OUGHT WE TO BELIEVE THE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH?
TWO ARGUMENTS FOR THE WIDE SCOPE VERSION OF THE TRUTH NORM

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ABSTRACT: According to the so-called truth norm, we ought to believe that A if and only if A is true. There are many possible interpretations of this norm. What does 'ought' in this norm mean? Does 'ought' have a wide or a narrow scope, etc.? In this paper, I will investigate one version of this norm and I will discuss two arguments for it. The 'ought' in the paper will be interpreted as a kind of 'rational' ought that takes wide scope. I will call the first argument for the truth norm 'the extrapolation argument' and the second argument 'the abductive argument.' According to the extrapolation argument, we 'derive' the truth norm from a reflection on what it means to be a perfect believer. According to the abductive argument, the truth norm is supported by the fact that it can be used to deduce many other plausible doxastic norms. If this argument is successful, the truth norm can be conceived as *the* fundamental norm of (theoretical) rationality (or wisdom).

KEYWORDS: the truth norm, the aim of belief, the consistency norm, rational requirements, rationality, wisdom

1. Introduction

Ought we to believe the truth and nothing but the truth? And what does this proposition mean? In recent years, such questions have often been discussed in connection with another idea, namely the idea that the aim of belief is the truth.[1] Some have defended this thesis in one form or another,[2] some have criticised it.[3]

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[1] See, for example, Atkinson (2021), Boghossian (2003), Bykvist and Hattiangadi (2007), Chan (2013), Côté-Bouchard (2016), Gibbard (2003, 2005), McHugh (2011, 2012), McHugh and Whiting (2014), Owens (2003), Raleigh (2013), Shah (2003), Shah and Velleman (2005), Steglich-Petersen (2006, 2009, 2013), Toribio (2013), Vahid (2006), Velleman (2000), Wedgwood (2002, 2007), Whiting (2010, 2012, 2013), Yamada (2012), Zalabardo (2010), and Zangwill (2005).

[2] See, for example, Boghossian (2003), Engel (2007, 2013), Fassio (2011), Shah and Velleman (2005), Wedgwood (2002, 2007) and Whiting (2010).

[3] See, for example, Bykvist and Hattiangadi (2007, 2013), Glüer and Wikforss (2013), and Papineau (2013).

But what does it mean to say that the aim of belief is the truth? Obviously, this is a metaphor that can be interpreted in many ways (Fassio 2022). According to several philosophers (see, for example, the introduction in Chan 2013), the idea that the truth is the aim of belief means that the following proposition is valid:

> (CN). The correctness norm. It is correct to believe that A if and only if (iff) it is true that A.

A number of thinkers have argued that 'correctness' is a deontic term that can be defined in terms of what ought to be the case (in some sense) (see, for example, Boghossian 2003). Hence, many philosophers also accept some version of the so-called truth norm, which tells us to believe the truth and nothing but the truth:

> (TN). The truth norm. We ought to believe that A iff A is true.

However, some seem to believe that the correctness norm is primitive or more fundamental than the truth norm (see, for example, Wedgwood 2002, 2007, 2013). Some have argued for a truth norm defined in terms of what *may* be the case. According to them, it is permitted that we believe that A iff A is true (see, for example, Whiting 2010). Some believe that the principle should be expressed in evaluative rather than deontic terms (see, for example, McHugh 2012).

The truth norm can be divided into two parts:

> (TN1) We ought to believe the truth, and

> (TN2) We ought to believe nothing but the truth.

Obviously, the conjunction of (TN1) and (TN2) is equivalent with (TN). Some are inclined to accept (TN2) (in some sense) but not (TN1) (see, for example, Boghossian 2003).

There are many possible interpretations of the truth norm. For example, does 'ought' have a wide or a narrow scope? Should we read it as '(We ought to believe that A) iff A is true' or as 'It ought to be that (we believe that A iff A is true)'? What kind of 'ought' is involved in the truth norm? Is it a moral ought, a prudential ought or some other kind of ought? Is it some kind of 'rational,' 'doxastic' or 'epistemic' ought?

Several philosophers have criticised the truth norm (see, for example, Bykvist and Hattiangadi 2007). They have, for example, argued that this principle violates the 'ought' implies 'can' principle and that it is inconsistent with the truth of some so-called 'blindspot propositions.' Such arguments seem to refute some versions of the truth norm, in particular some narrow scope versions, but it is not obvious that they can be used to show that every reading of this norm is false.

In this paper, I will interpret the truth norm as a wide scope norm that involves a kind of 'rational,' 'doxastic' or 'epistemic' ought. This version seems to avoid many problems with the narrow scope interpretation, and it is possible to find some interesting arguments for it (see Sections 2 and 3). Here is our rendition of the principle:

> (WTN). The wide scope truth norm. (Insofar as rationality is concerned) it ought to be that (we believe that A iff A [is true]).

This norm can be divided into two parts:

> (WTNI). (Insofar as rationality is concerned) it ought to be that (if A [is true], then we believe that A).

> (WTNII). (Insofar as rationality is concerned) it ought to be that (we believe that A only if A [is true]).

Instead of 'Insofar as rationality is concerned, it ought to be that A' we can use the expressions 'Rationality requires that A' or 'Rationally, it ought to be the case that A.' However, to keep things simple, I will usually only talk about what 'ought to be the case,' and when I do, I usually mean what 'ought to be the case insofar as rationality is concerned.' The word 'ought' can be used in many different senses; rational, prudential and moral requirements are logically independent. So, it can, for example, be true that rationality requires that A even though morality requires that not-A.[4]

Here is an example of an instance of (WTNI): It ought to be that (if $2 + 2 = 4$, then we believe that $2 + 2 = 4$), and here is an example of an instance of (WTNII): It ought to be that (we believe that $2 + 2 = 4$ only if $2 + 2 = 4$).

I will discuss two arguments for (WTN) in this paper. In Section 2, I will introduce an argument that I will call 'the extrapolation argument,' and in Section 3, I will investigate an argument that I will call 'the abductive argument.' According to the extrapolation argument, we 'derive' the truth norm from a reflection on what it means to be a perfect believer. And according to the abductive argument, the truth norm is supported by the fact that it can be conceived as the fundamental norm of (theoretical) rationality (or wisdom). Section 4 is a short conclusion.

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[4] Readers who think that rationality only has to do with consistency or means-end efficiency or have a narrow concept of rationality might try rephrasing (WTN). Instead of speaking about what 'rationality requires' we can perhaps talk about what the doxastic norms or wisdom or the aim of belief requires. The exact words are not that important. The important thing is that there seems to be a special kind of doxastic or epistemic norms that are different from other kinds of norms, for example, moral norms. (WTN) is supposed to be a norm of this kind.

2. The Extrapolation Argument

It is often valuable to believe what is true and not to believe what is false. Suppose that it is true that there is a lion in the bush. You do not believe that this is the case. So, you stroll along without any fear. The lion attacks you and kills you. Obviously, in this case it would have been good to believe the truth. Suppose that you believe that it is safe to drink the water from this pond (perhaps because it has been safe before). Since you believe this and are thirsty, you drink from the pond. However, your belief is false. The water is poisonous. As a consequence, you die a painful death.

These examples suggest that there are two things we want: to believe what is true and to avoid believing what is false. If we do not believe what is true (for example, that there is a lion in the bush) or if we believe something that is false (for example, that it is safe to drink the poisonous water in the pond), all sorts of negative consequences might follow. Now, we extrapolate from this. What would it mean to be a perfect believer or a perfectly rational or wise person? Well, it is natural to think that a perfect believer or a perfectly rational or wise person would believe everything that is true and that she would believe nothing that is false. A perfectly wise person, in this sense, would not accidentally get eaten by lions or drink from poisonous ponds.

We form the following hypotheses:

(W1). Wise 1. It is necessary that for every individual S, S is perfectly (theoretically) wise or rational (a perfect believer) only if, for every proposition P, if P is true then S believes P.

(W2). Wise 2. It is necessary that for every individual S, S is perfectly (theoretically) wise or rational (a perfect believer) only if, for every proposition P, S believes that P only if P is true.

Suppose now that everyone ought to be perfectly (theoretically) wise or rational (a perfect believer). Then we can derive (WTN) from (W1) and (W2). The only thing we have to assume is that rational requirements transfer over necessary implications. That is, the only thing we must assume is that if it is necessary that A implies B, then it ought to be the case that B if it ought to be the case that A. And this seems to be eminently plausible. I believe that something like this might be one (although not the only) route to the truth norm.

So, have we proven that the truth norm is 'valid'? Even though the extrapolation argument seems quite interesting to me, there are some potential problems with it. I will mention two.

According to the first problem, the argument is based on an overgeneralization. It is often valuable to believe what is true and not to believe

what is false. But this is not always the case. Sometimes it seems to be bad (or neither good nor bad) for us to believe what is true and good (or neither good nor bad) for us not to believe what is true. Suppose that there are 1.324.784 blades of grass in this part of the lawn. Is it good for everyone to believe this? Is it bad if not everyone believes this proposition? Is it bad if anyone (falsely) believes that there are 1.324.783 blades of grass in this part of the lawn? Suppose S's partner has cheated on S. Is it good for S to believe that her partner has been unfaithful? Is it bad if S (falsely) believes that her partner is faithful? Is it bad if S does not believe that her partner has cheated on her? So, maybe a perfect believer would not believe the truth and nothing but the truth.

A defender of the argument might point out that it is difficult to draw the line between truths (falsehoods) that a perfect believer will believe and truths (falsehoods) that a perfect believer will not believe. If a perfect believer does not believe every truth, which truths does she believe? When can a perfect believer believe something false? Any way of drawing the line seems arbitrary. There can be prudential, moral etc. reasons not to believe the truth and nothing but the truth. But maybe a perfect *believer* will satisfy (W1) and (W2).

According to the second problem, 'ought' implies 'can.' If 'ought' implies 'can,' we ought to be perfectly (theoretically) wise or rational (a perfect believer) only if we can be perfectly (theoretically) wise or rational (a perfect believer). Therefore, we ought to be perfectly (theoretically) wise or rational (a perfect believer) only if we can be perfectly (theoretically) wise or rational (a perfect believer). But it is not the case that we can be perfectly (theoretically) wise or rational (a perfect believer). Consequently, it is not the case that we ought to be perfectly (theoretically) wise or rational (a perfect believer). Hence, a crucial premise in the extrapolation argument is false. It follows that the extrapolation argument fails.

If perfect (theoretical) wisdom or rationality entails that a perfectly wise or rational individual believes that A iff A is true, then the premise that we cannot be perfectly (theoretically) wise or rational is very plausible. The only reasonable way to avoid this counterargument seems to be to reject the 'ought' implies 'can' principle for rational requirements (for a similar response to a counterargument to the abductive argument, see Section 3 below).

A possible response to the counterarguments above is to restrict (W1), (W2) and (WTN). In Section 3, we will mention some possible versions of (WTN). However, such a defence of the extrapolation argument seems much less plausible than a similar defence of the abductive argument. So, even though the

extrapolation argument is quite interesting it is not a watertight proof of the truth norm.

3. The Abductive Argument

Several philosophers have suggested or hinted at the idea that the truth norm is *the* fundamental epistemic or doxastic norm (see, for example, Boghossian 2003; Engel 2013; Wedgwood 2002, 2007). However, it is not always clear what they mean by this, and the idea has not been developed in detail. According to one interpretation of this thought, it means that other epistemic or doxastic norms in some sense depend on the truth norm.

If the truth norm is indeed a fundamental norm, how can one argue for it? If it is a basic principle, it seems that it should be treated like an axiom, and there are no deductively valid arguments for (genuine) axioms. So, we should not expect to be able to find any deductively valid arguments for the truth norm. Instead, we must look at the consequences of the norm and how it coheres with other beliefs. Does it have reasonable consequences? Does it have any problematic implications?

Nevertheless, we can formulate an abductive argument for the truth norm. An abductive argument has the following form: B. If A were the case, then B would be the case. Hence A. Obviously, such an argument is not deductively valid. The idea is rather that B in some sense supports A, or that we have good (fallible) reason to believe A if our abductive argument is strong.

It is possible to derive many different 'epistemic' or 'doxastic' norms from the truth norm, for example the following principle: we ought not to combine believing A and believing that A implies B with not believing B. However, I will focus on just *one* example in this paper. I will show how the so-called consistency norm follows from the truth norm. This is a widely accepted norm that is intuitively plausible. It has, for example, been explicitly defended by Harry Gensler (see Gensler 1986, 1996, Chapter 2). The consistency norm includes two parts (just as the truth norm). According to the first part, it ought to be that you do not combine inconsistent beliefs. More precisely, the first part can be formulated in the following way:

> (WCNI). The (wide scope) consistency norm (for two beliefs) (Part I). If A is inconsistent with B, it ought to be that you do not combine believing A with believing B.

Here is an example of an instance of Part I: If the proposition that all swans are white is inconsistent with the proposition that this swan is not white, then it ought to be the case that you do not combine believing that all swans are white with believing that this swan is not white.

This norm can be generalized in the following way. If a set of propositions is inconsistent, then you ought not to believe every proposition in this set. Or more precisely, if {A_1, …, A_n} (for n≥1) is inconsistent, then you ought not to combine believing A_1, …, and believing A_n. This principle can be called 'The (wide scope) consistency norm (for n beliefs) (Part I)'. However, to keep things simple, I will focus on the consistency norm.

Why shouldn't we have inconsistent beliefs? Here is one possible answer. If it is impossible that A and B and you believe A and you believe B, then there is at least one proposition that you believe that is false. If you believe something that is false, you violate Part II of the truth norm, that is, the principle that we ought to believe nothing but the truth. So, the truth norm can explain why we shouldn't have inconsistent beliefs.

We can show that the consistency norm (Part I) follows from the truth norm (Part II) in a rigorous way. We only have to assume that our modal and deontic expressions function as normal modal and deontic operators. For more on modal and deontic logic, see, for example, Garson (2018), and McNamara, and Van De Putte (2021). Here is our proof.

Suppose that (WTNII) is true and that (WCNI) is not true in some possible world w. Then it is impossible that A and B in w, and it is not the case that it ought to be that you do not believe that A and you believe that B in w. Since it is not the case that it ought to be that you do not believe that A and you believe that B in w, there is a possible world w' that is deontically accessible from w in which you believe that A and you believe that B. Since (WTNII) is true in w it is true in w that it ought to be that you believe something only if it is true. Since w' is deontically accessible from w it follows that 'if you believe that A then A' is true in w' and that 'if you believe that B then B' is true in w'. Hence, A is true in w' and B is true in w'. Therefore, A and B is true in w'. But A and B is not true in w', for A and B is impossible in w. This is absurd. Hence, it is not possible that (WTNII) is true and that (WCNI) is not true in some possible world w. Consequently, (WCNI) follows from (WTNII).

According to the second part of the consistency norm, it ought to be that you do not believe something without believing what is necessarily implied by it. More precisely, the second part can be expressed in the following way:

(WCNII). The (wide scope) consistency norm (for two beliefs) (Part II). If A necessarily implies B, it ought to be that you do not combine believing A with not believing B.

Here is an example of an instance of Part II: If the proposition that all swans are white necessarily implies that this swan is white, then it ought to be that you do

not combine believing that all swans are white with not believing that this swan is white.

Part II of this norm can also be called 'the consequence norm' or 'the closure norm.' It can be generalized in the following way. If a set of premises necessarily implies a conclusion, then you ought not to believe every proposition in this set without believing the conclusion. Or more precisely, if $\{A_1, \ldots, A_n\}$ (for $n \geq 1$) necessarily implies B, then you ought not to combine believing $A_1, \ldots,$ and believing A_n with not believing B. This principle can be called 'The (wide scope) consistency norm (for n beliefs) (Part II).' Nevertheless, to keep things simple, I will focus on the consistency norm.

Why should you believe what is necessarily implied by your beliefs? If it is necessary that A implies B and you believe A and you do not believe B, then there is at least one proposition that you believe that is false or else there is at least one true proposition that you do not believe. So, if you violate (WCNII), either you violate Part I or Part II of the truth norm, i.e. the norm that we should believe what is true or the norm that we should believe only what is true.

The consistency norm (Part II) follows from the truth norm (Part I and Part II). This can be shown in a rigorous way. Here is our proof.

Suppose that (WTNI) and (WTNII) are true and that (WCNII) is not true in some possible world w. Then it is true in w that it ought to be that if A then you believe that A and it is true in w that it ought to be that you believe A only if A. Since (WCNII) is false in w it is true that it is necessary that A implies B in w and it is false that it ought to be that you do not combine believing A with not believing B in w. Since it is not true that it ought to be that you do not combine believing A with not believing B in w, there is a possible world w' that is deontically accessible from w in which it is true that you believe A and it is false that you believe B. Since (WTNII) is true in w it is true that if you believe A then A in w'. And since (WTNI) is true in w it is true in w' that if B then you believe B. Hence, A is true in w'. Since it is necessary that A implies B in w it is true that A implies B in w'. Consequently, B is true in w'. It follows that it is true in w' that you believe B. But this is absurd. Hence, it is not possible that (WTNI) and (WTNII) are true and that (WCNII) is not true in some possible world w. Consequently, (WCNII) follows from (WTNI) and (WTNII).

> (WCN). The (wide scope) consistency norm (for two beliefs) is the conjunction of (WCNI) and (WCNII).

So, the consistency norm follows from the truth norm. Since we have good reason to believe that the consistency norm is true, it follows that we have good reason to believe in the truth norm.

The basic intuition behind the abductive argument can also be explained in the following way. Why should we care about consistency? Answer: Because we should care about the truth. Consistency is a necessary condition for believing the truth and nothing but the truth (this can be shown rigorously; the proof is left to the reader). Gensler (1986), for example, treats the consistency principle as an axiom. But if the abductive argument is sound, the consistency principle can be explained in terms of an even more fundamental principle, namely the truth norm.

So, does this prove that the truth norm is 'valid'? Since it is always possible to reject the conclusion in any deduction if we reject at least one premise, it is not surprising that there are some potential problems with this argument. A critic could argue that the consistency norm is not true. The fact that the truth norm entails the consistency norm is therefore not any reason to accept the truth norm. I will now consider three possible reasons why some may believe that the consistency norm is not true.

According to the first reason, the consistency norm is a narrow scope norm, and not a wide scope norm. (WCN) is not a good interpretation of the consistency norm. This principle should instead be construed as the conjunction of (NCNI) and (NCNII) below:

> (NCNI). The (narrow scope) consistency norm (for two beliefs) (Part I). If A and B are inconsistent, then if you believe A you ought not to believe B.

> (NCNII). The (narrow scope) consistency norm (for two beliefs) (Part II). If A necessarily implies B, then if you believe A then you ought to believe B.

However, there are several serious problems with the narrow scope interpretation of the consistency norm (see Gensler 1996, Chapter 2). Let us consider some of these.

Firstly, (NCNI) can have implausible consequences. Suppose that person S believes A and also believes B and that A and B are inconsistent. Assume that (NCNI) is true. Then S ought not to believe B. For S believes A and A is inconsistent with B. Since S believes B and B is inconsistent with A, S ought not to believe A. Hence, S ought not to believe A and S ought not to believe B. But this is implausible. Even though A and B are inconsistent, it is not reasonable to conclude that S ought to give up both beliefs. Consequently, (NCNI) is not true. On the other hand, (WCNI) only tells S not to believe both A and B. If A and B are inconsistent, either A or B is false, but one of the propositions may still be true.

Secondly, (NCNI) entails that everyone that believes a contradiction (a proposition that is inconsistent with itself) ought to believe nothing. Assume that (NCNI) is true. Suppose that person S believes that A and that A is a contradiction. Then for any proposition B it is true that B is inconsistent with A. Since S believes

A and B is inconsistent with A, S ought not to believe B. Hence, for any proposition B, S ought not to believe B. That is, S ought not to believe anything. But this is absurd. Surely, it is not the case that S ought to believe nothing. Therefore, (NCNI) is not true. (WCNI) seems to be more plausible. It does not entail that everyone that believes in a contradiction ought to believe nothing. Rather, it entails that one should not believe A if A is a contradiction.

Thirdly, (NCNII) can have problematic consequences. Suppose that (NCNII) is true. Furthermore, assume that A necessarily implies B and that person S believes A and also believes not-B. Then S ought to believe B. For A entails B and S believes A. Since A necessarily implies B, not-B necessarily implies not-A. Hence, S ought to believe not-A. For S believes not-B and not-B necessarily implies not-A. Consequently, S ought to believe not-A and S also ought to believe B. That is, S ought to believe the opposite of both S's beliefs. But this is absurd. Hence, (NCNII) is not true. (WCNII) does not have any consequences of this kind. (WCNII) only tells S that S ought not to believe a proposition without believing its consequences (or necessary implications).

Fourthly, (NCNII) also entails that everyone who believes a contradiction ought to believe everything (including every contradiction). Suppose that person S believes A and that A is a contradiction. A contradiction necessarily implies everything. Hence, for any proposition B, A necessarily implies B. Since S believes A and A necessarily implies B, S ought to believe B. Hence, for any proposition B, S ought to believe B. In other words, S ought to believe everything. But this is absurd. Surely, it is not the case that S ought to believe everything. It follows that (NCNII) is not true. (WCNII) does not entail anything similar.

In all these respects, the wide scope version of the consistency norm seems to be more plausible than the narrow scope version. Therefore, this reason to reject the wide scope consistency norm does not seem to succeed.

According to the second reason, the consistency norm cannot be satisfied. It has been argued that the truth norm violates the 'ought' implies 'can' principle (see, for example, Bykvist, and Hattiangadi 2007). And since the 'ought' implies 'can' principle is true, it follows that the truth norm is not true. Bykvist and Hattiangadi express their argument against the wide scope truth norm in the following way:

> take the conjunction of all the necessary truths - a proposition that is far too complex for you to grasp. According to [the truth norm], you ought to either bring it about that p is false or bring it about that you believe that p. But you can do neither. You cannot bring it about that p is false because p is a necessary truth. And you cannot come to believe that p because it is not humanly possible to grasp such a complex proposition, let alone believe it. Since 'ought' implies 'can,' [the

truth norm] must be false. (Bykvist and Hattiangadi 2007, 284–285)

A similar argument can be used against the consistency norm. The conjunction of all necessary truths is a necessary truth. A necessary truth is necessarily implied by any proposition. So, if you ought to believe anything you ought to believe the conjunction of all necessary truths, given that the consistency norm is true. But you cannot believe the conjunction of all necessary truths. 'Ought' implies 'can' and if 'ought' implies 'can,' you ought to believe the conjunction of all necessary truth only if you can believe this proposition. This is absurd, for surely you ought to believe at least something. Hence, the consistency norm is not true.

Here is another example that uses the 'ought' implies 'can' principle. It may be psychologically impossible that S believes every truth, and it may be psychologically impossible that S believes every necessary implication of what S believes. S may, for example, (truly) believe that everyone who was on the plane is dead and (truly) believe that S's wife was on the plane. From this it follows that S's wife is dead. S realizes that the proposition that his wife is dead follows from the proposition that everyone who was on the plane is dead and the proposition that S's wife was on the plane. Yet, it is psychologically impossible for S to believe that his wife is dead. S is in shock. Therefore, it is not the case that S ought to believe that his wife is dead. Insofar as morality (and prudence) is concerned, it is not the case that S ought to believe that his wife is dead. Nor is it all-things-considered the case that he ought to believe that his wife is dead. And S certainly ought not to be blamed for not believing that his wife is dead. Furthermore, S cannot stop believing that everyone who was on the plane is dead, and S cannot stop believing that his wife was on the plane. Consequently, it is not the case that S ought to believe every necessary implication of what S believes. It follows that the consistency norm is not true.

How might a defender of the consistency norm respond to this counterargument? Let us consider two possible replies. According to the first response, we should restrict the consistency norm. We can, for example, modify (WCNI) and (WCNII) in the following way (a restriction of this kind was suggested already by Gensler 1986):

> (RWCNI). The restricted (wide scope) consistency norm (for two beliefs) (Part I). If A is inconsistent with B, then, insofar as you are able, you ought not to combine believing A with believing B.

> (RWCNII). The restricted (wide scope) consistency norm (for two beliefs) (Part II). If A necessarily implies B, then, insofar as you are able, you ought not to combine believing A with not believing B.

The (restricted) wide scope consistency norm, (RWCN), is the conjunction of (RWCNI) and (RWCNII). (RWCN) does not violate the 'ought' implies 'can' principle. Hence, a defender of the abductive argument and the consistency norm can avoid the 'ought' implies 'can' arguments by accepting (RWCN) instead of (WCN). A potential problem with this response is that it might be difficult to find a similarly restricted version of the truth norm that can be used to derive (RWCN). And if (WCN) should be restricted, then surely the truth norm should be restricted in a similar way.

According to the second response to the 'ought' implies 'can' argument, we should reject the 'ought' implies 'can' principle for norms of rationality. Consider our example with S and his wife. In this case, both prudence and morality permit that S does not believe that his wife is dead. But remember that the 'ought' in the truth norm and in the consistency norm is a special rational (epistemic or doxastic) 'ought.' It might seem reasonable to say that rationality requires that S believes that his wife is dead, even though it is psychologically impossible for S to believe this. Hence, rationality can require someone to believe something that she cannot believe. Therefore, the 'ought' of rationality does not imply 'can.' This idea is compatible with the plausible proposition that both prudential and moral requirements imply 'can'.

According to the third reason, the consistency norm is not true since there may be prudential and/or moral reasons not to be consistent. It would, for example, clutter our minds if we tried to satisfy the truth norm or the consistency norm. We would have to believe many things that neither interests us nor should interest us (see Harman 1986). Should we believe every necessary truth? If so, it seems that we should do nothing but work out the necessary implications of our beliefs all day long. Should we believe every 'trivial' empirical truth? Do we have to try to find out how many leaves there are on all the trees in this forest? Should we count the stars? Is it obligatory that we keep track of how many times we breathe in and out every day? Etc. Seeking information is sometimes costly, at least in time and effort. Hence, it is not always prudent.

Some truths would (potentially) be very painful for us to believe. Likewise, it would (potentially) be very painful for us to believe some consequences of what we believe. Do we have to believe every truth about every horrible crime that has ever been committed? If we have a dominant gene for an incurable disease, ought we to believe that this is the case? Suppose that x is not the biological father of y but that both x and y believe that this is the case. Should x and y revise their beliefs?

Sometimes we do not want to know the truth. We do not want to know how the book or the movie ends. We do not want to know who won (before watching the match). We take pleasure in not knowing exactly what will happen. Knowing the end in advance would, in at least some cases, spoil the experience.[5]

Perhaps we have a right to privacy. So, maybe there are truths that we should neither know nor believe. Maybe I shouldn't know what you write in your mails or your diary.

The following thought experiment suggests that the consistency norm and the truth norm are not true. Suppose that there is an extremely smart but amoral scientist who is able to scan your brain and determine whether or not you satisfy the truth norm and the consistency norm. Suppose also that this scientist is going to drop an atom bomb on a large city if you satisfy the truth norm or the consistency norm in a particular case with respect to a certain set of propositions. Assume also that it is in your power not to satisfy the truth norm and the consistency norm in this case. You only have to take a harmless drug that is provided by the scientist. If you do not take the drug, you will satisfy the truth norm and the consistency norm and the scientist will drop the bomb. If you take the drug, you will not satisfy these norms and the scientist will not harm anyone. Obviously, in this case you should not satisfy either the truth norm or the consistency norm. Consequently, neither the truth norm nor the consistency norm is true.

Examples of this kind suggest that both the consistency norm and the truth norm are false. It is not always the case that we ought to believe something iff it is true, it is not the case that we never should have inconsistent beliefs and it is not always the case that we should believe the necessary implications of what we believe.

How might a defender of the consistency norm and the truth norm respond? I will mention two possible replies. According to the first response, we should restrict the norms. This can be done in several ways. We can, for example, introduce one or two new conditions to our consistency norm of the following kind: 'if prudence permits that A' and 'if morality permits that A.' Here is an alternative formulation (a restriction of this kind was suggested already by Gensler 1986):

> (CWCNI). The conditional (wide scope) consistency norm (for two beliefs) (Part I). If A is inconsistent with B, then, insofar as there are no overriding counterbalancing reasons, you ought not to combine believing A with believing B.

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[5] For more on 'pragmatic' reasons for belief, see, for example, Reisner (2009).

> (CWCNII). The conditional (wide scope) consistency norm (for two beliefs) (Part II). If A necessarily implies B, then, insofar as there are no overriding counterbalancing reasons, you ought not to combine believing A with not believing B.

If we restrict the consistency norm (and similar norms), rationality cannot require something that is not prudentially permitted, and it cannot require something that is not morally permitted. Then it is not the case that we ought to believe every trivial or painful truth. It is not the case that we ought to know everything in advance. It is not the case that we should be consistent if this has catastrophic consequences etc. So, by restricting our norms, we can avoid problems of the kind discussed above.

A potential problem with this response is that it is not obvious how to restrict the truth norm in such a way that it is still possible to derive our restricted consistency norm from this principle. Consequently, it might be difficult to work out all the details of this move.

According to the second response, we should emphasise the distinction between rational requirements and prudential and moral requirements. Even though prudence or morality may require us not to be consistent, for example, we are still *rationally* required to be consistent. Insofar as rationality is concerned, we should avoid inconsistent beliefs and believe the necessary implications of what we believe. But rationality is not all that matters. Rational requirements can be 'overridden.' If there is some stronger requirement against being consistent (or against believing the truth and nothing but the truth), then the rational requirement does not generate an all-things-considered requirement. All-things-considered we ought not to be consistent in some situations, although we always ought to be consistent *insofar as* rationality is concerned. So, this counterargument against the abductive argument is not conclusive.

Another possible problem with the abductive argument is that there may be other maxims that explain the consistency norm. The consistency norm can, for example, also be explained by the following principle:

> (P). The probability principle. You ought to believe that A iff A is more likely than not-A.

And there are, in principle, countless other norms that can be used to derive the consistency norm. A critic could argue that we must exclude all other possible explanations before we can conclude that we have good reason to believe in the truth norm. Therefore, the abductive argument fails.

However, it is always impossible to investigate all possible explanations of a certain principle. So, if we have to exclude all other possible explanations before

we can conclude that we have good reason to believe in a certain explanation of some principle, then all abductive arguments fail. Accordingly, a defender of the abductive argument could respond that the abductive argument shows that we have good reason to believe in the truth norm, *unless* the critic can find some other, more plausible, norm that can be used to explain the consistency norm. And it is not obvious that anyone has done that. The probability principle, for example, is intuitively plausible. But it is not obvious that it is a better explanation of the consistency norm than the truth norm. And there are several potential problems with this principle. If (P) is true, then the following principle is, for example, not 'valid:' If we ought to believe A and we ought to believe B, then we ought to believe A and B. But intuitively, this principle seems to be reasonable. Obviously, it is not feasible to discuss all more or less plausible explanations of the consistency norm in this paper.

On the one hand, our last counterargument strongly suggests that the abductive argument doesn't prove that the truth norm is 'valid.' On the other, it is not a clear refutation of the abductive argument either.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have investigated one version of the so-called truth norm, the principle that we ought to believe that A if and only if A is true. I have interpreted this norm as a wide scope rational requirement. I have discussed two arguments for this version of the norm: 'the extrapolation argument' and 'the abductive argument'. According to the extrapolation argument, we 'derive' the truth norm from a reflection on what it means to be a perfect believer. According to the abductive argument, the truth norm is supported by the fact that it can be used to derive many other plausible doxastic norms. If the abductive argument is sound, the truth norm can be conceived as *the* fundamental norm of (theoretical) rationality (or wisdom). We have seen that the arguments give some support to the truth norm. However, they are not decisive. I have considered some counterarguments. In my opinion, the counterarguments do not refute the arguments for the truth norm, even though they are interesting. So, is it reasonable or not (all-things-considered) to accept the version of the truth norm that we have discussed? Ought we to believe the truth and nothing but the truth? Before we can answer these questions, I believe, we should also discuss various arguments against (WTN). Can it, for example, handle the no-guidance argument that seems to be a problem for the narrow scope version of the truth norm (Glüer and Wikforss 2009, 2010, 2013)? It seems that we sometimes should suspend our judgement (Atkinson 2021). Is this idea consistent with (WTN)? Etc. However, the arguments for (WTN)

in this paper clearly suggest that this principle is worth taking seriously. I conclude that the version of the truth norm that we have explored deserves further investigation.

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