confidence in $p$ started out at $\%$, given only the fact that Beth arrived at $p$. Supposing that Chad independently comes to agree with Beth, how much should our confidence in $p$ increase? There are two possibilities: Either they both are right (in which case $p$ is true), or they both are wrong (in which case $p$ is false). How likely is each of these options? Because their opinions are independent, the probability that both are right is $\% \times \%$ (which is equal to 25/36). The probability that both are wrong is simply $\% \times \%$ (which is equal to 1/36). Since these are the only two possibilities, the final probability that both are right is 25/26 (which is approximately .96). And because $p$ is true if and only if they’re both right, this result should be our new confidence in $p$. So our confidence in $p$ increases from about .83 to about .96 after we learn of Chad’s independent agreeing belief. More generally, the agreement of reliable, completely independent sources will always be worth more than that of completely dependent sources.

7.3 Returning to the Random Copying Case

Here, it will be instructive to consider and respond to an objection, as the discussion may help to illustrate how the independence constraint outlined above is to be applied. The objection appeals to a certain version of the Random Copying case. In that example, Chad copies Anna when his coin lands heads and copies Beth when his coin lands tails. (Anna and Beth answer correctly 90% of the time, and answer independently from one another.) To make things somewhat more difficult, let’s suppose that Anna and Beth in fact disagree – Anna believes $p$, and Beth believes not-$p$. Will Chad’s opinion carry additional evidential weight? As we observed earlier, it is clear that Chad’s opinion shouldn’t carry any weight at all in this case. But it is not obvious that the proposed picture can deliver this result.50

Here is the tension. First, it seems clear that Chad is reliable, in a certain sense. He arrives at his views by randomly copying either of two very reliable sources. Second, it seems clear that Chad’s opinions are completely independent of the other opinions, in the expectational sense put forward previously. For, given that Anna and Beth disagree, Chad’s probability of answering correctly seems to be 50%, regardless of whatever new information is introduced. If indeed it is true that Chad is reliable and that his opinions are completely independent, the expectational account would say that his opinions are worth something, even after Anna’s and Beth’s opinions are known. Which they’re not.

The problem with the foregoing reasoning is an incongruity between the assessment of Chad as generally reliable and the judgment that his probability of answering correctly
is 50%. There are two ways of thinking about the case. Both are acceptable, and both have the consequence that Chad’s opinion is worthless. But we mustn’t mix and match.

If we take it to be part of the background of the case that Anna and Beth disagree, then Chad’s opinion should not be seen as reliable. For Chad will answer correctly only when his coin leads him to defer to the accurate source, which will be half the time. On this way of looking at things, Chad’s opinion is indeed completely independent of Anna’s and Beth’s. But his opinion still lacks significance simply because it is unreliable.

On the other hand, suppose we do not take Anna’s disagreement with Beth to be a background assumption. On this construal, Chad’s opinion seems clearly to be reliable: He will answer correctly 90% of the time. But, on this version of the case, in assessing whether information about Anna’s opinion and/or Beth’s opinion changes the probability that Chad answers correctly, we must take 90% as Chad’s baseline. If we start out thinking that Chad’s probability of success is 90%, and then we learn Anna and Beth reached different conclusions, our estimate of Chad’s probability will fall drastically (to 50%).

On this version of the case, Chad’s opinion turns out not to be completely independent. So the expectational account does not force us to say, implausibly, that Chad’s copied opinion has epistemic significance.

### 8 Partial Dependence

So far, we have seen how to understand complete dependence and complete independence. But this still leaves out a lot of cases. And, it turns out that considering these cases – cases of partial dependence – introduces some interesting complications.

We have seen that the agreement of reliable, completely independent sources provides more evidence than is provided by the agreement of comparably reliable, completely dependent sources. For this reason, it is tempting to conclude that the value of partially dependent agreement falls somewhere in between these extremes. And, often, this will be true. But not always. Certain forms of partial dependence can actually render the agreement of reliable sources even more valuable than that of comparably reliable completely independent sources. To see this, we will start with a simple case, where the evidential value of partially dependent agreement does land in between that of completely dependent and completely independent agreement. Next, we will consider the more unusual sort of case.

The following case can be described as ‘two against two’ – with two completely inde-

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51 Strictly speaking, the expectational constraint outlined earlier describes what it takes for one opinion to be completely independent of another. To assess whether an opinion is completely independent of multiple opinions, we simply examine whether knowledge of the multiple opinions has any bearing on the content of the first opinion (supposing that the proposition in question is true, and supposing that the proposition in question is false).
dependent sources believing one thing, and two partially dependent sources believing the opposite. Suppose that Beth and Chad – who, as usual, each answer correctly \( \frac{3}{4} \) of the time – occasionally copy each other (and are therefore partially dependent). In addition, suppose that Dawn and Eric also happen to be in the same logic class. Dawn and Eric are undercover logicians, so, for any question, they know what the right answer is. But in order to keep their identities secret, they answer incorrectly \( \frac{1}{6} \) of the time by using a six-sided die. Each keeps a personal die and answers incorrectly whenever ‘6’ is rolled – so Dawn’s and Eric’s answers are completely independent.

You are sitting in the center of all four of them, and you know all of the above information. On this particular problem, you can see that Beth and Chad arrived at \( p \), while Dawn and Eric both arrived at \( \neg p \). You do not know anything about this logic problem, and you did not see the dice that were discreetly rolled. Which answer should you go with? As it turns out, the kind of partial dependence exhibited by Beth and Chad renders their shared belief less significant than the shared opinion of Dawn and Eric, which makes it reasonable for you to be more confident of \( \neg p \). A simple argument can show this.

We know that something somewhat unlikely happened. Either Beth and Chad both arrived at the wrong answer, or else two fair dice both came up ‘6.’ Which of these is more likely? The second possibility involves the coincidence of two unlikely events, which have no bearing on one another – Dawn’s rolling ‘6,’ and Eric’s rolling ‘6’. The first possibility, in contrast, involves the coincidence of two unlikely events that frequently tend to coincide – Beth’s erring and Chad’s erring. Because one sometimes copies off of the other, it is – relatively speaking – not that uncommon for Beth and Chad to get the same problem wrong. This is the better explanation of what we have observed, so Dawn and Eric’s answer of \( \neg p \) is more likely to be correct. So, in this case, the agreement of partially dependent sources was not worth as much as that of comparably reliable, completely independent sources.

If we were to take this example as a guide, we might well conclude that the agreement of completely independent sources is always worth more than that of comparably reliable partially dependent sources. But, as noted earlier, this turns out not to be the case. Partial dependence, like complete dependence, comes in two main varieties: Ordinary partial dependence obtains whenever two sources agree more often than comparably reliable independent sources would. Perverse partial dependence obtains when two sources agree less often than comparably reliable independent sources would. In the example above, the dependence between Beth’s and Chad’s beliefs took the ordinary form: They agreed with each other more often Dawn and Eric do. But, one might wonder, what would happen if two reliable sources exhibited partial perverse dependence? How much would the agreement of two reliable contrarians be worth? Intriguingly, it turns out that the agreement of such thinkers is worth more than that of even completely independent sources.
Suppose that Beth and Chad are contrarians, always looking for opportunities to disagree with one another. But they do not always disagree: On the whole, each is right \( \frac{5}{6} \) of the time – so they still must agree quite often. However, let’s suppose that they disagree as much as they possibly could, given their reliability: \( \frac{2}{3} \) of the time, they agree and are both correct; the other \( \frac{1}{3} \) of the time, they end up disagreeing, with Beth’s being correct in exactly half of those remaining cases (so each is still wrong \( \frac{1}{6} \) of the time overall). Given this setup, it follows that Chad and Beth never agree on a wrong answer: At least one of them is always right. Immediately, it follows that their agreement is quite valuable. Given the setup, it is clear that, when these two do agree, we can be totally certain that their answer is correct.

One may wonder about what sort of lesson should be taken from this observation. For one thing, the example is unrealistic: After all, how often can we be totally sure, in advance, that two thinkers could not both settle on the wrong conclusion? This seems to me to be a fair complaint. In response, it is worth noting that even if an extreme case like the one described is unlikely to crop up in real life (that is, a case where agreement guarantees truth), milder instances of the same phenomenon (reliable sources exhibiting perverse partial dependence) almost certainly do. Imagine, for example, that Chad and Beth are not contrarians, but instead have complementary skill sets – such that they almost never make mistakes in the same area. This does not seem unrealistic, and (depending on the details) it could be that the two rarely, if ever, agree upon wrong answers – because every question falls in an area where at least one of them is quite strong. In such a case, it would be reasonable for us to be quite confident of any answers the two do agree about. While perverse dependence (of reliable sources) may be somewhat rarer than ordinary dependence, it still seems worth taking seriously.

The following table summarizes the observations made in these last few sections. The table assumes, where applicable, that each person answers correctly \( \frac{5}{6} \) of the time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Type of dependence</th>
<th>Confidence after learning Beth’s opinion</th>
<th>Confidence after learning of both opinions when they agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chad always copies Beth</td>
<td>ordinary complete dependence</td>
<td>( \sim .83 )</td>
<td>( \sim .83 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad sometimes copies Beth</td>
<td>ordinary partial dependence</td>
<td>( \sim .83 )</td>
<td>between ( \sim .83 ) and ( \sim .96 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dice-rolling logicians Dawn/Eric</td>
<td>complete independence</td>
<td>( \sim .83 )</td>
<td>( \sim .96 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad/Beth have complementary skill sets</td>
<td>perverse partial dependence</td>
<td>( \sim .83 )</td>
<td>between ( \sim .96 ) and 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To conclude this section, it will be useful to look at another toy example to see how these observations can be applied to realistic situations. Though we cannot say anything hard and fast about many real-world cases, the understanding of dependence and independence that has been developed here may help to highlight the kinds of questions that are relevant, in thinking about the degree of support outside opinions provide.

**Moved by Argument:** Suppose that Beth and Chad agree because Beth came up with an argument and Chad found it convincing. And suppose that they disagree with Anna, who has her own argument, but has not yet tried it on anyone. How much of a boost does Chad’s agreement provide?

To simplify matters, a first assumption to make is that Anna, Beth, and Chad are reliable – and equally so – with respect to the disputed topic. Obviously, if the topic is, say, politics, or philosophy, or religion, then questions of a person’s reliability will be quite difficult, if not impossible, to settle. But such assumptions are necessary if we are to say anything substantive about how the issue of dependence interacts with cases like these.

The next questions to ask concern dependence, particularly that between Beth and Chad: First, if Beth had offered a good argument, how likely is it that Chad would have been persuaded? Second, if Beth had offered a bad argument, how likely is it that Chad would have been persuaded? In answering these questions, we can’t use the fact that Chad ended up agreeing with Beth – since these questions are to be evaluated in advance of their agreement. However, we can use certain facts about the people involved. If, for example, Beth is known to be especially charismatic, or if Chad tends to be a contrarian around Beth, then our answers to the above questions should accommodate these data. To the extent that we expected, in advance, that Beth would surely convince Chad (no matter how good or bad her argument was), Chad’s agreement will add little credibility to the proposition they jointly hold. So Anna’s position and Beth’s/Chad’s position will be on a par, epistemically. To the extent that we expected, in advance, that Chad could well have disagreed with Beth (despite being just as reliable as she) Chad’s agreement will make their position more credible – and it will be reasonable to place more confidence in it than in Anna’s position. The size of the advantage that Beth’s and Chad’s shared view enjoys over Anna’s view will depend (in part) upon how likely it was that Chad would have disagreed.

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52 If Chad always anti-copies Beth, then the two will never agree. Moreover, if Beth’s reliability is % in such a case, then Chad’s reliability will necessarily be only %. So the anti-copying case is incompatible with the setup.
8 Application to Credences

So far, we have only talked about dependence and independence exhibited by beliefs. But some epistemologists prefer to think and talk in terms of credences (degrees of confidence), rather than in terms of all-or-nothing beliefs. Within this framework, one should consider the question of how the credences of others should affect one’s own credences.\(^\text{53}\) A complete answer to this question would include some treatment of dependence and independence. So it is well worth pointing out that the expectational account of dependence and independence discussed in the previous sections can be applied to a framework that uses credences in place of beliefs – with minimal modifications. Here are suitably modified versions of the principles earlier presented.

**Complete Dependence for Credences:** C’s credence of \(c\) (in some proposition \(p\)) is completely dependent on B’s credence of \(b\) (in \(p\)) just in case it is rational to be certain, in advance, that C will have a credence of \(c\) (in \(p\)) if B has a credence of \(b\) (in \(p\)). When this condition is met, the two credences provide just as much evidence for or against \(p\) as is provided by B’s credence, on its own.

**Complete Independence for Credences:** C’s credence of \(c\) (in some proposition \(p\)) is completely independent of B’s credence of \(b\) (in \(p\)) just in case:

1. On the supposition that \(p\) is true, the fact that B has credence \(b\) in \(p\) does not raise or lower the probability that C will have credence \(c\) in \(p\).
2. On the supposition that \(p\) is false, the fact that B has credence \(b\) in \(p\) does not raise or lower the probability that C will have credence \(c\) in \(p\).

When these conditions are met, the credences of reliable sources provide more evidence than is provided by either credence, on its own.

Applying the first of these principles to an example will help to bring out an important feature of the expectational account – a feature we largely ignored in our earlier discussion.

To the usual logic exam setup, we add the following details. Beth’s confidence in her answers is sometimes .9, and never higher. The answers she has .9 confidence in are the answers she is most sure about. And, Beth always makes a written note of her exact credence next to whichever answer she selects. Chad can see Beth’s notes and uses the following procedure: When he sees that Beth is at her highest level of .9, he simply copies her answer, coming to have a .9 credence in that answer as well; but when he sees that

\(^{53}\) For a general theory of how to aggregate credences, see Easwaran et al (2016). They do not discuss the kind of dependence we have focused on. For this reason, the expectational account of dependence and independence developed here may serve to complement to their well developed view.
Beth is somewhere below .9, he works through the problem himself, and comes to have a credence of .8 in whichever answer he arrives at.

With these details in place, one might ask: Do Chad’s opinions provide evidence beyond that provided by Beth’s opinions? Answer: It depends. On the one hand, if Beth and Chad both end up with a credence of .9 in some proposition \( p \), then, according to the expectational account, Chad’s opinion is completely dependent on Beth’s – and, therefore, it provides no additional evidence for \( p \). On the other hand, if Beth and Chad both end up with a credence of only .8 in \( p \), then Chad’s opinion would provide some additional support for \( p \) beyond that provided by Beth’s credence. What this package of observations illustrates is that opinions, rather than sources, are what should be assessed for dependence or independence, in a given case. One specific opinion can be completely dependent on another even when the sources of those opinions sometimes arrive at their views independently. In a similar vein, one specific opinion can be completely independent of another, even when the source of that opinion sometimes copies the other source. Though it is sometimes useful to speak of “the agreement of dependent/independent sources” to summarize general observations, it is important to remember that, strictly speaking, opinions, not sources, are the proper unit of analysis.

9 Conclusion

In some sense, it is clear that the numbers count. That is, it is clear the number of thinkers on a given side of a disputed issue is typically relevant to the degree of support their opinions provide. It has often been suggested that the extent to which these opinions are dependent or independent also has substantial epistemic import in such situations. In this paper, we have seen how to characterize the type of dependence that can play this role. Though many cases that illustrate the operative phenomenon tend to involve dependence of a causal variety, we have seen that dependence of the relevant kind should be understood expectationally, not causally – though causal relations are a particularly salient way of producing expectational dependence. Additionally, we have seen that we can make sense of expectational dependence regardless of whether we think in terms of credences or in terms of all-or-nothing beliefs. Though in any real-life circumstance, applying the account discussed will inevitably be an inexact science, a greater understanding of the nature of the relevant kind of dependence and independence puts us in a position to understand better how and when the numbers count.

References


— (forthcoming) “Disagreement, Drugs, etc.: From Accuracy to Akrasia,” Episteme.
Justified Moral Ignorance

Abstract: What should someone do when the opinions of others make it rational for her to be confident of a false (and potentially dangerous) moral view? Should she do what the rationally held view would recommend? Or should she act against the view she believes in? The paper argues that a person should sometimes act against her moral convictions in cases like this. One might worry that the proposed picture (“Act against your moral beliefs when your views are in fact false”) makes moral requirements unfollowable. I consider various ways of developing this worry and find none that is successful. On the proposed picture, moral requirements are followable in a robust sense and are no less followable than on any plausible rival picture.

1 Introduction
We are not infallible moral thinkers. Sometimes, we are wrong about what morality permits or requires. This fact presents interesting and difficult questions concerning what a person should do when her moral beliefs are inaccurate.\(^\text{54}\) Two examples serve to make the issue vivid.

**Vikram’s Dilemma:** Vikram observes strict religious protocol. Raised a Sikh, Vikram believes that one should never remove one’s turban in public – even in an emergency. An emergency arises: A young boy is injured and is rapidly losing blood, and Vikram’s turban is the only thing that can be used to cover the wound. Wrapping the boy’s wound would improve his prospects. Vikram wants to help, but he sincerely believes that removing his turban would be morally wrong. What should Vikram do?\(^\text{55}\)

**Huck’s Dilemma:** Huck Finn – a boy portrayed as an ignorant but good person – helps a slave named ‘Jim’ escape. As they float together on a raft, Huck experiences what he thinks of as pangs of conscience: He wonders if he is doing something wrong – stealing from Miss Watson. Upon deliberation, Huck concludes that helping Jim is wrong. The next day, a golden opportunity to turn Jim in arises. What should Huck do?\(^\text{56}\)

Should the protagonists of these examples act in accordance with the moral principles

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\(^\text{55}\) Leask, Anna “Sikh puts religious rule aside to help boy,” *New Zealand Herald* (16 May 2015).

\(^\text{56}\) Adapted from Arpaly (2015, pp. 141-142), who has put this example to use on several occasions. See Arpaly (2002, 2003), as well as Arpaly and Schroeder (1999, 2014). The example owes to Bennett (1974), who is inspired by Mark Twain’s novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. 

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they deem correct? Or should they act against the principles they believe in?

Set aside, for the moment, any concerns about the questionable epistemic status of Vikram’s and of Huck’s moral beliefs. Suppose we fill out the examples so that both people are epistemically justified in believing as they do. With this provision in place, a certain conflict arises. On the one hand, there is some pressure to say that Vikram and Huck should do what is, in fact, right (i.e. that Vikram should help the child and that Huck should help Jim). If they do otherwise, someone could get hurt. On the other hand, if we say that Vikram and Huck are required to act against their well-supported beliefs about what they should do, we seem to be holding them to an unfollowable standard. There is some tension here.

This paper confronts these issues, ultimately arguing for what has been called a “mismatch” view. The idea, as applied to Vikram’s Dilemma, is that Vikram should (morally) remove his turban, though he should (epistemically) believe that this course of action is wrong. After outlining some merits of the proposal, the paper considers one of its potential weaknesses – that it renders moral requirements “unfollowable,” in some important sense. The paper distinguishes two standards of followability to which a rule can be held. The mismatch view meets the weaker standard and fails to meet the stronger one. However, the paper argues that the stronger standard would also disqualify the mismatch view’s chief competitor. So the view suffers from no disadvantage, with respect to followability.

2 More Than One ‘Should’

Here is one way of putting the paper’s central question: Should Vikram do what he deems ‘right’? Or should he do what really is right? Framed this way, the question is somewhat confusing: If removing his turban really is the right thing to do, then doesn’t it follow immediately that Vikram should do it? Where’s the difficulty?

The problem is that there may be multiple senses of ‘should.’ An opponent might reply: “Yes, there is a certain sense in which Vikram should remove his turban. But there is also a very important sense in which Vikram should keep it on.” This picture corresponds to Andrew Sepielli’s “uncertaintism” (so called because it sees moral uncertainty as morally relevant):

Like most everyone, I think that what we should do is a matter of which [moral view is] cor-

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57 Whether this is possible is a controversial matter. See Guerrero (2007), McGrath (2009), Harman (2011, pp. 460-463), and Wieland (2015) for discussion of closely related issues.

58 Titelbaum (2015, p. 279). Arpaly and Schroeder (1999) coin the term “inverse akrasia” to refer to someone who does right while believing she’s doing wrong. They argue that the inverse akratic is praiseworthy.

59 At this level of description, the view agrees with Weatherston (2015, ms.), as well as Harman (2011, 2015, ms.). This paper explores some new ways of defending this package of views.
rect. But I also think that what we should do depends on the chances of views like these being correct, regardless of which [views] are, in fact, correct. I do not regard these claims as inconsistent, for in making the first claim, I am using “should” in what’s often called its “objective” sense; in making the second, I am using “should” in one of its “subjective” senses.60 (2016, p. 2952)

According to uncertaintism, objective and subjective moral requirements come apart in cases like Vikram’s.61 Objectively, Vikram should remove his turban, because the principle that one should never remove one’s turban in public is not true. But, subjectively, Vikram should keep his turban on, because, from Vikram’s perspective, the principle has a high probability of being true.62

In the objective sense, all sides can agree that Vikram should remove his turban. But the subjective question is more controversial. Compare Elizabeth Harman’s “actualism” (so called because it privileges whichever moral theory is actually correct – irrespective of one’s moral beliefs):

A person’s moral beliefs and moral credences are... irrelevant to how she (subjectively) should act. How a person (subjectively) should act... depends solely on her non-moral beliefs and credences. (2015, p. 58)

According to the actualist, Vikram should remove his turban – both objectively and subjectively. Vikram’s moral beliefs are not relevant to either requirement. So, evidently, actualism and uncertaintism differ with respect to what, subjectively, someone like Vikram should do.

Of course, the two sides do not just disagree about Vikram. They disagree about how

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60 At the end of the passage, Sepielli adds the following footnote: “To be clear: I am not simply defining the various senses of ‘should’ here, but rather making stronger claims about how, as a matter of substantive moral theory, these senses apply.”

61 Not everyone is willing to accept the subjective/objective distinction uncritically. Some hold that only one of these senses of ‘should’ is legitimate; others hold that there are more than two legitimate senses. See Kolodny and MacFarlane (2010) or Pittard and Worsnip (2017) for views that reject the subjective/objective distinction, as I’ve outlined it here. The appeal to the distinction is helpful to illustrate Sepielli’s uncertaintist view, and much of the paper uses the same language. However, questions about the three desiderata presented on p. 6 can be asked quite apart from the distinction, and the paper’s arguments about which of the views better captures these desiderata do not depend upon the distinction in any way.

62 If it seems implausible that Vikram could ever be justified in having confidence in this moral principle, we can modify the case. Weatherson (ms.) considers an example of a person who is justified in believing that one should never tell a lie on the basis of testimony from brilliant Kantian philosophers. Then she must decide whether to lie to save the life of her friend. Arpaly (2015) also considers a similar case. Though some authors have suggested that one can never be justified in believing a false moral view, this view is non-standard, and we set it aside here. See Guerrero (2007), Mcgrath (2009), Harman (2011, 2015, ms.).
the subjective ‘should’ operates more generally. In effect, the uncertaintist and the actualist are both offering their own versions of the subjective ‘should.’ It will be helpful to juxtapose them.  

**Uncertaintism:** A person should do what she justifiably believes to be right.  

**Actualism:** A person should do what is recommended by her beliefs about the descriptive facts combined with the facts about what is right.

According to uncertaintism, what someone should do is purely a function of her justified moral beliefs. For this reason, we can think of the uncertaintist norm as the pure subjective ‘should’. According to actualism, what someone should do is, in a way, anchored to the moral facts. For this reason, we can think of the actualist norm as the anchored subjective ‘should.’ Is the true subjective ‘should’ pure or anchored? To approach this question, we will need to have a better idea of what the subjective ‘should’ is.

3  The Subjective ‘Should’: Three Desiderata

Consider a simple example.

**Sarah’s Dilemma:** Sarah, a paramedic, is deciding which of two emergency treatments – A or B – to administer to an ailing patient. Only A will cure the patient. But because of a bottle-labeling error that Sarah couldn’t possibly have known about, Sarah has every reason to think that B is the cure instead. She has to act fast. What should she do?

According to some, there are two ways to interpret this question – one objective and one subjective. Here is Gibbard’s characterization of the popular distinction:

We can ask what one ought to do in light of all the facts. Alternatively, we can ask what one ought to do in light of available information... Standardly in moral theory, we distinguish what a person ought to do in the objective sense and what she ought to do in the subjective sense. (2005, pp. 343-344)

It is clear how to apply this distinction to Sarah’s situation: In light of available information (that is, subjectively), she should administer treatment B – what she takes to be the cure; but, in light of all the facts (that is, objectively), she should administer treatment A – the actual cure.

Applying this distinction to Sarah’s case illustrates that the subjective requirement links up with certain important ethical concepts – in particular, moral worth, virtue, and

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63 Sepielli (2009, p. 9) makes a closely related distinction.  
64 This is a simplification of Sepielli’s own view, though the differences won’t be relevant here. See Way and Whiting (2016) for a defense of the very position stated, and see Kiesewetter (2016) for something close.  
65 Since the actualist’s norm required the subject to have justified beliefs, one might be inclined to invoke a similar epistemic requirement here. This issue proves not to be relevant, so we’ll ignore it.
action-guidance. More specifically, it serves to highlight what seem to be three core features of the subjective ‘should’:

1. It is closely connected to moral worth (praise and blame).
2. It tracks what a person of good character would do.
3. It is, in some important sense, “followable” or “action-guiding.”

After all, we think that Sarah would be irresponsible if she administered A. We think that a good person, in her circumstance, would administer B. And we think that the objective requirement – “Do whatever will in fact cure the patient” – is not something that Sarah is in any position to follow.

If all of this is right, it grants us leverage in assessing uncertainism and actualism. These views disagree about what people like Vikram and Huck should (subjectively) do. If the subjective ‘should’ is largely captured by the three features outlined above, we can investigate the strength of the two rival views by exploring how well they are able to capture these features. Specifically, we can ask: In situations like Vikram’s and Huck’s, which course of action is praiseworthy? Which course of action would the virtuous person pursue? And which of the two norms (if either) are followable, in the relevant sense?

This paper does not concentrate directly on the question of praise/blame, as this question has been explored by other authors. But by exploring the second and third questions, we can still shed light on the first. For questions about character and followability are relevant to questions about action appraisal. If one of the two views corresponds better to what a good person would do (desideratum 2) and seems sufficiently followable (desideratum 3), then this would indicate, I think, that the view links up with proper assessments of praise and blame as well. The rest of the paper aims to assess how the pure and anchored views respectively fare, with regard to the second and third desiderata – character and followability.

4 Character and the Virtues
4.1 Intuitions about Cases
Numerous authors have suggested, in effect, that the virtuous person will behave as the ‘anchored-subjective should’ recommends. One influential route to this conclusion involves distinguishing *de dicto* moral motivation (roughly: being disposed to do what one deems ‘right’) from *de re* moral motivation (roughly: being disposed to do what is in fact right) and then arguing that while the latter speaks well of a person, the former consti-

tutes a problematic ‘moral fetishism.” This package of views can be defended by way of intuitions about cases, such as those considered in the introduction.

Consider Vikram. Suppose that, in the heat of the moment, Vikram’s concern for the child’s welfare proves stronger than any competing motive (e.g. Vikram’s desire to do “the right thing”): Vikram removes his turban and helps the child. To consider Vikram blameworthy or to consider him less than fully virtuous simply for valuing a child’s life so heavily strikes many (this author included) as implausible. Though Vikram may, in fact, reproach himself for acting as he did, he has nothing to blame himself for. If Vikram had chosen to keep his turban on, we would consider Vikram callous for having shown insufficient concern for the child’s welfare.

Other examples (such as that of Huck Finn) could be (and have been) used to similar effect. If the intuitive judgments elicited by these cases are to be trusted, it follows that the virtuous person would – at least sometimes – act against her moral convictions. If it can be assumed that subjective moral requirements will track the virtuous person’s behavior, then the cases put pressure on the uncertaintist suggestion that the subjective ‘should’ is wholly pure.

Of course, there are ways out for the uncertaintist. Some resist the intuitive conclusions the examples suggest. For this reason, it is worth exploring approaches to the issue that do not rely so centrally on intuitions about these cases. As it happens, there is an alternative avenue available – one that involves examining other moral terms, to see how they are applied in the face of various forms of ignorance.

4.2 The Anchored Nature of the Character Virtues

Assume that the subjective ‘should’ does indeed track what a person of good character would do. Uncertaintism and actualism, then, are not merely views about what a person (subjectively) should do; they are, in effect, views about which acts are extensionally virtuous (that is, they are views about whether a person of good character would do them). What is interesting, here, is that we observe a noteworthy parallel between the actualist account of virtuous action and the intuitively correct account of specific character

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68 This term is credited to Smith (1994).
70 What do I mean by “wholly pure”? It is important to point out that there is space between the uncertaintist and actualist extremes. We can entertain an intermediate view, which we might call partially anchored, according to which, under conditions of justified moral ignorance, there is no hard and fast rule about what one should do; sometimes one should conform to uncertaintism, and other times, one should conform to actualism. (This is not merely a conceptual point; later, we’ll see how to motivate this intermediate view.)
71 See, for example, Zimmerman (2010, p. 201), Kiesewetter (2016, p. 767), or Johnson King (ms.).
virtues, such as courage and generosity.

According to actualism, whether a person’s act is virtuous (in the sense specified above) depends on her beliefs about the plain facts but not on her beliefs about what morality consists in. Interestingly, specific character virtues, like courage, exhibit a similar pattern of dependence: whether a person’s act is – say – courageous depends on her beliefs about the plain facts but not on her beliefs about what courage consists in. A few examples will help to illustrate this correspondence.

First, notice that, typically, whether a person’s decision takes courage depends upon her beliefs about the plain facts. Consider a diver who rescues a dolphin caught in a net. Whether the diver’s rescue took courage depends not on whether the waters really were shark-infested but, rather, on whether the diver believed them to be. So courage is unlike the objective ‘should’, which is entirely insensitive to the subject’s beliefs. Courage is, in some sense, subjective.

But, second, notice that whether a person’s decision takes courage depends on the truth about what courage consists in rather than on the person’s beliefs about it.

**Public Speaking:** Holly has agreed to speak in front of a large audience about a painful and deeply personal subject. Though, ultimately, she wishes to do it, the prospect terrifies her. Incidentally, Holly also holds a false view of what courage requires: She believes – with justification – that it is only possible to show courage in the face of physical danger. For this reason, she does not regard her decision to speak as courageous.

Despite what Holly reasonably believes, it seems clear that her decision did, in fact, take substantial courage. So courage is more like the anchored-subjective than the purely-subjective ‘should’: the subject’s beliefs about whether they have met the requirement seem irrelevant. So there is a striking parallel here between what courage requires and the actualist view of what virtuous action requires.

Importantly, this parallel is not unique to courage. Generosity can serve as another example. On the one hand, assessments of generosity do seem sensitive to a person’s beliefs about the plain facts: Suppose Elizabeth leaves a large box containing her valuable video game collection in front of a local orphanage. This might well be a generous act – but not if she believed the box to be full of rubbish and was simply looking to dispose of it. On the other hand, assessments of generosity do not seem sensitive to a person’s beliefs about what generosity requires: If a person believes – falsely, but with justification, perhaps – that generosity requires providing someone with material resources, she still can be generous by giving her time or care to a friend in need. Courage, generosity, and, presumably, many other virtues and vices seem to be “anchored,” in a certain sense: Whether these evaluative terms fit a given person’s behavior seems insensitive to the person’s (perhaps justified) beliefs about whatever ethical concept the term in question picks out.
What should we make of this observation? At the very least, the observation raises interesting questions for the uncertaintist. Given desideratum 2, uncertaintism brings with it a certain account of virtuous action: Whether a person’s behavior is virtuous depends upon her beliefs about ethics, in a certain way. There can seem to be a tension between this principle and the observation we have made about the “anchored” character of various specific virtues: If acting courageously does not require acting in accord with one’s beliefs about courage, if acting generously does not require acting in accord with one’s beliefs about generosity, etc. – why should it be that acting with good character in general requires that one act in accord with one’s beliefs about what that takes?

In reply, there are a few points the uncertaintist might make. Here is one.

What you say about specific virtues is accurate: Courage isn’t about doing what one deems ‘courageous,’ generosity isn’t about doing what one deems ‘generous,’ and so on. But I was never committed to thinking that the virtues would operate this way. Instead, I would say that what matters are one’s beliefs about what’s right. So courage, generosity, and the like are about doing what one deems ‘right.’

The imagined uncertaintist is correct that this avenue is, for everything said so far, open to her. And this proposed picture has a certain kind of appeal: If one is tempted by the idea of a kind of Socratic unity of the virtues (one grounded in knowledge, perhaps), one might find the picture especially compelling. But I think that the position has costs as well. In particular, I think that certain cases can put pressure on the idea that virtues consist in doing what one deems right.

**Dismissive Husband:** Though Allie likes many aspects of her husband Rory’s personality, she feels that he can be rudely dismissive of her opinions. She is not sure whether to bring this to his attention, though – both because she is afraid of how Rory might react and because she believes it would be wrong to advocate for herself in this way. (She believes – with justification – that wives should serve their husbands.) Ultimately, her desire to be respected proves stronger than her reservations; she tells Rory that she doesn’t appreciate it when he disregards her opinions without listening to them.

Though Allie acts against her (justified) beliefs about what she should do, it seems clear that Allie’s act took some degree of courage. So courage is not about doing what one deems ‘courageous,’ nor is courage about what one deems ‘right.’ And again, it is worth pointing out that this feature of courage is not unique to courage. Considering a variation on a familiar case illustrates why justice operates similarly to courage.\(^{72}\)

**Sheriff’s Dilemma:** An innocent man is widely believed to have committed a violent crime. The sheriff, who knows that the suspect is innocent, must determine whether to surrender the suspect to an angry mob, who will surely kill the suspect if given the chance. If the sheriff de-

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clines to turn him over, she is sure that several people will be killed in the ensuing riot. Moreover, the sheriff believes – with justification, we’ll suppose – that utilitarianism is the correct moral theory. What should she do?

As with the many other cases we have examined, uncertaintism and actualism will likely differ with respect to this case. But set their respective verdicts aside. About this case, I want to ask: Which course of action is more just (irrespective of which is right)? The more just course, I think, is to harbor the suspect from the mob. The original version of this case is compellingly construed as a conflict between virtues (justice and benevolence, perhaps). Justice demands that the sheriff harbor the suspect; benevolence demands that she turn him over. When we add the provision that the sheriff is a utilitarian, neither of these facts seem to change. Justice still demands that the sheriff harbor the suspect. So justice isn’t about doing what one deems ‘right.’

Even if this is right, one might remain unsatisfied. Perhaps it is true that justice doesn’t require that one do what one deems right. But is there not some virtue associated with doing what one regards as morally proper? If, for example, the sheriff decides to act against her utilitarian commitment, is she not showing something vicious – a lack of conscientiousness, perhaps? The next section confronts this worry.

4.3 Conscientiousness: The Uncertaintist’s Virtue

There may be a form of virtue that does require (or, perhaps more accurately, consists in) doing what one takes to be right. Hurka (2014), for one, suggests that it is a virtue to be (defeasibly) disposed to follow one’s conscience, where following one’s conscience involves acting as one believes one should. We might label this virtue conscientiousness, or integrity perhaps. Whether this kind of de dicto moral motivation really speaks well of a person’s character is a controversial matter. But for the purposes of this paper, we can allow that being disposed to act in accord with one’s moral beliefs is a virtue – call it “conscientiousness.”

This is not enough, for the uncertaintist. What uncertaintism would need – at least, on the assumption that there is a close connection between virtue and the subjective ‘should’ – is that conscientiousness is the only virtue, or that it is the most important virtue, in

73 Though this way of viewing the case has something going for it, Foot (1983) doesn’t. She argues that the virtues are unified in a way that renders these stark conflicts relatively rare, if they can be said to arise at all. If one is attracted to Foot’s position here, moving from rightness to justice in the Sheriff case won’t have the desired dialectical effect. Still, I find the intuitions elicited by the cases to be powerful.

74 Johnson King (ms.) advocates a position similar to Hurka’s. For criticism, see Arpaly and Schroeder (2014, pp. 159–199) and Arpaly (2015, pp. 147–151). More broadly, Williams (1973) argues that integrity is not a virtue, while Cox, La Caze, and Levine (2003) argue that it is – though these authors may not be talking about de dicto concern for morality when they discuss “integrity.”
some sense. For if conscientiousness is a virtue, then it will make sense to see the examples of Vikram and Huck as clashes between conscientiousness and other virtues. The perfectly virtuous person would be conflicted, motivationally. But as long as it isn’t the case that conscientiousness wins every conflict – either because it is the only virtue or because it is enjoys some kind of primacy – then the uncertaintist’s account of the subjective ‘should’ cannot be entirely correct.\footnote{Of course, if conscientiousness really is a virtue, it may still win some conflicts, in which case, actualism, too, will run into trouble. On this picture, the truth lies somewhere between the two extremes. In this paper, I aim to argue that the subjective ‘should’ is at least partially anchored, so I will take no stand on the issue of conscientiousness.}

5 Followability

So far, we have explored reasons for thinking that a person of good character may act against her moral convictions in a wide class of cases. The uncertaintist, however, can concede this point. Earlier, we outlined three desiderata for an account of the subjective ‘should,’ pertaining to moral worth, virtue, and followability. The uncertaintist’s view does not seem to capture virtue perfectly. But the third desideratum, the one pertaining to followability, can seem to support uncertainism. First, there is a straightforward and simple deliberative picture that seems to make sense only if uncertainism is true. Second, it is not clear whether impure prescriptions (that is, prescriptions issuing from the actualist’s ‘should’ or from intermediate views) are followable in the relevant sense.

5.1 The Argument from Enktratic Reasoning

Start with the first point. The idea is that once we grant that someone is justified in believing that a certain course of action is right, it seems that we must also grant that – from her perspective – it makes good sense for her to decide to act that way. How could we criticize someone for acting in accord with her well-supported beliefs about what she should do? This line is pursued by several different authors, including Whiting and Way (2016), who aptly label it “the argument from enktratic reasoning.”\footnote{See Sepielli (2012, 2016), Littlejohn (2014), and Whiting and Way (2016).} Sepielli, thinking about things first-personally, puts the point forcefully, framing it as a challenge.

I am also tempted to ask [my opponents] something to the effect of: “What do you want from me?! –qua uncertaintist agent, that is. I’m uncertain about certain moral issues, and let’s suppose reasonably so (i.e. my credences line up with the epistemic probabilities). You say that in acting on an uncertaintist norm, I thereby exhibit bad motivations. But is there anything I can do instead, such that I don’t exhibit bad motivations? If the answer is ‘no’, then there must be something wrong with your argument somewhere.” (2016, p. 2961)

Though, in this passage, Sepielli is focused on moral uncertainty (rather than on false mor-
al belief), I take it to be clear that his point still applies. If we reject the uncertainist’s deliberative picture (which says, roughly: do what you have reason to think is right), we must be able to provide some sort of alternative.

I want to explore one such alternative. For the sake of argument, let’s fix – by stipulation – the content of morality. Specifically, let’s say that morality consists in equally balancing promotion of welfare with respect for autonomy. Next, consider two idealized agents – Dedi, and Derek. Both are completely practically rational, in a Humean sense: They always do what is likeliest (given their evidence) to satisfy their (distinct) goals.

Dedi: Dedi’s sole goal in life is to do the right thing – whatever that happens to be. She is motivated by concern for morality de dicto.

Derek: Derek’s sole goal in life is to do whatever equally balances promotion of welfare with respect for autonomy. Though he may not know it (or care), he is motivated by concern for morality de re.

In short: Dedi is the uncertainist’s paragon; Derek is the actualist’s paragon. Notably, Derek will not always reason enkratically. He will sometimes violate the uncertainist’s deliberative ideal. It will be helpful to see how someone like Derek would reason, under conditions of moral ignorance. Hurka, discussing the Huck Finn case, does this for us. He imagines a version of Huck that is motivationally similar to Derek:

Huck: I know it’s wrong not to return Jim – and really wrong, not just what people say is wrong – but I don’t care about right and wrong. I want to help him and I will. (2014, p. 498)

Presumably, uncertainists like Sepielli will be unsatisfied with this deliberative process. But it’s not obvious, to me anyway, what’s wrong with it.77

5.2 What’s Wrong with Being like Derek?

There are several concerns that an agent like Derek presents. We’ll consider five below.

Worry #1 – Lack of Understanding: The problem with Derek is that he doesn’t see why his actions are right. He lacks moral understanding.

It certainly would be better, in some sense, if Derek always understood what made his acts right. All sides can agree on this. But this lack of understanding is not a feature of

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77 In light of our earlier discussion, a simple answer is just that Derek lacks conscientiousness. This is what Hurka would say. If conscientiousness is a virtue, then we will want to consider a third idealized agent (footnote continues on the next page):

Bonnie: Bonnie has two goals in life. The first is to promote welfare and respect autonomy; the second is to do the right thing – whatever that happens to be. She has concern for morality de re and de dicto. The challenge to uncertainism is to explain what’s wrong with Bonnie. For ease of presentation, we concentrate on Derek, but the points made in defense of Derek can be extended to Bonnie as well.
Derek, per se; it is a feature of his circumstances. We are considering cases of justified moral ignorance – situations in which a person justifiably believes some false moral view. So, Derek’s lack of moral understanding should not be held against him.

**Worry #2 – Accidentality:** There’s nothing so terrible about where Derek ended up. Promotion of welfare and respect for autonomy are quite valuable things. But, notably, we aren’t given a story about how Derek came to care about these things. We’re left to assume that it’s a complete accident that Derek is a good person.

In a certain sense, we could say that it is merely “good fortune” on Derek’s part that he cares about the right things. He certainly didn’t reason his way there. He may simply have been born caring about the right things. One might say that Derek is a beneficiary of what Nagel (1979) called “constitutive moral luck.” In response to this observation, there are two points worth making.

First, it should be pointed out that Dedi might equally be regarded as a beneficiary of moral luck. From where did she get her concern for morality de dicto? But, second, why think that this kind of luck precludes right action? Earlier, we observed that acting in accord with a given virtue does not typically require one to believe that one is acting in accord with that virtue, nor does doing so require one to believe that one is acting as one should. In other words, one could act, say, justly through “good fortune” (that is, without reasoning one’s way to that course of action). If it is possible to act justly (or courageously, or generously, etc.) through good fortune, why think it impossible to act rightly through a similar sort of good fortune?

**Worry #3 – Insensitivity to Argument:** One problem with Derek is that you can’t reason with him. Or, more precisely, reasoning with him is, in a way, pointless. Suppose I present him with an argument that he should take some particular course of action. He might be entirely persuaded (in his beliefs) but still do the opposite when it comes time to choose. This would never happen with Dedi.

In response, it is important to note that there is a certain kind of argument that Derek is perfectly responsive to: If you can show Derek that a certain course of action better promotes welfare and better respects autonomy, he will do it. So it is not as if Derek is unresponsive to argument altogether. Derek and Dedi are both responsive to argument, though under conditions of moral ignorance, they respond to arguments of different kinds: An argument that a certain course of action is right (but not welfare-promoting/autonomy-respecting) moves Dedi but not Derek; an argument that a certain course of action is welfare-promoting and autonomy-respecting (but not right) moves Derek but not Dedi. Given that Derek and Dedi are both limited in their responsiveness to argument (and, perhaps, given that Derek tends to bring about morally desirable outcomes more reliably than does Dedi), the challenge for the uncertaintist is to explain why it is
moraly better to be like Dedi than like Derek.

Worry #4 – Akrasia: Derek’s thinking and action form an akratic package (because Derek is acting as he thinks he shouldn’t).

It is clearly true that Derek will be akratic under conditions of moral ignorance. If it is simply taken as a premise that an act’s being akratic always constitutes a decisive moral reason not to do it, then, of course, it follows that Derek is not the moral saint the actualist takes him to be. But, the moral status of a certain kind of akratic activity is, in a way, precisely what is at issue between the uncertaintist and the actualist. In asking “What’s wrong with Derek?” we might as well ask “What’s wrong with akrasia?”

Reply #5: What’s wrong with Derek? Nothing. It would be great if we all were like Derek. But, given that, in the actual world, we don’t know what morality consists in, the advice “Be like Derek” is unhelpful. We can say, if you insist, that Derek is the morally perfect agent, but this doesn’t provide us with much guidance.

Of course, the fact that it’s hard to be like Derek is no knock against him. Still, this is an important objection: Shouldn’t our moral paragon be something we can sensibly aim at? The final section of the paper considers this question.

5.3 – Followability

The actualist’s recommendation seems to be: Be like Derek; care about morality de re. This can seem unsatisfying. We do not know exactly what morality consists in. So the advice seems crucially unfollowable. On the other hand, the uncertaintist seems to be offering something more helpful: Be like Dedi; care about morality de dicto. This rule seems easier to follow, as it does not require us to know precisely what morality consists in. So, in short, uncertaintism is more followable than actualism, right? I am not sure. I share this intuition, but on reflection, I have found the asymmetry to be difficult to characterize. In what sense is uncertaintism more followable than actualism? This section explores a few possibilities, which don’t seem to me to work. At the end of the day, I will tentatively suggest uncertaintism is not more followable than actualism in any important sense.

To start, it is helpful to recall an example where the objective ‘should’ issues clearly unfollowable prescriptions. When Dr. Sarah must administer one of two treatments to an ailing patient, the objective ‘should’ recommends that Sarah choose the one that will, in fact, cure the patient’s illness, irrespective of what Sarah’s best evidence indicates. So: If the bottles are mislabeled, the objective ‘should’ says give the actual cure; if the bottles are outwardly identical, the objective ‘should’ says give the actual cure; if the bottles are correctly labeled, the objective ‘should’ says give the actual cure. It is plain that this instruction is not

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78 See Arpaly and Schroeder (1999) for an early discussion of this kind of akrasia.
79 This section is inspired by Arpaly’s (2000) memorable discussion.
followable, but it is worth thinking about exactly why and how.

One immediate complaint about the objective ‘should’ is simply that one’s beliefs about the objective ‘should’ can sometimes be false. More specifically, here is a standard that it violates:

**Full Transparency:** A requirement is *fully transparent* if and only if one’s beliefs about what is required of her are always true.

The objective ‘should’ is not fully transparent. But this is hardly a complaint: Few normative requirements meet this incredibly stringent standard.\(^{80}\) It seems that the objective ‘should’ is unfollowable in a far more egregious way: We cannot “engineer,” even in principle, a being that would reliably conform to it. We can capture this idea a second standard of followability that the objective ‘should’ fails to meet.

**Trackability:** A requirement is *trackable* if and only if there could be a person who adheres to it with probability 1.\(^{81}\)

To illustrate how this standard is to be applied, it will be helpful to consider a requirement that plainly fails to meet it. Here is one, which we might call the ‘Get Lucky’ requirement: “Predict correctly the outcome of a fair, truly random, coin toss.” No matter how clever we are, we will not be able to design a being that adheres to this requirement with probability 1. No matter what strategy we deploy, there will always be some degree of rational uncertainty with respect to whether our designed being will succeed in getting lucky.\(^{82}\)

The Get Lucky requirement is not fully transparent. And, for similar reasons, the objective ‘should’ isn’t fully transparent either. After all, conformity with the objective ‘should’ will often require making correct ‘guesses’ (e.g. about which of two indistinguishable medicines is the cure), and in appropriately constructed cases, it will not be possible to design a being that can guess correctly with probability 1. So trackability is one way of characterizing the kind of followability that the objective ‘should’ lacks.\(^ {83}\)

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\(^{80}\) See Williamson (2000).

\(^{81}\) See Karen Jones (1999) for a discussion of a related idea, though Jones does not appeal to probability in her discussion of tracking. One might wonder how to interpret the appeal to probability I invoke here. I have in mind an epistemic probability, assessed relative to a third-party evaluator who possesses complete knowledge of the agent’s decision-making procedure and also possesses the same information about the situation that the agent has herself. The precise formulation of this standard can certainly be disputed, and I am open to alternative formulations. However, I think that the idea has an unassailable core, which is illustrated by the discussion that follows.

\(^{82}\) Obviously, in any individual case, or across any finite number of cases, our being could fare perfectly well. But having probability 1 of conformity requires that we be able to see, in advance, that the being will succeed – perfect *actual* conformity is not enough.

\(^{83}\) It may be objected that trackability, being a somewhat technical condition, is too *ad hoc* to
So far, we have seen that the objective ‘should’ is not fully transparent or even trackable. How do the pure ‘should’ and anchored ‘should’ fare with respect to these standards? It seems to me that neither standard meets full transparency, while both meet trackability.

First, consider full transparency. Is the actualist norm fully transparent? No. If a person doesn’t know which moral view is actually correct, then there is no way for her to guarantee that she will comply with the actualist norm, even if she wants to. What about uncertaintism? Since uncertaintism requires that a person’s beliefs be justified, there is no guarantee of compliance here either, among those that are trying. So uncertaintism and actualism both fail with respect to full transparency.

Next, consider trackability. Both norms meet the trackability standard. After all, Dedi and Derek are possible agents, and we already observed that they will reliably conform to the uncertaintist and actualist norms. So we have not yet uncovered any followability advantage for uncertaintism: Both norms are trackable, but neither is fully transparent.

At this point, though, the uncertaintist may object, as follows.

The advice ‘Be like Dedi’ is manifestly helpful in a way that ‘Be like Derek’ isn’t: So long as I always do what I deem right, then – so long as I believe rationally – I will always succeed in following the uncertaintist rule.

This is accurate, and it does seem to be a feature unique to uncertaintism, so it is a direction worth exploring. And moreover, it can seem reasonable to appeal to rationality in this context: After all, rational requirements are presumably followable. So why can’t we build a followable moral requirement by invoking another norm we already regard as being followable? If we follow the suggested approach, we will end up with an uncertaintist requirement whose followability is, in a way, parasitic on the followability of rational norms. Accordingly, we can put forward a third standard of followability.

**Rational Transparency:** A requirement is rationally transparent if and only if a person’s beliefs about what is required of her are always true – so long as she reasons well.

Finally, we have identified a standard that respects the felt asymmetry between the uncertaintist and actualist norms. So long as a person respects epistemic rationality, she will be able to follow uncertaintism for free. But this is not the case with actualism. However, it is important to ask: How followable are rational requirements themselves? If rational requirements are completely opaque, then rational transparency would hardly be a standard to capture what we have in mind when we invoke followability. But I think this complaint is unfair. When a requirement is put forward, it seems totally reasonable to ask whether it is even possible that an agent – any agent – could reliably conform to it. If this is not possible, it indicates that the requirement isn’t really something that anyone could follow – let alone something that you or I could follow.
ard worth meeting. It would be like saying: “Sure, uncertainty is easily followable – so long as you can follow these impossibly difficult rational requirements.” Rational transparency is valuable only to the extent that rational requirements are themselves followable, in a deep and important sense.

So we need to work out just how followable rational requirements are. Conveniently, we have just developed three followability standards. Which of them do rational requirements meet?

To start, it is clear that rational requirements are not fully transparent. Sometimes, a person can have false beliefs about what she should believe.

What about trackability? I think it will turn out that rational requirements are trackable. In principle, I see no reason to deny that we could build a perfectly rational agent. At the very least, it would be a surprising and intriguing result if this were not possible. I will assume that rational requirements are trackable, and we will discuss the upshot of this fact, to conclude the paper. But before we get there, let’s turn to our final standard of followability.

A provocative and tempting thesis is that rational requirements are themselves rationally transparent. Though this question sounds problematically circular, I think it can still be meaningfully asked. Could a fully rational person ever harbor beliefs about what she should believe and be wrong? In effect, we are asking a question parallel to the one that began this paper. There, we wanted to know how to respond to justified moral ignorance. Here, we want to know how to respond to justified epistemological ignorance. If a person has misleading evidence about the nature of rational requirements, should she follow the epistemological principles she believes in? Or should she believe against them?

In effect, the question is whether rational epistemic akrasia is possible. If it isn’t, then rational requirements are rationally transparent. If it is, then rational requirements are not rationally transparent. There has been plenty of discussion of this issue.84 Here’s a purported example of rational epistemic akrasia which looks somewhat different from those found in existing discussions.85 Though the case is complicated, the example seems to me to lend some support to the idea that epistemic akrasia can be rational.

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84 Some – Kolodny (2005), Smithies (2012), Titelbaum (2015) – take the irrationality of epistemic akrasia as a premise. Others – Greco (2014) – argue for the same position. Still others – Coates (2012), Horowitz (2014), Christensen (2016), Field (ms.), Weatherson (ms.) – argue that epistemic akrasia can be rational (though these authors typically allow that epistemic akrasia often is irrational).

85 The explanation I will provide draws on Christensen’s (2016, pp. 413–416) defense of the possibility of rational epistemic akrasia. Christensen’s examples involve agents who possess evidence of their own unreliability. The example discussed here does not rely on this kind of higher-order evidence.
**Gavin’s Dilemma:** Several of Gavin’s friends are epistemologists. Gavin has excellent reason to regard each as reliable concerning epistemological matters. On this occasion, however, they lead Gavin astray. Here is a statement of the (false) epistemological view each of them independently endorses:

**Proof Chauvinism:** Rationality is partly about accuracy, but it’s not only about accuracy; it’s also about responding to the right reasons. And, for mathematical propositions, the right reasons are proofs. In light of this, rationally speaking, one should never become highly confident in any mathematical proposition unless one can prove it. Though one can often have accurate opinions about mathematical propositions simply by deferring to reliable sources, the more rational course is to remain less certain until one devises satisfactory proofs on one’s own.

Being no epistemology expert himself, Gavin defers to his friends, coming to believe – with justification – that Proof Chauvinism is true. It then occurs to Gavin that – if he is to be rational – he must become substantially less confident of many mathematical propositions, such as the Pythagorean Theorem (which he is unsure how to prove).

That day, Gavin is at the store looking to purchase fencing for his garden, which has the shape of a right triangle with side lengths three and four yards. He knows that if the Pythagorean Theorem is true, then he should purchase twelve yards of fencing in all. He wishes not to buy too much or too little, so he should make the purchase only if he is highly confident that exactly twelve yards are needed. What should Gavin do?

If epistemic akrasia were always irrational, then Gavin should adhere to Proof Chauvinism, reducing confidence in the Pythagorean Theorem accordingly (and, presumably, opting not to purchase the fencing). This seems to be the wrong result. Gavin should, I think, make the purchase without any major misgivings. And, more to the point, his confidence in the Pythagorean Theorem should not be shaken by what he takes himself to have learned about epistemic rationality. Because this is a controversial result, it seems advisable to say more to justify this intuition.

Why should Gavin flout Proof Chauvinism’s advice, despite justifiably regarding it as a constraint on rationality? Here is what seems to me the most promising explanation. The Proof Chauvinist allows that one’s accuracy may be enhanced through deference to reliable sources but maintains that one’s opinions will be less rational for it. In light of this feature of Proof Chauvinism, Gavin is in a position to reason as follows:

> If I remain confident in the Pythagorean Theorem, my opinion will probably be more accurate, but less rational. If I reduce confidence, my opinion will be more rational, but, probably, less accurate. I don’t care about being rational; I care about being right. So I will remain confident.

Given his predicament, this seems a reasonable way for Gavin to think. Given the conflict

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86 One could maintain, perhaps, that it is impossible to have a justified, false, belief about what rationality requires. See Titelbaum (2015) for a defense of this line. But, just as we’re setting a version of this complaint aside in the moral case, we also will set aside the complaint here.
between what Gavin deems ‘more rational’ and what he deems ‘more accurate,’ it seems to me that, to the extent that Gavin is rational, he will be disposed to favor accuracy. If all of this is right, then rational epistemic akasria is possible – in which case, rational requirements are not rationally transparent.

Where does that leave us? Well, we said that rational requirements met the standard of trackability, but failed to meet each of the other two. Does that sound familiar? This is precisely the followability profile of actualism! So rational requirements are themselves no more followable – at least in terms of the standards of followability surveyed here – than the actualist’s proposed norm. This is significant. The idea was to try to identify an asymmetry between uncertainism and actualism – an asymmetry that would explain why uncertainism is more followable than actualism is. Our strategy involved pointing out that perfect adherence to uncertainism simply reduces, in a certain sense, to adherence to rationality. This would be the magic bullet, if and only if rationality is more followable than actualism is. But, I’ve suggested that it isn’t. And if not, then, at the end of the day, uncertainism and actualism are on a par with respect to followability. Followability is the main advantage uncertainism seems to have over actualism. If this advantage is an illusion, it is hard to see why uncertainism should command so much appeal.

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