

RECOVERING RESPONSIBILITY

Guy AXTELL

ABSTRACT: This paper defends the epistemological importance of ‘diachronic’ or cross-temporal evaluation of epistemic agents against an interesting dilemma posed for this view in Trent Dougherty’s recent paper “Reducing Responsibility.” This is primarily a debate between evidentialists and character epistemologists, and key issues of contention that the paper treats include the divergent functions of synchronic and diachronic (longitudinal) evaluations of agents and their beliefs, the nature and sources of epistemic normativity, and the advantages versus the costs of the evidentialists’ reductionism about sources of epistemic normativity.

KEYWORDS: epistemic normativity, character epistemology, evidentialism, synchronic and diachronic

1. Epistemic Normativity and the Synchronic/Diachronic Divide

Trent Dougherty’s recent article, “Reducing Responsibility: An Evidentialist Account of Epistemic Blame,”¹ raises quite interesting issues about the epistemic appraisal of agents and their beliefs. Dougherty, editor of a new collection, *Evidentialism and its Discontents*,² constructs and discusses a case similar to those that authors he terms the ‘core responsibilists’ have utilized as counter-examples to evidentialism. But Dougherty’s purpose in constructing his case – the ‘Craig Case’ as we’ll call it – is to defend the analysis of epistemic justification advocated by evidentialist thinkers like Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, according to which ‘evidential fit’ (or ‘synchronic epistemic rationality’) is the sole source of properly epistemic norms. This he terms the evidentialists’ ‘reductionist’ account of epistemic normativity, in sharp relief from the ‘non-reductionism’ of the core responsibilists, who allow and indeed insist upon other sources of epistemic normativity besides evidential fit.

As technical background, Conee and Feldman hold that a proposition being justified for an agent is just a question of that agent having at any and every given moment of time that singular doxastic attitude towards that proposition – belief,

¹ Trent Dougherty, “Reducing Responsibility: An Evidentialist Account of Epistemic Blame,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, 2011, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0378.2010.00422.x (accessed August 2011).

² Trent Dougherty, ed., *Evidentialism and its Discontents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2011).

suspension, or disbelief – that uniquely ‘fits’ the total evidence bearing upon it that she possesses. Propositional justification is thus a matter of the right sort of cognitive response to evidence (mentally-accessible reasons), and this is wholly a ‘synchronic’ (present time-slice) evaluation. The evidentialists furthermore holds the propositionalist view that epistemic justification (justification that epistemizes true belief, i.e., renders it knowledge) is just the having of propositional justification for some proposition, plus the basing of one’s actual belief upon those reasons.³ Their view of ‘epistemic normativity’ derives directly this propositionalist account, although it is a contentious thesis not shared by non-internalists, who typically begin with a conception of the basing relationship and of *doxastic* justification that does *not* entail propositional justification as a necessary condition on knowing.

The case Dougherty has us focus on is that of an imaginary friend and peer, Craig, a short earth creationist who basically ignores his (Dougherty’s) introduction of counter-evidence to this belief as well as a well-meaning recommendation that Craig consider and investigate this counter-evidence by reading a book he offers him on subjects of geological and evolutionary science. The worry in the Craig case and in many cases like it is that the agent *is and remains* personally justified according to the evidentialist standard of epistemic fit, but ironically only because that agent’s evidence-base is so extremely narrow; indeed, Craig nurtures this ignorance of alternatives by simply dismissing or otherwise failing to pursue inquiry into this potentially undermining counter-evidence to his belief. “[E]videntialism requires that a change in epistemic status of belief issue from a change in evidential status.”⁴ But the Craig Case is one where the personal justification of the agent appears to drop with or after the encounter with his friend, and for reasons *other than* lack of evidential fit.⁵ A responsibilist at first gloss might suggest that the drop

³ Jonathan Kvanvig, “Propositionalism and the Metaphysics of Experience,” *Philosophical Issues* 17 (2007): 165-78.

⁴ Dougherty, “Reducing Responsibility,” 5.

⁵ I insert ‘drop’ along with simple ‘loss’ of status in recognition of the important point that externalists and holders of ‘mixed’ accounts believe that Craig *never* had the positive status of being epistemically justified (doxastically justified) in the first place, by virtue of meeting the evidentialist standards of doxastic justification (having evidence that propositionally justifies, plus basing one’s belief on that evidence). Where diachronic justification (competent or responsible evidence-gathering) isn’t a further requirement, agent reliability is by no means ensured, and doxastic justification or warrant as externalists understand it, won’t be present. Yet, as Baehr writes, “Perhaps there is some epistemic value simply in having a belief that fits one’s evidence – regardless of whether this evidence is the result of defective inquiry. Such beliefs might be said to involve a kind of logical coherence or consistency, which indeed is often regarded as an epistemic desideratum.” (Jason Baehr, “Evidentialism, Vice, and Virtue,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 78 (2009): 549.)

in personal justification for his belief is due to Craig subsequently manifesting poor intellectual motivations (strong confirmation bias) and his displaying intellectual irresponsibility diachronically (cross-temporally) through failing to engage or 'deal with' the counter-evidence to his belief in ways that we would reasonably demand of any intellectually virtuous agent similarly situated.

Dougherty readily agrees that the evidentialist must take account of such cases. However, he argues, on closer inspection evidentialism is well-able to handle them by offering a kind of *error theory*. "My position is that all instances of epistemic irresponsibility are in fact either forms of instrumental rationality or moral irresponsibility in so far as there is anything amiss that goes *beyond* one's belief fitting the evidence one has at the time."⁶ Despite first appearances, then, there is nothing distinctly epistemic about what the responsibilists call 'intellectual responsibility' in inquiry: being diachronic or longitudinal evaluations, these are misconstrued "moral and prudential evaluations of behavior related to the formation of beliefs."⁷ To show this Dougherty offers three different responses which an evidentialist might make, which he thinks don't require us to recognize anything distinctively epistemic about Craig's failures and which therefore don't require us to recognize any exception to the evidentialist account of epistemic normativity.

At issue between the evidentialists Dougherty defends and the self-described responsibilists he targets with his error theory is not only the role of time-slice (synchronic) and longitudinal (diachronic) evaluations in epistemology, but also, equally important to him, the right attitude that a philosopher should hold towards reductionism about the sources of epistemic normativity. The intended upshot of his treatment of the Craig Case is to re-instate the evidentialists' reductionist account of epistemic value by replying directly to the best responsibilist counter-examples. His reductionist thesis as localized to the responsibilist's person-level or diachronic picture of epistemic evaluation is formalized as the Identity Thesis:

IT: Each instance of epistemic irresponsibility is just an instance of purely nonepistemic irresponsibility /irrationality (either moral or instrumental).⁸

But this is just one application of a more general reductionist approach to *epistemic normativity*, captured in the statements that "any *normativity* concerning

⁶ Dougherty, "Reducing Responsibility," 3. "Like Feldman, my position is that when one's belief fits the evidence, all other forms of evaluation concerning the belief are either moral or instrumental." (Dougherty, "Reducing Responsibility," 5.)

⁷ Dougherty, "Reducing Responsibility," 3. Compare Richard Feldman, "The Ethics of Belief," in *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology*, ed. Earl Conee and Richard Feldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 190.

⁸ Dougherty, "Reducing Responsibility," 4.

belief that goes beyond fitting the evidence, and in particular epistemic responsibility, is either moral or instrumental”⁹, and that “Like Feldman, my position is that when one’s belief fits the evidence, *all other forms of evaluation concerning the belief* are either moral or instrumental.”¹⁰

As one of the ‘core responsibilist’ authors targeted by Dougherty in his paper, I want to make my replies to this reductionist thesis and to his application of it in treatment of the Craig Case, while recognizing that I cannot speak for any other author treated in this paper. Other thinkers critical of the Identity Thesis might take a significantly different tact in their own responses. There are a number of interesting questions that arise in the above quotations, but I first want to point to two less obvious ones, questions that Dougherty’s implicit answers to already inform the manner in which he glosses the concept of epistemic normativity in his paper. One of these questions is whether epistemic normativity applies only to evaluation concerning beliefs, or also to evaluations concerning agents and their habits and dispositions. As Roger Pouivet aptly notes, “Virtue epistemologists generally agree that, more than anything, good intellectual *habits* ground our pretensions to warranted beliefs, and to knowledge. And habits are properties of persons, not of beliefs.”¹¹ Another is whether epistemic normativity, even granting it the narrower extension of ‘*normativity* concerning belief,’ is best construed as restricted to knowledge-relevant epistemic status, or includes *theoretic understanding* among primary positive epistemic goods or standings. Responsibilists have been among the foremost proponents of conceiving the *telos* of the life of the mind to include (at least) understanding, and this question of epistemological axiology is directly relevant to the question as to whether diachronic assessments of agents can be properly epistemological. What Raymond Nickerson in *Aspects of Rationality* calls ‘active fair-mindedness’ – an interpretation that would require one to put “significant effort into seeking evidence, including evidence that goes against a favored hypothesis as well as evidence that supports it”¹² – may not seem to be required for more passive sorts of propositional acceptance, yet seems prerequisite for achieving the epistemic good of understanding. Virtue-relevant epistemic standings such as theoretical understanding are thus more naturally given to a dynamic and developmental account than is true belief, often conceived (or misconceived) as a static cognitive state. We cannot directly pursue these matters here, but we can

⁹ Dougherty, “Reducing Responsibility,” 1, emphasis added.

¹⁰ Dougherty, “Reducing Responsibility,” 5, emphasis added.

¹¹ Roger Pouivet, “Moral and Epistemic Virtues: A Thomistic and Analytical Perspective,” *Forum Philosophicum: International Journal for Philosophy*, 15, 1 (2010).

¹² Raymond Nickerson, *Aspects of Rationality* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2008), 140.

return to consider their place in this debate after we attend more directly to explicating Dougherty's thesis and argument. Put in more positive terms, the reductionism of the evidentialists that he argues in support of is that evidential fit is the only proper source of epistemic normativity, and that this is wholly a matter of synchronic evaluation.

Michael Williams' term 'due care and diligence,' from his paper "Responsibility and Reliability"¹³ will be used here to characterize the responsibilist position on the properly epistemological standing of evaluations of an agent's motivations and habits that bear directly upon the conduct of inquiry.¹⁴ Dougherty writes, "[T]he core responsibilists all say that there is more to epistemic responsibility than evidential fit" and that if evidentialism is false, then the ethics of belief goes well beyond this consideration of synchronic rationality.¹⁵ This is quite correct; there *is* considerably more to epistemological evaluation – and still more especially to the ethics of belief – than is allowed for by a theory that takes believing according to one's present total evidence (however gotten or ill-gotten) as the only source and measure of epistemic value. I think the issues that his paper raises are misdescribed as issues about the ethics of belief, because that is a question of what one should believe 'all things considered,' which is not Dougherty's focus. The ethics of belief, taken this way, explicitly involves ethically-guided considerations of the consequences our beliefs have on our actions, and so obviously goes well beyond considerations of synchronic rationality or evidential (propositional) justification. (10) What Dougherty seems to have in mind is something closer to 'belief's own' ethics – doxastic norms. Having argued elsewhere against both sides of Feldman's evidentialist program – his account of 'epistemic' justification since the driving idea is, and what he describes as ethics of belief¹⁶ – I here only want to argue that there

¹³ Michael Williams, "Responsibility and Reliability," *Philosophical Papers* 37, 1 (2008): 1-27.

¹⁴ Williams distinguishes two senses of epistemic responsibility, as a matter of *accountability* (responsibility *for* belief – we are responsible for what we believe in the sense of *accountable*) and as it contrasts with *irresponsibility*: failure to exercise due care or diligence in what I term our inquiry-directed or *zetetic* habits and strategies (sometimes as attested-to by our overt activities or behaviors). The antonym of the first sense is *not responsible*, and of the second sense is *irresponsible*. Williams writes that "The two kinds of responsibility are related in an obvious way: We are accountable for our beliefs precisely because of our obligation to manage them properly." (Williams, "Responsibility and Reliability," 2.) The issue between Dougherty and the responsibilists is primarily over this second sense. The responsibilists hold that knowledge involves reliability, and that justified belief is justified (responsible) *believing* (i.e., doxastic justification or warrant).

¹⁵ Dougherty, "Reducing Responsibility," 10.

¹⁶ Guy Axtell, "From Internalist Evidentialism to Virtue Responsibilism," in *Evidentialism and its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

is more to 'epistemic normativity' and to a proper understanding of responsibility-relevant norms than evidential fit and the agent's having the sort of rationality that it is characterized by. The agent with unconscientiously acquired or maintained true belief is not necessarily doing fine *qua* epistemic agent, even when their ascent to a proposition is finely in line with their evidence. Unconscientiously held beliefs will definitely affect one's understanding, but I think there is more to it even if this term 'epistemic normativity' is restricted just to 'knowledge-relevant' normativity. Evaluation of *persons* (agents), as contrasted with the evaluation only of beliefs (cognitive states), is properly part of the theory of knowledge, and evaluation of persons is never wholly a synchronic affair abstractable from motivational factors and from habits of inquiry. In short then, my stance is that epistemic fit is not a sufficient or even a very useful measure of personal justification, epistemic value, or agent reliability when set apart, as evidentialists intend, from *diachronic* considerations of how well or poorly motivated and conducted were the inquiries that provided the agent with just *that* set of what the evidentialist calls an agent's 'total evidence at time t.'¹⁷

Dougherty to his credit provides very clear characterizations of the issues and of the stances various philosophers have taken, and one thing I agree with fully in his paper is that for the responsibilists' explicitly non-reductionist account to be plausible, its proponents need to show that there are nontrivial cases of what they call epistemic irresponsibility that cannot be better explained in one of the three explanations he offers in the Craig Case. That case presents a common (all-too-common) situation, and (with one notable exception to be discussed below) is as good as most cases might be in serving as a focal point for this debate. The thrust of my reply is therefore a straightforward one: None of the alternative explanations Dougherty offers in the Craig Case is as plausible as he thinks they are; neither individually nor collectively do they provide evaluations *as* plausible or informative as the one according to which the personal justification Craig enjoyed for his creationist belief does indeed drop, and drops not merely due to the discovered *fact* of peer disagreement, but due to Craig's own subsequent failure to meet an expected (diachronic) standard of due care and diligence in treating the counter-evidence his friend and peer presents him with.

¹⁷ The virtue responsibilists can certainly agree with their virtue reliabilist counterparts that the etiology of belief matters in knowledge-yielding doxastic justification, and in the achievement of other epistemic goods as like theoretical understanding as well. Synchronic rationality *qua* 'fit' of the strength of belief with one's evidence at any point in time is thus viewed as at best one among a number of sources of epistemic standards, which include agent reliability as well as reliability-enhancing intellectual motivations and habits of inquiry. (Guy Axtell, Philip Olson, "Three Independent Factors in Epistemology," *Contemporary Pragmatism* 6, 2 (2009): 89-109.)

2. Reductionism, Non-Reductionism, and the Unification Ideal

Before proceeding to the Craig Case, the three different possible evidentialist explanations of it, and my responses to the adequacy of each, something more should be said about Dougherty's contrast of reductionism and non-reductionism. He acknowledges that there are a range of positions that might support non-reductionism as he employs that term, some but not all being versions of virtue epistemology. He cites the more explicitly non-reductionist authors like Lorraine Code, James Montmarquet and I, among those who develop the analogies between ethical and epistemic evaluations. For the virtue responsibilists non-reductionism does not preclude, as one might initially think, but even *supports* aspirations to greater theoretical unity between philosophy's main normative sub-fields.¹⁸ It is a possible path to properly circumspect theoretical unity, and as such not to be dismissed as an obstruction to it or a merely eclectic view. Dougherty rightly notices that the non-reductionist approaches of certain self-described responsibilists are considerably different than the approach taken by Linda Zagzebski, who in *Virtues of the Mind* tries to "subsume the intellectual virtues under the general category for moral virtues."¹⁹ This Dougherty is right to point out is a subsumption thesis, and a reductionist thesis albeit one running in a direction quite *contrary* to the evidentialists' own intended reduction.

Yet we should draw attention to *more* positions available to non-reductionists than Dougherty distinguishes; Susan Haack²⁰ helpfully identifies five distinct views in the literature about the relationship between ethical and epistemic appraisal:

[1] that ethical appraisal is strictly inapplicable where epistemological appraisal is relevant (the *independence thesis*);

[2] that epistemic appraisal is distinct from, but analogous to, ethical appraisal (the *analogy thesis*)

[3] that positive/negative epistemic appraisal is distinct from, but invariably associated with, positive/negative ethical appraisal (*correlation thesis*);

[4] that there is not invariable correlation, but partial overlap, where positive/negative epistemic appraisal is associated with positive/negative ethical appraisal (the *overlap thesis*)

¹⁸ Although similarly confused identifications of unification and reductionism do sometimes occur even in the sciences, most philosophers of science acknowledged that these are separable goals; it seems possible then to hold that a virtue theory or other general theory of value provides a non-trivial degree of unification to epistemology and ethics.

¹⁹ Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 255.

²⁰ Susan Haack, "The Ethics of Belief Reconsidered," in *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty*, ed. Matthias Steup (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21-34.

[5] that epistemic appraisal is a subspecies of ethical appraisal (the *special-case thesis*).

On this taxonomy, Dougherty holds Model [1], and Zagzebski's claim in *Virtues of the Mind* "that epistemic evaluation is a form of moral evaluation"²¹ is an instance of Model [5]. Non-reductionists might hold any of Models [2]-[4], some of which it should be noted make considerably stronger claims than others; yet each of [2]-[4] are able to consistently maintain basic distinctions between theoretical and practical reason, as well as between epistemic and moral evaluation (as Model [1] arguably is not). This broadened taxonomy is helpful in correcting one mistake it appears Dougherty makes in characterizing the non-reductionism of the core responsibilists and the burden of proof issues that lie between them. For at one point he strays from his initial, correct characterization and attributes to them a stronger thesis than I think its defenders need to or in fact do make. This comes when he claims that they need to demonstrate "a purely epistemic category of evaluation which does not concern fit with one's evidence," or again, "a purely epistemic evaluation" or kind of irrationality, "over and above synchronic irrationality."²² It is quite unclear what 'purely' is meant to indicate in these passages, and credit-worthy intellectual habits and problem-solving strategies are anyway surely connected not *only* with concerns of agent reliability in the external sense, but also with concerns of how evidence, including counter-evidence, is internally processed by agents engaged in inquiry. But Dougherty's claim about what the responsibilists *must demonstrate* in order to maintain their non-reductionist stance seems to function as a burden shifting move that they needn't accept. Even the strongest of the three models ([2]-[4]) available to them asserts *only* a strong kind of 'entanglement' of epistemic and ethical evaluation (Model [4], the *overlap thesis*, which happens to be Haack's own view).²³ Yet this strong kind of entanglement, and even the weaker kinds of it in Models [2] and [3], the *analogy*

²¹ Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 6.

²² Dougherty, "Reducing Responsibility," 6.

²³ This should be familiar from the history of ethics in the 20th century, where for instance the position of pragmatists from Dewey through Putnam, in opposition to the influential schemes of reduction offered by C.L. Stevenson, and typically endorsed by the logical positivists, took the form of entanglement thesis (see Putnam's *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004)). Defenders of the irreducibility of 'thick' affective and characterological concepts to 'thin' deontological ones is another pertinent example; in writers from Bernard Williams to John McDowell this irreducibility is similarly couched as an entanglement thesis (quite contrary to asserting a 'pure x' idea). See also Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy*, for an extended discussion of return of philosophical interest in thick concepts and its relationship with "the collapse of the fact/value dichotomy."

thesis and the *correlation* thesis, appear substantial enough to motivate certain main tenets of responsibilist thought, including especially the inclusion of ‘character epistemology’ (Baehr’s term) into epistemology’s purview and the properly epistemic standing of evaluations of intellectual motives and habits. This is why I thus think it is mistaken to claim that it is incumbent upon critics of the Identity Thesis to demonstrate “a purely epistemic category of evaluation which does not concern fit with one’s evidence.”²⁴ This is misguided because the responsibilist can hardly be expected to argue for entanglement (strong or weak) and for ‘purity’ at the same time. Better to acknowledge, as social and feminist epistemologists like Heidi Grasswick do, the “impurities of epistemic responsibility,” and sharing their demand “that a viable concept of epistemic responsibility must be consistent with the impurities of epistemic agency ... as we make decisions regarding how to know.”²⁵ The only *direct* burden of a non-reductionist as Dougherty uses that term is to show that proposed reductions *don’t work*. Yet the same point also underlines that it *is* clearly incumbent upon Feldman and other reductionists to demonstrate that every instance of purported epistemic irresponsibility in the kinds of cases before us is really “just an instance of purely non-epistemic irresponsibility/irrationality” – *since that is just what Identity claims*.

3. Competing Explanations in the Craig Case

With these notes about the Identity Thesis and the nature of the responsibilists’ opposition to it out of the way, we can precede directly to Dougherty’s case of Craig the short-earth special creationist. The author acknowledges finding Craig’s mind-set troubling:

The problem, though, didn’t seem to be that his beliefs didn’t fit his evidence—they did seem to fit his evidence, for he had read very narrowly on the subject and had been raised and schooled all his life in an apparently reliable community which sustained this belief in the usual social ways, and which had reasonable-sounding stories for why people deny their views. Rather, the problem seemed to be precisely that he only had the very limited evidence he had, since I’d often recommended books challenging his views. In language that is becoming more common, his belief seemed to satisfy the standards of synchronic rationality: it seemed to fit the evidence he had at the time; but it didn’t appear to meet the

²⁴ Dougherty, “Reducing Responsibility,” 5.

²⁵ Heidi E. Grasswick, “The Impurities of Epistemic Responsibility: Developing a Practice-Oriented Epistemology,” in *Recognition, Responsibility and Rights: Feminist Ethics and Social Theory*, eds. Hilde Nelson and Robin Fiore (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 90.

standards of diachronic rationality, which is a cross-temporal assessment of rationality.²⁶

This case does indeed typify ones that responsibilists have raised.²⁷ Dougherty even sharpens this challenge by imagining that he suggests to Craig “that he read a couple books which I say show that the arguments of young-Earth creationists are seriously flawed,” and that “he refuses to do so.”²⁸ If we allow the dynamic aspect of evaluating Craig over some interval of time, this refusal to inquire into the matter further by consulting readily available books and arguments concerning geologic time, etc. seems intellectually irresponsible and something an intellectually virtuous agent would not do. If we further trust the intuition that there is a change (a drop) in our evaluation of either or both of Craig himself, *qua* epistemic agent, or of the warrant he has for his belief, then the case appears to undermine the Identity Thesis. For again, “evidentialism requires the change in *epistemic* status of belief issue from a change in *evidential* status,”²⁹ and here it seems Craig has no substantial new evidence, having ignored rather than investigated the challenges raised by his friend’s testimony.

But Dougherty, having now nicely identified the challenge that the Craig Case presents to evidentialism, goes on to give evidentialist explanations of it, explanations that proceed without a need for the ‘diachronic picture,’ and that apply a kind of error theory to those attributions of intellectual irresponsibility which on first glance had looked formidable. Initially we were supposing Craig’s belief to be justified by the evidentialist standard, even if only because the homogenous culture he was raised and educated confirmed this belief at every step and he never sought out any potentially disconfirming evidence. But on the first of these three alternative interpretations we are mistaken to think that there is no change to Craig’s evidential status. There *is* a loss or drop: After Craig’s encounter his belief *no longer* fits the evidence as it previously did. Recognition of serious peer disagreement eventuates in the loss of whatever positive epistemic status of Craig’s belief that evidential fit is supposed to supply, but explains this by a *corresponding* drop in his evidential status or ‘fit.’ “Evidence of evidence is evidence,” so that “at the time at which Craig became aware that he had testimony from a known reliable source that some of his beliefs were false, at that moment he had *evidence* that his beliefs *were* false.”³⁰ Thus, this loss of positive epistemic status

²⁶ Dougherty, “Reducing Responsibility,” 5.

²⁷ For others see especially Baehr, “Evidentialism, Vice, and Virtue.”

²⁸ Dougherty, “Reducing Responsibility,” 6.

²⁹ Dougherty, “Reducing Responsibility,” 5, emphasis original.

³⁰ Dougherty, “Reducing Responsibility,” 7.

of his belief “is perfectly explicable in terms of synchronic justification”³¹ because Craig is interpreted as having gone *from* synchronically justified (‘epistemically rational’) to synchronically unjustified (‘not epistemically rational’) in holding his belief. Hence by this first explanation, “If his beliefs don’t change at all we have something to explain our inclination to condemn his belief in the lack of synchronic justification.”³²

This first explanation functions so as not to allow responsibilists to run cases in the way they want in order to directly challenge the Identity Thesis, and Dougherty believes that in many cases this explanation may offer the most natural interpretation. He is nevertheless willing to concede that responsibilists *would* be able to describe the case so that it is clearly assumable, or is stipulated, that Craig remains synchronically justified in accepting the creationist proposition *after* the encounter with his friend. Thus Dougherty allows his first response to be treated as something of an aside, acknowledging that dialectically the greater weight of argument over issues between the evidentialists and the responsibilists falls upon the success or failure of the latter two of his three evidentialist explanations of the Craig Case.

These second and third explanations take a markedly different tact than the first. According to these, Craig maintains the ‘fit’ between his level of belief and his total evidence even post-encounter, and so long as this is true of him then he is doing perfectly well *qua* epistemic agent.³³ Craig is indeed culpable in *some sense* for failing to pursue inquiry and/or discounting the testimony of the epistemic peer who disagrees with him, but the second explanation is that what he displays is only an ‘instrumental’ or ‘prudential’ irrationality. “It is instrumentally irrational for Craig not to read the books, since if he wants to get the truth, and we supposed he did, he ought to read the books, since he has evidence that reading the books will get him to the truth. The cost is low, the potential payoff, we may assume, is high.”³⁴ The second explanation leans heavily upon the point that there is no general philosophical principle as to what determines whether acquiring some true belief is worth our effort attention; expending effort on inquiry and taking an attitude towards a proposition always involves personal costs and trade-offs, and since there are many truths not worth knowing, any answer to what determines whether some truth is worth our attention engages personal/practical interests and/or moral concerns. Although he doesn’t use these terms, Dougherty might be

³¹ Dougherty, “Reducing Responsibility,” 7.

³² Dougherty, “Reducing Responsibility,” 10.

³³ Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, ed., *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology*.

³⁴ Dougherty, “Reducing Responsibility,” 10.

thought to be accusing the responsibilists of conflating theoretical and practical reason, or again of presupposing a strong voluntarism about belief in ascribing 'intellectual' responsibility and irresponsibility to agents.

But what if it is responded that this explanation isn't plausible because truth is, after all, not some merely pragmatic goal but a prime (perhaps even intrinsic) epistemic good, and it looks as though Craig's faulty way of maintaining his challenged belief shows that he lacks appropriate motivation to believe truly? Then there is a third explanation which an evidentialist might invoke: "But this also is either a matter of instrumental irrationality if he has a sufficiently strong desire to believe truly on this matter or a purely moral one if he does not have such a desire."³⁵ There is a kind of irresponsibility operating, but it is purely moral and not intellectual irresponsibility. This relates back to the earlier point about 'culpable ignorance' when there are costs to information. Dougherty doesn't take himself to be arguing that there is no such thing as culpable ignorance in matters of belief, but rather that "being in a state of ignorance is, when irresponsible, morally irresponsible or instrumentally irrational."³⁶

The evidentialist reductionist does not need to argue that these three explanations are mutually exclusive, but they do need to show that they are all that are needed in the Craig Case, and that it's unlikely that we will find other real-world cases that cannot also be better explained in at least one of the ways indicated. Dougherty holds that simplicity argues for reducing normative categories wherever possible, and that if epistemic responsibility *can* be adequately explained through any one of the three proposed strategies then we needn't go looking for a different kind of explanation.

4. Interpreting the Craig Case

Let's now turn to critically evaluate each of Dougherty's proposed explanations of the Craig Case in turn. His first explanatory strategy *allows* that there is a loss³⁷ in the epistemic status of Craig's creationist belief after the encounter with his friend and epistemic peer, but it explains this loss in terms of a *corresponding* loss of the evidential fit that his belief enjoyed prior to the encounter. Hence it explains the drop in status wholly in terms of loss of synchronic rationality or evidential fit.

³⁵ Dougherty, "Reducing Responsibility," 10.

³⁶ Dougherty, "Reducing Responsibility," 4.

³⁷ Dougherty appears to differ from Feldman in allowing that there are degrees of belief, but it seems to me that he applies this inconsistently to his epistemology of disagreement if he still assumes as Feldman does that a person's justification for a belief is fully defeated by the awareness of disagreement, or that no belief is defeated by this awareness.

I would concede that there are in principle certain cases for which each of the three explanatory strategies might work. But in what kinds of cases, specifically, and if in the Craig Case, then why? Dougherty makes no effort to clearly identify what the moral fault or the prudential aim would be construed to be in the Craig Case, for instance. With the first explanatory strategy, it is clearly the evidentialist's burden to provide not a mere sketch or suggestion but a full accounting, a *theory of evidence* illuminating the actual basis for claiming that Craig's belief was synchronically rational *up to* this one encounter, but synchronically irrational thereafter. Otherwise invoking this explanation appears *ad hoc*. What is the independent motivation for viewing *this* one particular piece of testimony or *this* one encounter with an epistemic peer as being what 'tips the scale' or 'crosses the threshold' between synchronic rationality and irrationality?

Dougherty and I would agree, I think, in taking recognition of serious peer disagreement as having epistemic consequences for agents. Dougherty does not seem entirely comfortable with those currently-popular epistemologies of disagreement that allow only the three doxastic attitudes of full belief, disbelief, or suspension, and that consequently tend to leave only the options of a 'no defeater' or a 'full defeater' view of the epistemological significance of serious peer disagreement. I would concur with rejecting these assumptions, if that is indeed what Dougherty intends. But allowing that epistemic-peer disagreement often results in a *partial* defeater,³⁸ while likely making the description of the focus-case more realistic, would correspondingly also make it more difficult to support the assertion that Craig passes over this threshold from being synchronically justified to being synchronically unjustified in holding his creationist belief, at just the point at which he receives his peer's contesting testimony.³⁹ As a further aside, epistemic 'peerhood' even seems impossible to define apart from admirable shared habits of inquiry and a normal level of intellectual motivation to achieve a range of socially shared and acknowledged epistemic goods. Thus I think that attributions of evidential fit with 'total evidence' are implicitly *parasitic* on attributions of adequate investigatory habits, suggesting again that bare synchronic rationality maximization is not a fundamental criterion of epistemic value. Note that responsibilists also often say much the same thing about bare or 'thin' attributions

³⁸ As does Michael Thune, "'Partial Defeaters' and the Epistemology of Disagreement," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 60, 239 (2010): 355-372.

³⁹ Under the influence of evidentialist assumptions, "the debate about the epistemological significance of disagreement is largely focused on whether a belief's justification is retained or lost wholesale," yet a more adequate "account of the epistemological significance of disagreement should leave plenty of room for cases which result in the partial defeat of beliefs." (Thune, "'Partial Defeaters,'" 356 & 372.)

of reliable genetically-endowed processes (faculty virtues) made by austere versions of reliabilist externalism that neglect the importance of personal justification, both synchronic and diachronic.⁴⁰

This suggests a further line of argument. The first explanatory strategy illustrates for us how evidentialists want to treat Craig's belief on the model of acceptance of an atomistic proposition, and want to treat the total evidence he has for that proposition in the way we would treat the evidence for any everyday, flatly empirical assertion. Yet in most matters of any importance in relation to a person's moral, political, philosophical, or religious beliefs the evidence is diverse, subtle and complex; what the agent finds salient in this diverse evidence-base, and therefore what constitutes the total evidence he 'has' that bear upon it, will vary over time. The reasoning that supports propositional acceptance based upon such evidence is *cumulative in form*: It is not just a matter 'total' evidence, but of *totalizing* or *on-balance* reasoning. *Cumulative case arguments* are ones that agents approach with cognitive *strategies* that vary greatly in their sophistication and in their appropriateness to the subject matter before them. For example, a figure like Craig (who hasn't examined what we would call 'hard' empirical evidence) likely relies pretty heavily upon Paley-esque arguments by analogy and arguments by appeal to Biblical authority. It is these I imagine he would cite if pressed to offer defense of his special creationist belief. But both of these inductive strategies are notoriously difficult to provide objective/probative measures for. Logic tells us that with analogical argument and appeal to authority, we need to carefully distinguish our evaluation of the argument's inductive strength from our evaluation of the truth of its premises; yet many or most people are not logically proficient enough to notice let alone to carefully apply this distinction between inductive *strength* and *cogency* in their reflective weightings of these kinds of arguments.

The upshot here is that an evidentialist attributor of the first explanation must first be *in a position to know or reasonably judge* that Craig's encounter with the friend and epistemic peer really does tip the scale from synchronically justified to unjustified – from *on-balance* fitting to *on-balance* not fitting his total evidence; but the cumulative or all-things-considered nature of the agent's inference in such cases strongly suggests that the evidentialists are here setting themselves a task that cannot be met. The problem of operationalizing 'evidential fit' to a degree that can evade the *ad hoc* objection will be still more difficult whenever broad-scale hypotheses or theories confront one another; now the choice between them is generally characterizable as *inference to the best explanation*. Cases of *inference to*

⁴⁰ See George Streever, "Virtues of Inquiry and the Limits of Reliabilism," *Social Epistemology* 20, 1 (2006): 117–128.

the best explanation are again common in science, philosophy and religious metaphysics, but they place a further special burden on the evidentialist who wants to apply Dougherty's first explanatory strategy to the Craig Case: *produce the further weightings* that allow us to support the claim that an agent like Craig was really on-balance synchronically justified in his belief at time T1 but not so at T2, post-encounter with a proponent of a contrary large-scale hypothesis or theory.

Another major worry about the satisfactoriness of the first evidentialist explanatory strategy also arises from Dougherty's rather artificial presentation of Craig as an agent previously situated in near complete cultural isolation from the scientific tradition of our day. The author describes this as a 'harmless idealization'⁴¹ and says his account could easily be adapted to more realistic ones and still run this first explanation. I doubt that this is true, however. For Craig's epistemic situation to be one that genuinely invites interpretation along the lines of the first explanation, such an idealization seem needed.⁴² In a case where the individual has already been aware of scientific ideas which challenge his special creationism, it will be all the more difficult to motivate the claim that this one *further* peer-encounter or one *additional* piece of testimonial evidence results in that agent's belief sliding from properly to improperly fitting his total body of evidence.⁴³

The second and third explanations that Dougherty offers, by allowing us interpretations on which Craig continuously fulfills the evidentialist's condition of being synchronically rational, are better keyed to the issues at stake between evidentialist supporters of Identity and their critics. The responsibilists now appear in a better position to argue that the deserved criticisms of Craig *qua* epistemic agent aren't captured on assumption that synchronic epistemic rationality is the sole source of legitimately epistemic norms, but rather by something like a failure in due care and diligence on Craig's part. But in reply to this charge, Dougherty is arguing that the evidentialist might succeed in saving the Identity Thesis by

⁴¹ Dougherty, "Reducing Responsibility," footnote 7.

⁴² The unrealisticness of this idealization is the one small exception I mentioned earlier to allowing the Craig Case as a shared focus for debate.

⁴³ Note that in the page 5 quote, above, Dougherty writes that "I'd often recommended books challenging his views" in the past. In this more realistic glossing of the case, I'd hold, the first explanation is *clearly implausible* because the newest encounter is unlikely to dramatically result in moving the agent's belief from on-balance fitting to on-balance not fitting total evidence. The encounter with a disagreeing peer is then clearly an important piece of evidence (and serious peer disagreement, I agree with Dougherty, deserves to be taken seriously). But I am skeptical of an ideal attributor providing the single objective weighting of these diverse evidences needed to say that an agent was synchronically rational at time T1, but synchronically rational at time T2, post-encounter.

sticking to their guns and saying, first, that in remaining synchronically justified Craig is 'doing fine' as an epistemic agent, and second, that what the responsibilists describe as Craig's intellectual irresponsibility will always on closer analysis be seen to be an extra-epistemological evaluation. More formally, the suggestion that the responsibilists are confusing intellectual responsibility with moral blameworthiness is first broached by Dougherty, as we noted earlier, through the question of what determines whether a particular truth is worth one's attention. From there, his line of reasoning leading to the second and third explanations is formalized as a constructive dilemma:

Either there is some interest at stake in knowing or there is not. If there is not, then there is no irresponsibility. If there is, it is either the inquirer's interest – or someone else's interests are at stake – in which case it is a moral shortcoming.⁴⁴

A constructive dilemma is a valid argument form.⁴⁵ This dilemma I'll argue is unsound, and I'll approach it by 'grasping' the second of its two horns.⁴⁶ The dilemma as just quoted requires further clarification, however, since its second horn is itself intended to be disjunctive, leading directly to Dougherty's second and third explanations:

2nd Horn: if it's the inquirer's interests at stake then the irresponsibility or blameworthiness is really just a matter of instrumental irrationality, and if it's someone else's interests at stake then it's really a matter of moral irresponsibility.

First, some general comments regarding assumptions underlying Dougherty's constructive dilemma. One mistake that I think is made here is to cast these issues in such an individualistic philosophical idiom. Knowledge and knowledge

⁴⁴ Dougherty, "Reducing Responsibility," 1.

⁴⁵ A constructive dilemma is a valid argument of the form (if P then Q) and (if R then S); P or R; therefore, Q or S. There is actually an embedded second dilemma attached to the second horn: "If it concerns the interests of others, then either I have a duty to promote their interests or I don't. If I don't, then I'm doing nothing irresponsible in not being scrupulous. If I do, then the irresponsibility is clearly moral." So if it concerns the interests of others, then either I'm doing nothing irresponsible, or my irresponsibility is clearly moral. My response, which consists of grasping the horns of the constructive dilemma, encompasses a response to this second, embedded dilemma as well.

⁴⁶ The first horn – that where there is no interest at stake in a particular proposition being believed, there can be no question of irresponsibility, intellectual or ethical – I won't challenge. But there is a worry about providing a mantle for vices of inattention, which I do not consider to be all and only moral vices. The issue is properly that one can never be intellectually blameworthy for not believing or not disbelieving a proposition regarding which they have no evidence that a morally and intellectually virtuous agent would be presumed to have; it is not that lack of attention entirely insulates an agent from epistemic appraisal.

attributions serve social functions, such that agents are members of communities of inquirers, and knowledge-attributions ‘genealogically’-considered serve social functions of marking reliable testifiers. Another problem that needs to be avoided in the framing of the dilemma is treating assumptions stemming from the fact/value dichotomy of Dougherty’s Model [1] as if they were analytically true (true by definition). This cannot be done without begging some of the most interesting questions at issue in the present debate. I will highlight what I see as mistakes of this kind as they crop up with the nothing but ‘instrumental irrationality’ and the nothing but ‘moral irresponsibility’ reductions.

Let’s start with the third, or ‘moral irresponsibility’ strategy. Dougherty’s point that we sometimes confuse moral with epistemic appraisal is again a valid one. But our burden is only to say why in the Craig Case and similar cases this third explanation does not look very plausible or philosophically satisfying. Firstly, the responsibilists think that we should consider Craig *intellectually irresponsible* for dismissing his peer’s disagreeing testimony and suggestion to re-open inquiry into the grounds for his belief, but not necessarily or obviously *morally irresponsible* for doing so. The evidentialist who appropriates the third explanation will be saying asserting exactly the opposite; I doubt that evidentialists have consensus intuitions in this matter on their side. This is a minor point in itself – what the evidentialist is offering is, after all, an *error theory*, and *could* encompass the error of even what seem to me strong common-sense intuitions to the contrary. What it does is only to raise the bar on the need to show the clear superiority of their way of explaining the case. Secondly, it seems that far too much of the weight of argument with the third explanation flows *merely* from identification of the ‘interests at stake’ in a particular instance of knowing with interests of ‘others’ besides the agent him or herself. That every self-regarding consideration is a non-moral consideration, and every other-regarding consideration is a moral one, is not an assumption that I think many ethicists share, whatever normative ethical account they hold. Secondly, far too much of the weight of argument with the third explanation flows merely from association of the dynamic aspects of belief acquisition and maintenance with overt ‘behavior related to the formation of belief.’⁴⁷ This term ‘behavior’ threatens to carry practical or moral assessment by definition, potentially placing it all within the realm of practical reason with one fell swoop. But of course much of what the defenders of character epistemology and a diachronic picture of epistemic evaluation are concerned with are intellectual dispositions, habits and problem-solving strategies, of which overt behaviors are outward manifestations. Conduct and character are strictly correlative, as Dewey puts it; virtue theorists

⁴⁷ Dougherty, “Reducing Responsibility,” 3, Feldman, “The Ethics of Belief,” 90.

would anyway be among the *least* likely fellows to focus on conduct to the exclusion of character. So this term 'behavior,' while convenient for the evidentialist to employ, misses its mark by a good distance in describing the responsibilist approach.

Thirdly, if I claim that an agent lacks the motivational set needed to distinguish aesthetic objects from mechanical ones, my judgment of the agent is not *itself* an aesthetic judgment but a judgment of agential competence *with respect* to this target domain. Relatedly, an evidentialist characterization of Craig's blameworthiness as relating to his moral rather than intellectual agency seems to confuse two things. It may well be moral considerations, such as the impact that an agent's highly ethnocentric belief might have on others when he acts upon it, that initially draws philosophic or social scientific researchers to an interest in the case, and to scrutinize habits of inquiry that the agent manifested in acquiring or maintaining this belief. But once so attending, the focus easily shifts to epistemic evaluation simpliciter, where the standards utilized are intellectual standards involving consideration of whether the agent manifested normal intellectual motivations, utilized effective or ineffective cognitive strategies for problem-solving, avoided known cognitive biases and fallacious tendencies in reasoning, etc. This latter evaluation will be clearly epistemic to the extent that what the presence (or absence) of normal desire for true belief and strategic efforts at inquiry is *salient in explaining* isn't the agent's blameworthiness in *acting* upon the belief, but simply why the agent in this instance was or wasn't successful in achieving distinctively *epistemic aims* such as true belief, etc. This is then a distinct evaluation of the quality of the agent's inquiry and of the competence and performance of the agent *qua* inquirer. If this weren't the case, then presumably the proponent of the third explanatory strategy would have to hold that all attributions of 'epistemic credit' on credit accounts of knowing are disguised moral assessments as well.

Enough has been said regarding the claim that if the interests at stake in knowing in a particular case are not the agent's own, then evaluation of that agent's habits of inquiry is really only disguised moral evaluation. But let's look at the other conjunct of the second horn of Dougherty's dilemma, the one which states, "If it pertains to one's own interests, then the irresponsibility at hand is easily explained in terms of practical irrationality."⁴⁸

In my view the Craig Case and cases like it will not plausibly be adequately explained on the other two explanatory strategies, and so the ability of this 'practical' or 'instrumental irrationality' explanation to catch all remaining is crucial to the support of the Identity Thesis. Explaining the agent's failure of due care and

⁴⁸ Dougherty, "Reducing Responsibility," 7.

diligence with counter-evidence will be necessary if we are to be convinced that the Identity Thesis is true and that there aren't real-world cases of apparent intellectual irresponsibility that cannot be explained in one of these three ways.⁴⁹ Yet Dougherty's reasons for claiming that diachronic assessments of the intellectual irresponsibility of the agent amount only to assessments of 'practical' or 'means/end' or 'instrumental' rationality/irrationality, strike me as obscure and dubious. Yes, our intellectual lives are always caught up in the balancing of the goals of accumulating interesting true beliefs and avoiding false ones; this involves both valuation and risk, a point that pragmatists like Haack have often highlighted. There are also, to be sure, issues concerning tradeoffs between the cost of information in terms of energy and attention, and the constant need for active fair-mindedness. I agree with Dougherty that his points about how practical interests and values may inform issues of attention, etc. serve as a corrective to any veritists who would claim "a general, impersonal duty to seek truth as such."⁵⁰ But these points I see going nowhere in regards to showing that all choices of attention and all investigative strategies in pursuit of true belief, knowledge, understanding, etc. are nothing but moral directives or else matters of prudential/instrumental rationality. If doing fine as an epistemic agent were really the passive affair the synchronic account seems to suggest, there would be no response to the 'updating problem' with inductive knowledge, which in turn would be a steep concession to scepticism. There may be no general answer to the question of how long you remain justified in your belief that the car you parked on the street yesterday, or the child you parked in the playroom before the game started, is there yet. But the reasonableness of occasionally getting off the coach and checking ('updating one's evidence') is not merely pragmatic/moral – it's that, to be sure, but one's level of active searching for updating information is clearly *also* a matter of what rational confidence you can have for those inductive beliefs, and what good reasons you could offer if challenged in them. Evidential fit is presumably supposed to supply reflectively 'good reasons' that one can discursively offer as grounds for the belief. But if the agent hasn't been active in updating information when needed in order to maintain rational confidence, or put any effort into inquiring into counter-evidence to their belief once presented with it, then that agent's reasons aren't going to wash when someone asks them why they (still) believe it, are they?

⁴⁹ The language of intellectual vices seems well-adapted to providing detailed characterizations of the cognitive heuristics as cognitive studies are revealing to us, without treating agents who fall afoul of the standard of evidential fit as simply 'dysfunctional' agents, as Dougherty appears to want to treat them.

⁵⁰ Dougherty, "Reducing Responsibility," 10.

It is noteworthy that Dougherty uses ‘prudential,’ ‘instrumental’ and ‘practical’ synonymously, in order to mark a sharp separation from matters epistemic. But why can’t it be both instrumentally and epistemologically evaluable, where true *belief* is valued intrinsically and true *beliefs* serve many a practical goal? There may well always be the possibility of additive personal value from having true beliefs that are relevant to action, or to satisfaction of personal desires, but this doesn’t show that their personal value *excludes* their status as an epistemic good. A decision to refrain from some activity “does not constitute a rejection or a denial of the norms that govern it”⁵¹; neither does choosing to engage in that activity render its assessment wholly pragmatic.⁵² An agent who *while* engaged in inquiry forms reflective beliefs by way of methods or strategies that aren’t reliably truth-conducive seems to be engaging poorly in epistemic activities. Efforts to be actively fair-minded are obviously intimately involved in the improvement of agent reliability in areas of contested belief. It seems that if the efforts to be actively fair-minded towards counter-evidence to one’s belief is ‘easily explained in terms of practical irrationality’ it is only because instrumental or means-end re-descriptions are *always easily available* when aim-pursuit is involved. Its availability in and of itself does little to show that such instrumentalist descriptions are *adequate* to their subject-matter, however. Their availability as descriptions doesn’t mean they capture all of the relevant aspects of rationality involved. Cases where the means are partly *constitutive* of the end, as seems to be the case with intellectual as with moral virtues, are among the many cases in which instrumentalist re-description provides too narrow a conception of the rationality-connected concerns. Nickerson identifies at least eight distinct conceptions of rationality, which he sees as ‘aspects’ dependent upon explanatory interests. These are rationality as:

- consistency with self-interest
- pragmatic adaptiveness
- consistency of actions with preferences or goals
- optimal analytic choice behavior

⁵¹ Michael-John Turp, “Naturalized Epistemology and the Normative,” *Forum Philosophicum* 13 (2008): 343-355.

⁵² “We do, after all, decline to investigate the truth of a great number of propositions without this implying that we thereby violate in the norms of judgement. We might do so because the propositions are trivial, or because the investigation would be inappropriately time-consuming, or for moral, prudential, political or aesthetic reasons However, a decision to refrain from some activity does not constitute a rejection or a denial of the norms that govern it. If one decided that [some project] were a reasonable project, then quite plausibly one *would* be governed by the applicable epistemic norms, as in all one's epistemic endeavors.” (Turp, “Naturalized Epistemology,” 352.)

- satisficing
- conformity to norms
- reflectiveness
- responsiveness to reasons.

Those most clearly epistemological among the eight aspects of rationality would be rationality as reflectiveness, and as responsiveness to reasons. The responsibilist's interests most clearly fall under rationality as reflectiveness – “a matter of attitude and intent – love of truth, willingness to examine issues from various points of view, active fair-mindedness”⁵³; but the responsibilist makes no pretension that this is the *whole* of rationality as related to the achievement of epistemic goods. The evidentialist's interests most clearly fall under rationality as responsiveness to reasons if we restrict ‘responsiveness’ to the passive and synchronic, as they would. They *do* claim that this is the whole of epistemic rationality, and that rationality as reflectiveness, because it often involves active and not merely passive fair-mindedness, reduces to rationality as consistency of actions with preferences or goals. This seems unmotivated. How much effort rationality requires that an agent expend is an open question; clearly the rational requirement to seek evidence must be tempered by the cost of obtaining information and by the recognition of practical limits on what people can be expected to do. But it is far from clear that ‘epistemic rationality’ consists exclusively in being responsive or fair with whatever evidence one *happens* to encounter. “A more active interpretation would have rationality require that one put significant effort into seeking evidence ... active search for evidence, especially counterindicative evidence, is a key aspect of some conceptions of what it means to reason well.”⁵⁴

Recalling a passage noted earlier, “maybe the problem is that we think Craig doesn't care enough about the truth. But this also is either a matter of instrumental irrationality if he has a sufficiently strong desire to believe truly on this matter or a purely moral one if he does not have such a desire.”⁵⁵ This strikes me as another false dilemma. Briefly, if the agent's performance in gathering and weighing evidence is thought to be irresponsible for want of skills rather than sound intellectual motivation, then the sense of ‘instrumental’ irrationality that could be applied would clearly be consonant with epistemic evaluations rather than representing merely practical or pragmatic irrationality.⁵⁶ Yet the case only appears to get worse

⁵³ Nickerson, *Aspects of Rationality*, 25.

⁵⁴ Nickerson, *Aspects of Rationality*, 141.

⁵⁵ Dougherty, “Reducing Responsibility,” 10.

⁵⁶ To illustrate further, there are epistemologists who conceive first-personal epistemic rationality as a *kind* of instrumental rationality in the service of one's distinctively cognitive or epistemic

for this explanatory strategy if we hold true belief to be an aim of intrinsic value. Nor need we agree, as the second horn of the newest dilemma supposes, that if Craig's intellectual motivations *are* what is in questions – that is to say, if indeed we find that lack of a normal level of intellectual motivation leads to his unreliability either generally or in a particular case, that this is necessarily to make a moral assessment of him. The previous objections to the second explanatory strategy I think already work to dispel this contention.

In summary, if the *ad hocness* worry was strong with the employment of Dougherty's first explanatory strategy, that worry is greatly magnified with this third strategy, which purports to show that evaluations of an agent that *aren't* moral evaluations but that do go beyond 'evidential fit', can always be treated as some 'other sort of normative failing'. 'Instrumentally' and 'prudentially' irrational are the catch-all terms, but it appears that pursuit of perfectly respectable epistemic ends are simply being *re-described* in this manner in order to save the reductionist theory. Yet the real point of contention may not be these issues about differences between epistemic and prudential assessments, but about sharp differences in what Kvanvig⁵⁷ calls the 'idealizations' embodied in different epistemological theories. In the way that virtue responsibilists idealize personal justification, it depends not just on the information the agent in fact recognizes, or has available to her, but also information that person *would* have obtained given sound epistemic motivation and a baseline degree of cognitive competence on that person's part. The standard of competent due care and diligence that an agent's performance is judged against is not restricted to a passive conception of fair-mindedness, but it does not need to

goals; Thomas Kelly dubs this the *instrumentalist conception* of epistemic rationality, and it is exemplified in a framework of naturalized epistemology by thinkers like Hilary Kornblith. This view has some plausibility, but assessing Craig's shortcomings as a kind of instrumental irrationality using this model would confirm rather than deny its standing as an epistemological assessment of the agent. If this *isn't* what Dougherty intends, then I suspect he is just smuggling in at this point the quite radical Conee/Feldman stance "if there is an aim for belief, or a norm for belief, it is evidence, not truth ... if a person has strong evidence for a false proposition F she should believe that falsehood" (Conee, Feldman, *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology*, 184), and that "a person who irrationally believes a lot of truths is not doing well epistemically. In contrast a person who forms a lot of false beliefs rationally is doing well epistemically." (184) But, as Pascal Engel has noted, to purport to supplant knowledge, and understanding as the telos of the life of the mind with constant, perfect synchronic rationality is a radical doctrine that finds no motivation aside from a host of assumptions not shared by evidentialism's critics (Pascal Engel, "Review of *The Architecture of Reason*, by Robert Audi / *Evidentialism*, by Earl Conee and Richard Feldman," *Disputatio* 20, 1 (2006): 349-358, <http://disputatio.com/articles/020-5.pdf>, accessed October 2010).

⁵⁷ Kvanvig, "Propositionalism and the Metaphysics of Experience."

insist upon unrealistically large efforts at inquiry either. That level is determined by the context of inquiry itself, including the nature of the claim, and the kinds of investigative and reasoning strategies that bear upon it.⁵⁸

5. Closing Remarks

Trent Dougherty's paper highlights important issues that deserve considerably more attention. Issues about active fair-mindedness and the cost of information is one such question responsibilists would like to see discussion expanded upon. This paper has replied directly to his dilemma for responsibilism, and to his key reductionist claim that one or another of his three proposed explanatory strategies will always better-explain cases like the Craig Case than will any diachronic or dynamic concept of epistemic irresponsibility. I conclude that none of the three explanations Dougherty offers in the Craig Case is as plausible as he thinks they are, and that neither individually nor collectively do they provide evaluations *as* plausible or informative as one invoking person-level motivation and/or habits of inquiry. It isn't an error or illusion: Craig really *isn't* doing as well *qua* epistemic agent as Dougherty and other evidentialists would have us suppose. Moreover, the merits of a reductionist urge in epistemology, as Dougherty presents it, is considerably overwrought. Reductionist philosophical approaches that claim motivation from a desire for theoretical unification often not only fail at their task, but actually preclude the possible realization of greater theoretical unification. Evidentialists like Feldman claim to want to develop as purely internalist a conception of epistemic justification as possible. The evidentialist insistence on reducing epistemic normativity to a purely synchronic standard, and the perpetuation of the longstanding debate over internalism and externalist about knowledge, I submit, is a case in point.

The objections we have made here to Foley's and Dougherty's Identity Thesis and its confusions of *evidential* status with *epistemic* status largely agree with those that Richard Foley has previously made; this makes relevant the lesson Foley draws from his own discussions of internalism, the lesson of the need to properly separate the theory of knowledge from the internalist account of justification. The key

⁵⁸ Dougherty could argue directly against such agent-focused idealizations, but the plausibility of the explanation in terms of Craig having exhibited instrumental/practical *instead* of intellectual/epistemic blameworthiness cannot lean on the assumption that propositionalism is true without begging all of the interesting questions at stake here. Propositional and doxastic justification are indeed difficult to reconcile, whatever epistemological orientation one adopts. But virtue epistemologists do not think the evidentialists are fair in imposing the self-serving propositionalist view over the debate. Etiology matters in epistemology, and diachronic factors are substantially a matter of a belief's causal etiology.

lesson for Foley is “the corrupting consequences of the assumption that there is a conceptual tie between epistemic justification and knowledge.”⁵⁹ This “Unfortunate Assumption,” as he calls it – the assumption that the conditions that make a belief justified are by definition conditions that turn a true belief into a good candidate for knowledge – is “needlessly limiting”: “It discourages the idea that there are different, equally legitimate projects for epistemologists to pursue” and it inevitably distorts *both* the project of trying to provide and analysis of knowledge, *and* the project of understand epistemic responsibility or rationality its importance to us. Now, what Dougherty calls the Identity Thesis is a product of the Unfortunate Assumption and appears completely unmotivated apart from it. What commitment to that assumption produces in the present instance is an artificial separation between the standard of evidential fit or synchronic rationality and our everyday assessments of each other's opinions, which as Foley points out “tend to emphasize whether we have been responsible in forming our beliefs rather than whether we have satisfied the prerequisites for knowledge.”

‘The remedy’ which Foley prescribes, and which I here suggest we prescribe for defenders of the Identity Thesis, is that they not resist the philosophical reasons pushing us to a ‘separation’ of the two projects. The prescribed remedy is for them to jettison the Unfortunate Assumption and all associated attempts to forge a necessary link between evidential justification, and knowledge possession, and then to develop an account of synchronic rationality as one distinctive sense of personal justification or responsibility, and one among several epistemic factors or ‘springs’ of epistemic value.

John Greco’s recent book, *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity*,⁶⁰ provides quite more direct arguments against the evidentialist understanding of epistemic justification and epistemic normativity than I have tried to give here. Knowledge-relevant normative status is not exhausted by the facts about one’s evidence. The view that it is exhausted by evidential fit, he argues, suffers from a “psychological plausibility problem” and is undermined by contemporary cognitive science, and “the prospects for evidentialism about knowledge look bleak.”⁶¹

But in order not to conclude with this criticism of reductionism in epistemology, let me simply propose a model of diachronic evaluation of the competence and

⁵⁹ Richard Foley, “Justified Belief as Responsible Belief,” in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, eds. Matthias Steup, Ernest Sosa (Malden, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell, 2008), 313-326. All quotes from pages 314-315.

⁶⁰ John Greco, *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁶¹ Greco, *Achieving Knowledge*, 68.

performance of inquirers in the pursuit of epistemic aims or goods. The issue between Dougherty and the core responsibilists is not about what has been called ‘pragmatic encroachment’ upon epistemic norms; but if like Feldman one tries to construct as an account of epistemic justification as internalist as possible, the issue at hand might well be seen as a challenge of ‘diachronic encroachment.’ On the following chart reflects key concerns with diachronic evaluation that I think are today shared among social, feminist, and character epistemologists, and that constitute responsibilist research programs in the sense of programs that put epistemic responsibility into a central place in the theory of knowledge. “Normative epistemological assessment need not be restricted to judgments of whether particular claims or beliefs are good or bad, epistemically speaking. Normative epistemological assessment can also take the form of developing models of how to *practice* good inquiry ... action and inquiry are central to the concept of an epistemically responsible agent.”⁶² The diachronic are evaluable in at least three basic ways: morally, pragmatically, and intellectually. We begin with our interests in diachronic evaluations, and then examine them ‘in light of’ moral, pragmatic, or intellectual and epistemic concerns. We do not pre-categorize synchronic and diachronic norms as wholly one or another, but allow the agent’s context and our own interests as evaluators to focus our assessment in one or more directions. Diachronic evaluations are sometimes backwards and other times forward-looking, and this is true of each of the three ways just mentioned. So this model yields six basic types of evaluation, to which on the chart I have added basic ‘prompting questions,’ to give you a feel for how I’m thinking about each. In some cases I have further separated out prompting questions that motivate social epistemological evaluations from those that motivate individual-agent epistemological evaluations. I use my usual terminology in this, referring to these as *zetetic* evaluations, because the diachronic as here understood identifies inquiry-directed motives, habits, and activities, or *zetetic* considerations.⁶³

⁶² Grasswick, “The Impurities of Epistemic Responsibility,” 91-92.

⁶³ Thanks especially to Trent Dougherty, Phil Olson, Heidi Grasswick, Nancy Daukas, Christian Miller and Timothy Chappell for stimulating discussion, as well as to many other discussants at *JanusBlog: The Virtue Theory Discussion Forum*, <http://janusblog.squarespace.com>.

Responsibility Unpacked: Doxastic Norms & the Logic of Diachronic Evaluations

Epistemological	Practical	Moral
<p>Individual: The etiology of belief as relevant to doxastic justification of beliefs, and hence to epistemic credit attributions and to final value (the value associated with achievements of all kinds).</p> <p>Individual <i>zetetic</i> prompting question: "What did I do that my belief was grounded on solid and adequate evidence?"</p> <p>Social: Genealogical narratives illuminating the <i>axiological</i> (normative/value or authority-conferring) and social functions of epistemic concepts and attributions within our overall cognitive ecology.</p> <p>Social <i>zetetic</i> prompting question: "What functions, descriptive and/or normative, does this concept serve within epistemic practices and communities, and how does its history illuminate these functions?"</p>	<p>Individual <i>zetetic</i> prompting question #1: "What did I do to ensure that the beliefs and attitudes upon which my actions were based were formed with a degree of responsibility fitting the gravity of the decision?"</p> <p>Individual <i>zetetic</i> prompting question #2: "Did I exhibit the kinds of non-epistemic deliberative virtues – e.g. friendliness or sincerity that conduce to a healthy deliberative environment and good epistemic practice?"</p> <p>Social <i>zetetic</i> prompting question #1: "Was a healthy deliberative climate present during the time of my inquiries and deliberations?"</p> <p>Social <i>zetetic</i> prompting question #2: – "Were the background conditions during the time of my inquiry and deliberation such that good epistemic practices could be pursued?"</p>	<p>Individual <i>zetetic</i> prompting question #1: "What did I do to ensure that the beliefs and attitudes upon which my actions were based were formed with a degree of responsibility fitting the gravity of the decision?"</p> <p>Individual <i>zetetic</i> prompting question #2: "Were my personal interests and motivations consistent with ethical virtue and with a good life?"</p> <p>Social <i>zetetic</i> prompting question #1: "Was there epistemic justice or injustice displayed in the group institution's deliberative practice in question?"</p> <p>Social <i>zetetic</i> prompting question #2: "Was the division of epistemic labor fair, and were varied perspectives fairly included in this group or institution's deliberative practice?"</p>
Backward-looking		
Forward-looking		
v		
Epistemological	Practical	Moral
<p>Improving one's or one's group's epistemic situation, intellectual motivations, and/or problem-solving strategies.</p> <p>Individual <i>zetetic</i> prompting question: "Is my epistemic situation good enough for me to understand the matter, or to make a sound judgment in accepting or rejection a proposition; or should I first pursue further inquiries or adopt new strategies in order to improve my epistemic situation?"</p> <p>Social <i>zetetic</i> prompting question: "Are the institutional or social group practices conducive to truth and understanding, or should they be altered in light of the present problem-situation?"</p>	<p>Improving the deliberative climate and nurturing the non-directly epistemic deliberative virtues in myself and others.</p> <p>Individual <i>zetetic</i> prompting question: "How can I acquire or apply deliberative virtues that will improve my own deliberations (and those of others in my community of inquiry)?"</p> <p>Social <i>zetetic</i> prompting question: "How should cognitive labor be divided in order to promote shared cognitive goals? Also, what part of that labor is it my responsibility to take on, and how do I responsibly assess the credibility of inquiry performed by others?"</p>	<p>Increasing my/our ethical awareness and considering what ethical aims and projects to pursue. Delineating ideals against which current practices and institutions may be criticized, and future practices designed.</p> <p>Individual <i>zetetic</i> prompting question: "What special responsibility for pursuing further inquiry, given the gravity of the situation on which my actions will bear, and the social roles I have (qua professional, parent, etc.)?"</p> <p>Social <i>zetetic</i> prompting question: "What socially 'transformative' aims should I endorse, and what individual, social and collective 'new' virtues should I posit as reflective of those aims?"</p>