

RECONCILING EVIDENTIALISM AND PRAGMATISM: REASONS, BELIEFS, AND QUESTIONS

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ABSTRACT: According to evidentialism, only evidential or truth-conducive reasons matter for the rationality of belief. According to pragmatism, pragmatic reasons can contribute to making a belief rational. The debate between evidentialism and pragmatism appears to have reached a stalemate. In this paper, we revisit the debate by focusing on the question and inquiry-sensitive view of belief and the idea that normative reasons are answers to normative questions. The focus on the question and inquiry-sensitive views of belief and reasons allows us to suggest a way to reconcile evidentialism and pragmatism and to move the debate about rational belief forward.

KEYWORDS: evidentialism, pragmatism, normative reasons, normative questions, rational belief

1. Introduction

What makes a belief rational? One popular way of approaching this overarching question is to divide the possible responses to it into two groups. On one side, there are evidentialists and theorists who claim that only truth-conducive (e.g., evidence) factors can make a belief rational. On the other side, there are pragmatists who claim that practical or pragmatic, that is, non-truth conducive considerations can contribute to making a belief rational (a limit case of pragmatism is radical pragmatism, according to which only practical/pragmatic considerations can make a belief rational).¹ So, for instance, that an eccentric billionaire will pay me a million dollars if I were to believe that there is life on Mars, a hypothesis that is not overall supported by my evidence, is not a factor that can contribute to making my belief that there is life on Mars rational, according to evidentialists. After all, the fact that the billionaire will pay me to believe it doesn't speak to the truth of the hypothesis that there is life on Mars. For pragmatists, however, things are less straightforward - in some contexts, the promise of the eccentric billionaire could be a factor that makes my belief that there is life on Mars rational. Perhaps, I could really use this extra million dollars. Moreover, I know there was water on Mars some time ago,

¹ The label of 'pragmatism' as I use it is to be distinguished from the venerable tradition of American pragmatism, which is an approach that goes far beyond the mere question of rational belief and has implications for the very nature of truth and knowledge.

so I know it is not clearly impossible that there is life on Mars. Maybe there could be life on Mars. And maybe thinking more and more about this possibility could lead me to conceive of life on Mars as a live possibility. And at this point, only a little leap of faith is needed to go from this state of mind to the state of believing that there is life on Mars. A prominent way of specifying the conditions under which a belief is rational is to appeal to reasons to believe. The idea is that reasons are considerations that speak in favor of F-ing, be it an action or an attitude (cf. Scanlon 1998). That I promised to be back at home at 2 PM is a reason for me to take the morning train; it is a consideration that speaks in favor of taking the morning train. According to popular assumptions, normative reasons are facts and are distinguished from motivating reasons. With respect to the rationality of belief, then, the proposal here is that normative reasons determine the rationality of beliefs. Roughly, having overall stronger reasons to believe that *p* than not to believe that *p* makes it rational, on this reason-theoretic picture, to believe that *p*. Not everyone is on board with the reason-theoretic approach, though. For one thing, some theorists seem to find the minimal undefined notion of reasons as considerations that speak in favor of F-ing mysterious and the whole reasons-first project that is taken to come with it as problematic. For another, alternatives for theorizing about rational belief are readily available in the literature. For instance, the disposition-centered projects of rationality seem to become an increasingly popular competitor to the reasons-theoretic approach (Hughes 2023; Lasonen-Aarnio forthcoming). In what follows, however, we will bracket the alternatives and work within the reasons-theoretic framework.

The reason-theoretic approach is perfectly suited to make sense of the above-introduced tension between evidentialism and pragmatism. The factors that evidentialists and pragmatists appeal to in theorizing about rational belief can be easily interpreted as normative reasons to believe. On the evidentialist picture, the only reasons contributing to making a belief rational are evidential - they speak to the truth of the hypothesis. For pragmatists, non-evidential reasons can be genuine reasons to believe and thus contribute to making a belief rational. Moreover, appealing to the reasons-theoretic framework in thinking about rational belief need not commit one to the whole reasons-first package. Indeed, our aim in what follows is to move the evidentialist-pragmatist debate forward specifically by exploring a new account of normative reasons.

In what follows, we first revisit aspects of the evidentialist-pragmatist debate about reasons to believe and assess the stalemate in this debate. We introduce, then, in section three, a way of thinking about a belief that relies on two increasingly popular thoughts, namely, that beliefs are sensitive to the relevant questions and that

beliefs are also relativized to the relevant underlying inquiries of which they are supposed to be concluding parts. We elaborate on one way of specifying this relativization in belief. Section four introduces a new theory of reasons as answers to normative questions. Section five then puts all the elements of a new treatment of the evidentialist-pragmatist debate together. In this proposal, beliefs that are relativized to the project of figuring it out are rational on the basis of reasons as answers to the question of why believe p in the figure-it-out sense. Only truth-conducive, that is, evidential considerations, can be reasons in this sense. While beliefs relativized to inquisitive projects of comprehension through explanation can be rational on the basis of reasons as answers to the question of why believe p in the understand-through-explanation sense. Pragmatic considerations can be among the relevant reasons in this sense. If the proposal is on the right track, it constitutes a way to advance the debate by revisiting our views on beliefs and reasons. Section six concludes.

2. The Evidentialism – Pragmatism stalemate

Here is a way to schematize our problem. Evidentialist and Pragmatist views on what makes a belief rational appear to be incompatible.

- 1.1 Necessarily, if S 's belief that p is rational, then S 's evidence overall supports p .
[An Evidentialist Principle]
- 1.2 S 's belief that p is rational, but S 's evidence doesn't overall support p
[Pragmatist Cases]
- 1.3 It is not the case that necessarily if S 's belief that p is rational, then S 's evidence overall supports p [1.2, Material Implication]

As we can observe, there appears to be a contradiction in (1.1)-(1.3). And unless we accept contradictions, we should not endorse both premises (1.1) and (1.2) in their present form. That is, in the present formulation (and unless terms used in (1.1)-(1.3) are not well defined), the Evidentialist principle about rational belief in (1.1) cannot be true, while there are also cases where one is rational to believe that p while lacking overall evidential support for p (1.2).

A way of approaching the dilemma expressed in (1.1)-(1.3) is to focus on normative reasons to believe. According to evidentialists about reasons to believe: for r to be a normative reason for S to believe that p just is for p to be a truth-conducive consideration that p . Roughly, for r to be a truth-conducive consideration that p just is for r to entail, indicate, probabilistically support, inductively support, or abductively support that p . Evidentialism is a big tent; we can

find versions of it in (Kelly 2002, 2003), (Shah 2003), (Conee and Feldman 2004), (Engel 2007, 2013, 2020), (Way 2016) among others.

Evidentialism was and sometimes still is endorsed as a default view in epistemology without a positive argument. When arguments are provided, they are most of the time either about the very concept of *belief* (or about the concept of *reason to believe*) (cf. (Shah 2003)) or, perhaps more popularly, about extensional adequacy, e.g., cases and our pretheoretical judgments. Here is one influential case that has been taken to support evidentialism about reasons to believe and thus can be appealed to in order to motivate premise (1.1). The argument is that evidentialism is said to explain better our pretheoretical observations about a range of cases.

Imagine an agnostic who, having become convinced that the expected utility of being a religious believer is higher than the expected utility of not being a religious believer, undertakes a project designed to induce religious belief. The agnostic thoroughly immerses herself in a life of religious ritual [. . .] In time, she genuinely becomes convinced that God exists. Suppose further that a tragic irony subsequently ensues: the expected utility of belief in God suddenly and dramatically changes. (A despot bent on persecuting religious believers unexpectedly seizes power.) Even if she recognizes that the expected utility of being a believer is now lower than the expected utility of being a non-believer, this recognition will typically not prompt the abandonment of the newly acquired belief. [...] Here, the fact that the belief is not abandoned in response to the change in expected utility indicates that the belief is not based on considerations of utility. (Kelly 2002, p. 176)

Note that Kelly talks here about belief "being based on considerations of utility." This should not surprise us. For Kelly, normative reasons play the role of rationalizing a belief through proper basing. The talk of being based on a consideration need not distract us from the underlying focus on normative reasons.

Also, let me stress that Kelly's argument is about our pretheoretical judgments about relevant cases. It would seem, according to Kelly, that deconversion is not plausible, and evidentialism best explains why this is the case.

Pragmatists about reasons might find the above argument too quick and thus question the rationale behind the premise (1.1). According to pragmatism, non-evidential, namely, pragmatic considerations, can be normative reasons to believe. Pragmatism, in its radical version, insists that all normative reasons to believe are fundamentally pragmatic considerations. In contrast, pragmatism, in its moderate version (pluralism), claims that some pragmatic considerations are reasons (in particular in cases of equipollence when evidence alone doesn't favor belief to disbelief).

Several lines of positive arguments have been proposed in favor of versions of pragmatism. Some of these explore the possibility of pragmatic reasons and ways

to combine them with evidence. Often, pragmatist arguments put forward supposed extensional adequacy: the idea that pragmatism captures best our pretheoretical judgments about relevant cases. Consider the following discussion of the example of Pascalian belief from Leary 2017 that can be taken to motivate the premise (1.2). Note also that detailed discussions of similar cases have been proposed earlier in the recent literature; see, for instance, (Danielsson and Olson 2007), and (Reisner 2009; Reisner 2008). For pragmatists, cases of this sort are best explained by accepting the idea that pragmatic reasons matter for the rationality of belief.

Suppose that, if Joseph were to exercise regularly, it would make him a happier person. Intuitively, this is a normative reason for him to exercise: the fact that his exercising would make him happier counts in favour of him doing so. Now suppose that, if Mary were to believe that God exists, it would make her a happier person. Is this a normative reason for her to believe that God exists? [...] The alethist [evidentialist] thus owes us an account of what the relevant difference is between action and belief, which thereby explains the normative difference between these two cases. Without such an account, we should assume that there is no such difference, and thereby accept pragmatism as the default view. (Leary 2017, pp. 529–530)

A few remarks are in order about Leary's and other similar cases. She seems to suggest that it is pre-theoretically plausible that Mary's considerations speak in favor of the belief in God. If so, Leary suggests, then the best explanation is that pragmatic considerations can be reasons to believe. Once again, we see in this debate an argument from extensional adequacy: pragmatism is said to explain best our pretheoretical judgments. Note also that Kelly's and Leary's (and other pragmatists') cases are somewhat similar. It is thus surprising to see theorists arrive at two radically opposite conclusions from somewhat close cases.

The evidentialist-pragmatist debate appears to be in a deadlock. The intensity of the deadlock is manifested by the fact that the involved parties appear nowadays to see the other party as being in a state of some confusion. Evidentialists (often) appeal to an alleged confusion in a pragmatist position between the wrong kind of reasons and the right kind of reasons. Pragmatists are said to be somewhat confused in thinking that there can be genuine normative reasons *to believe* that p (as opposed to, say, reasons to *bring it about that one believes* that p, cf. (Skorupski 2007, pp. 10–12)). At the same time, (some) pragmatists insist that "[t]he idea that there is anything inherently wrong with believing contradictions is just a symptom of evidentialist thinking." (Rinard 2017, p. 137).

Both camps seem to be increasingly drifting towards flat-out accusations of mere confusion in their opponent's views. This indicates that the debate is now entering a profound impasse.

3. Belief relativized to inquisitive projects

Our positive proposal to solve the above evidentialism-pragmatism puzzle will rely on a pluralism about reasons to believe and a question and inquiry-centered view of belief. Ultimately, our suggestion is that only qualified versions of the Evidentialist principle (1.1) and the Pragmatist Case (1.2) hold. Strictly speaking, our response is that the above argument commits an equivocation fallacy, for 'belief' doesn't mean the same in (1.1) and in (1.2). The guiding idea is that, in general, beliefs are relative to questions and inquisitive projects. The underlying question that is relevant to the cases that vindicate the evidentialist principle is not the same as the question that is relevant to cases of believing for pragmatic reasons that pragmatists put forward. Once we see that, we can rethink how exactly to specify principles for rational beliefs in their different senses. Our proposal is that beliefs are rational only within specific inquisitive projects insofar as they fit the relevant standards or aims determined by these projects. To see how exactly these standards might be specified, we will make a rapid detour through recent debates in the epistemology of inquiry. Before that, however, I would like to clarify how exactly we understand a question and inquiry-centered view of belief and why this conception of belief is independently motivated.

The idea that belief is sensitive to questions is increasingly popular in recent epistemology. It has been explored and defended in (Yalcin 2011, 2018), and in somewhat different forms in (Holguín 2022), and (Hoek forthcoming). But the idea goes back at least to (Dretske 1970) and has appeared in various places in contemporary epistemology/ philosophy of mind/ philosophy of language (see Hoek forthcoming, footnote 10, for a complete list of the defenses of the question-sensitive view of belief). One way to understand the view is to admit that to believe that *p* is always to believe that *p* in answer to a question *Q*. Our beliefs can have the same truth conditions yet be distinct. This happens when they are had in answer to distinct questions and involve hyperintensional contents. For instance, my belief that Man City will win the championship this year in answer to the question *How will Man City perform this year* is not the same belief as my belief that Man City will win the championship this year in answer to the question *When will Man City win the championship* (see (Hoek forthcoming) for more details).

A number of considerations have been proposed in favor of the question-sensitivity of belief (see (Yalcin 2011, 2018), (Holguín 2022); (Hoek forthcoming), for some of these). Let us quickly overview two of these in order to illustrate that the view seems to have a lot going on for it independently of our present discussion. For one thing, it provides a way to deal with the persistent problem of logical omniscience (cf. (Yalcin 2018)). The problem of logical omniscience (or rather, one

prominent problem of logical omniscience) is a problem for otherwise plausible views on which beliefs are representations and have information/possible worlds as contents. On (at least the simple versions of) these views, it seems to follow that one believes *all* the propositions that are consequences of what one believes (that is what holds given some information/possible world) and also that one believes all the necessary truths since these hold in all possible worlds. Relativizing the content of beliefs to questions is a way forward in maintaining the plausible aspects of the representationalist tradition while avoiding the problems with the simple possible-worlds model of beliefs. The contents of beliefs, in this view, are not possible worlds but are propositions relativized to questions. There is a variation of how exactly the details of the question sensitivity are spelled out, but it would seem that on the question-sensitive view of belief content, it doesn't follow that one believes all the consequences of one's beliefs and all the necessary truths.

The second argument for the question-sensitive account of belief is that it seems to help understand minimal rationality (see (Hoek forthcoming), for more on this). That is rationality that is still demanding (that is, a standard that doesn't lead to an *everything goes* approach to rationality) and yet doesn't set unattainable, ideal standards on rational belief. For instance, an aspect of minimal rationality is that it only requires a subject to deduce some but not all consequences of one's belief. Focusing on question-directed propositions allows us to recover the right amount and depth of consequences that one should be able to deduce rationally. These two points illustrate that the view on which belief is sensitive to questions is independently theoretically well motivated, and an appeal to it is not an *ad hoc* move in our treatment of the evidentialist-pragmatist dispute. The second, and related, aspect of belief that we take on board in what follows is that belief is specifically sensitive to inquiry or to inquisitive projects. The guiding idea here is that beliefs do not just "pop up" in our minds out of the blue. Even in paradigmatic cases of quasi-automatic belief acquisition, e.g., perception, we are in a given epistemic, or more specifically, inquisitive project. For instance, in forming a perceptual belief, we are within an inquisitive project of, say, figuring out what one's physical environment is. Being in this specific project of figuring out what one's physical environment is like explains one's perceptual belief.

The idea that belief is tightly connected to inquiry is also increasingly popular in recent epistemology. So, for instance, in a recent article, Jane Friedman (Friedman 2019) argued that belief and credence have a crucial difference since belief plays a role in the inquiry that credence cannot play; namely, belief is an attitude that settles an inquiry (see also (Staffel 2019), for the idea that belief plays a specific role in

reasoning). For Friedman, we can "look at belief through the lens of inquiry" (Friedman 2019, p. 310). More concretely, she writes:

My claim is that belief has some inquiry-theoretic properties that even very high and maybe even maximally high credence don't have. In particular, believing while inquiring is a form of incoherence but having even very high credence while inquiring is not. (Friedman 2019, p. 307).

Now, if we take seriously the idea that belief is relativized to an inquiry, we may think that factors that determine the rationality of a belief have to be sensitive to the fact that it is an inquiry-closing attitude. A natural thought, then, is that a belief is rational when it fits well with the aim of the inquisitive project it is the concluding part of. In short, to see what factors determine the rationality of a belief, we should know better what the aims of inquiry are. The rationality of a belief depends, or so I would suggest, on how well it fits with the aim of an inquiry into a given question to which the belief is relativized (as the expected settling attitude).

The topic of the aims of an agent's inquiry (e.g., as instantiated, for instance, by an agent's interrogative attitudes) is actively debated in recent epistemology. Several competing views on the aims of inquiry have been proposed. On the one hand, it would seem that inquiry aims at knowledge, and ignorance seems to be its norm. After all, it is somewhat odd for one to be curious whether p while knowing that p . The idea here is that where p is a complete answer to a question Q , one ought not: to have an inquiring attitude towards Q at time t and know that $p/\text{not-}p$ at t (Friedman 2017; Sapir and Elswyk 2021; Whitcomb 2017); see also (Palmira 2020). Yet, inquiring beyond knowledge seems to be OK in some cases. See, for instance: "[W]e might inquire about something we already know in order to understand why it's true. [Footnote:] Indeed, such cases sometimes occur in proof-checking in mathematics. For example, the great mathematician Michael Atiyah once reported having proven a theorem—thus *knowing that* it held—while simultaneously seeking to *understand why* it held." (Woodard 2022, p. 3).

Once we realize that there are situations where knowledge doesn't seem to be the aim of inquiry, we might be tempted to simply endorse a pluralist view of the aims of inquiry. However, while this seems to be a move in the right direction, we need a theoretical explanation of how it is possible that inquiry (as instantiated by our interrogative attitudes, cf. (Friedman 2017)) can aim at more than one valuable state. Without a theoretical explanation, a move towards pluralism about aims of inquiry might appear *ad-hoc*, that is, as a move motivated merely by the aim to avoid the counter-examples.

Here is then one way of providing further theoretical motivation for a pluralist view of inquiry (for a more detailed argument, see (Logins 2024)). We start

with an assumption that a crucial desideratum for a plausible account of aims and norms of inquiry is that such an account should respect the *reasonableness of inquiry* constraint. And by the reasonableness of inquiry constraint, we mean that an account of inquiry shouldn't predict that mere acquisition of information or some other cognitive state doesn't count as an instance of inquiry. Chris Kelp nicely sums up this desideratum in the assessment of the following example: "[G]oing to the local brainwashing service and having a certain belief installed will not count as inquiring into the corresponding question." (Kelp 2020, p. 368). Now, here is a condition that does respect the reasonableness constraint: finding sufficient reasons to F as the aim of inquiry. The idea here is that for any inquiry-sensitive (inquiry closing) F and, in our case, specifically for belief, when one is inquiring into Q (where Q is the question to which F contains the answer), one is aiming to have sufficient reasons to F (or alternatively to not-F). This way of thinking about the aim of inquiry as involving finding sufficient reasons to F respects and explains the reasonableness constraint desideratum. Having sufficient reasons to F is beyond merely happening to be in a condition F that instantiates a valuable state. This idea can be captured in a more precise way as follows:

The Reasons Aim of Inquiry For all relevant condition F (e.g., belief, intention, action, attitude), for all agent-relativized inquiry I, where one's F-ing is a question Q-dependent, A is an aim of one's inquiry I into Q if and only if A is the aim of finding sufficient reasons for one to F with respect to the relevant Q in I.

Specifying the aim of inquiry in this way enables us also to define the fundamental norm of inquiry as forbidding the combination of an interrogative attitude concerning a question Q while having sufficient reasons to F with respect to the relevant question Q (see (Logins 2024) for more details on the general norm of inquiry). We now focus on how the Reasons Aim of Inquiry determines factors that matter for a rational belief, given the inquiry-centered conception of belief that we presented above.

Here is the general idea of applying the reasons-aim and the norm of inquiry specifically to cases of belief, namely, where F believes that p , one ought not, according to this norm, to be in an interrogative attitude about a question Q (where p is the answer to Q) and at the same time possess a sufficient reason to believe that p . But how should we think about sufficient reasons to believe that p ? Aren't we back now to the square one since that's precisely where the disagreement between evidentialists and pragmatists stand: they don't agree on the nature of reasons that can make a belief rational.

Fortunately for us, we can now progress on the evidentialist and pragmatist dispute since we now have a principled basis that will allow us to make the relevant

distinction between reasons and beliefs. Both reasons and beliefs are individualized to the inquisitive projects at hand. The rationality of a belief depends on having sufficient reasons for the relevant sort. To see the details of this suggestion, we now need to look into how normative reasons work.

4. The question-centered view of reasons and the solution to the problem of reasons

We *characterized* normative reasons above as considerations that speak in favor of the relevant F cf. (Scanlon 1998). Revisiting this assumption and zooming in on reasons might help us with the evidentialist-pragmatist debate about reasons to believe.

According to the prominent *reasons-first* approaches, normative reasons are the basic building blocks of the normative, and we cannot analyze (define/explain) them in more fundamental terms (Parfit 2011; Scanlon 1998; Schroeder 2007). There is a growing dissatisfaction with the reasons-first approach, however. And most of the existing reductive proposals can be classified as either version of the reasoning view of reasons or versions of the explanation view of reasons. According to the reasoning view, normative reasons are premises in good patterns of reasoning. Here is a formulation of the reasoning view in its general form (summing up various more specific proposals):

A consideration *r* (on many accounts, a fact) is a normative reason for *S* to *F* just in case *r* is a content of a premise-response (along with other possible premise-responses) in *S*'s possible good/sound reasoning towards *F*-ing (i.e. conclusion-response). (cf. Williams 1979, 1989, 2001; Velleman 1999; Hieronymi 2005, 2013 (on some interpretations); Setiya 2007, 2014; McHugh and Way 2016; Silverstein 2016; Asarnow 2017; Way 2017)" (Logins 2022, pp. 39–40)

According to the explanation view, reasons are parts of normative explanations. Normative explanations are either explanations of deontic properties cf. (Broome 2004, 2013), (L. Schroeter and F. Schroeter 2009)) or explanations of axiological properties (cf. (Finlay 2012, 2014, 2020), (Maguire 2016)).

According to a recent proposal (Logins 2019, 2022), while both the reasoning and explanation views seem to get something right, they also have a number of worries. See for a detailed argument (Logins 2022, pp. 38–191). An alternative proposal aims to capture the insights of both of these approaches while avoiding their pitfalls. Thus, according to the erotetic view of reasons (question-centered view), normative reasons are appropriate answers to normative Why-F?, e.g., *why do this?, why believe that?* questions (cf. (Logins 2022)), (cf. (Hieronymi 2005) for another question-centered view of reasons). These questions come in two sorts. In

some contexts, Why-F questions ask for an argument/a premise in a pattern of reasoning that could lead one to the conclusion that one ought/should F (or not F). Yet in other contexts, Why-F questions ask for an explanation of why one should/ought F. (Alternatively, the two readings concern the question *why it would be good for one to F* rather than why one ought/should F, respectively in the argument seeking and explanation seeking senses). One sort of appropriate answer then corresponds to the normative reasoning reasons, yet another to normative explanation reasons. Thus, the view captures the best bits of both the reasoning and explanation views.

One consideration that speaks in favor of the erotetic view of reasons is that the *Why* questions, in general, exhibit a fundamental ambiguity. On the one hand, there is a 'Why?' of arguments, and on the other hand, there is a 'Why?' of explanations (cf. (Whatley 1827/1975, 1828/1846)), (Salmon 1971); (McKeon 2013)). The question 'Why are dolphins not fish?' can be understood as asking for an argument. This happens in contexts of a challenge when the interlocutor doesn't accept that dolphins are not fish. Yet, in different contexts, the question asks for an explanation. In these contexts, one is trying to improve one's comprehension of the matter.

To sum up, on the erotetic view, reasons are answers to the relevant readings of the normative *Why* questions. The view can be stated in full as follows:

For that p to be a reason to F for S is for that p to be either

(a) (a part of) the content of an appropriate explanation providing (pattern of an) answer to a (S directed) question 'Why F?/ Why ought S to F?' in its explanation requiring reading; or (b) the content of an appropriate premise in a good argument/ reasoning providing (pattern of an) answer to a (S directed) question 'Why F?/ Why ought S to F?' in its argument/reasoning requiring reading. (Logins 2022, p. 170)

Once the erotetic view of reasons is on the table, we can reconcile evidentialism and pragmatism about reasons to believe (see (Logins 2022, pp. 192–227) for details on this). To see how let us consider the following case:

Let us say that Jill has a disease from which her chance of recovery is 10 %. Let us say, too, that if she believes that she is certain to recover, her chance of getting better will improve to 15%. The fact that doing so would help her get better is a reason for her to believe that she is certain to get better. This is a non-evidential normative reason for belief.[...] The fact that is the reason is not evidence for the truth of the contents of the belief. We may call these reasons *pragmatic normative reasons* for belief. (Reisner 2008, p. 18)

The erotetic view of reasons enables the following proposal. Pragmatic reasons are normative explanation reasons to believe. Evidence (truth-conducive) reasons are normative reasoning (broadly understood) reasons to believe. The improvement chance, given the relevant belief fact, is a pragmatic reason that contributes to explaining why Jill should believe that she will get better. It is not a normative reasoning reason. For this consideration doesn't have the relevant argumentative profile. Postulating that explanatory considerations of why one should/ought F (or of why it would be good for one to F) could constitute pragmatic reasons to believe and that argumentative considerations (premises in an argument/reasoning) could be evidential (truth-conducive) reasons helps only in explaining how there could be both evidential and pragmatic reasons to believe. This, by itself, doesn't yet explain how, if ever, both sorts of reasons could contribute to the rationality of a belief (in a sense). That is, the picture we sketched above about the reasons doesn't yet explain whether and how Jill's belief could be rational. The next section aims to connect the dots and provide details for a conciliatory view of rational belief.

5. Rationality: solution

The proposal from Logins 2022 of applying the ideas from the erotetic view of reasons to the case of pragmatic vs. evidential reasons is a way to reconcile evidentialists and pragmatists about reasons to believe. However, as we observed, the proposal allows us to reconcile pragmatists and evidentialists only about reasons and not yet about rational belief. This section details how exactly to reconcile the two views on rational belief.

Remember the initial way in which we stated the puzzle/disagreement about rationality:

- 1.1 Necessarily, if S's belief that p is rational, then S's evidence overall supports p.
[An Evidentialist Principle]
- 1.2 S's belief that p is rational, but S's evidence doesn't overall support p [A Pragmatist Case, e.g., Jill]
- 1.3 It is not the case that necessarily if S's belief that p is rational, then S's evidence overall supports p [1.2, Material Implication]

We observed above that there seems to be a contradiction in (1.1)-(1.3). Our proposal here is to revisit the "S's belief that p is rational" claims in the above argument. I suggest that the above occurrences of this expression in (1.1)-(1.3) have crucially distinct senses. And thus, the above argumentative schema commits the fallacy of equivocation. Once we accept this verdict about the above schema, we have to conclude that only qualified versions of the Evidentialist principle (1.1) and the

Pragmatist Case (1.2) hold. Beliefs are rational only relative to inquisitive projects. Their rationality depends on how well they contribute to instantiating the specific aim of the underlying inquiry.

Now, remember the suggestion above that the reasons norm of inquiry specifies that in the case of belief, it is forbidden for one to combine an interrogative attitude (to inquire) about Q and, at the same time, to possess sufficient reasons for one to believe that p (where p is the answer to Q). We observed above that we need to know a bit more about reasons to be able to use this in our treatment of the pragmatist-evidentialist dispute. Now that we have an independent theory of normative reasons at hand, where reasons are answers to normative questions, we are able to provide the necessary details. Here is a more specific suggestion. The reasons norm of inquiry, when applied to belief, provides the following two requirements:

The reasons norm of inquiry applied to belief One ought not:

- (1) Inquire into Q in the argument seeking sense of inquiry AND at the same time possess sufficient argument providing reasons to believe that p (where p is an answer to Q);
- (2) Inquire into Q in the explanation-seeking sense of inquiry AND at the same time possess sufficient explanation providing reasons to believe that p (where p is an answer to Q).

Now, when 'sufficient' in (1) is understood as 'sufficient reasoning-wise' and if (theoretical) reasoning aims at providing fitting belief (cf. (McHugh and Way 2016, 2018)), 'sufficient' here amounts to producing knowledge (assuming that a fitting belief is knowledge). This enables us to recover in a theoretically well-motivated way the sense in which inquiry aims at knowledge.

And we can also recover other aims of inquiry, namely, the aim of confirmation or understanding. Where sufficient in (2) is sufficient 'understanding/confirmation-wise,' and if we assume that explaining aims at providing understanding, then 'sufficient' here amounts to producing understanding. In this manner, we can vindicate pluralism about aims and norms of inquiry.

With the motivated pluralism about the inquiry at hand, we can finally return to the problem of rational belief and the evidentialist-pragmatist debate. The suggestion is that we have to disambiguate the initial argument and consider not only pluralism about normative reasons but also the inquiry-sensitive nature of believing. A belief can be a belief in the figuring-it-out sense. Namely, it can be a state that concludes an argument-seeking inquiry, that is, an inquiry aimed at finding sufficient reasoning/argumentative reasons to believe that p. But a belief can also be specified as a belief in the improvement-of-understanding sense. Namely, it

can be a state that concludes an explanation-seeking inquiry, that is, an inquiry that is aimed at finding sufficient explanation reasons to believe that p . Normative explanation reasons provide elements of explanation of why one should believe that p in this case. Overall coherence contributes to a better understanding of why one should believe that p .

Here is then the disambiguated premises:

- 1.1 * Necessarily, if S 's belief_{figuring-it-out} that p is rational, then S 's evidence overall supports p . [Best Interpretation of An Evidentialist Principle]
- 1.2 * S 's belief_{improve-understanding} that p is rational, but S 's evidence doesn't overall support p [A Pragmatist Case, e.g., Jill]
- 1.3 * It is not the case that necessarily if S 's belief_{improve-understanding} that p is rational, then S 's evidence overall supports p [1.2, Material Implication]

The premises of this revisited argument do not lead to a contradiction. And yet, we can still make sense of and respect, in a sense, both evidentialist and pragmatist initial assumptions. Crucially, it is not the case that necessarily, if S 's belief_{improve-understanding} that p is rational, then S 's evidence overall supports p .

The solution is not an *ad hoc* pluralism about rationality. It fits perfectly with the overall theory of reasons-inquiry-belief.

5.1 Replies to potential worries

However, one might think that the above-developed solution to the initial problem is not a solution, since it only reiterates the initial evidentialist-pragmatist tension at a deeper level. To see the worry, imagine a situation where it is permitted for one to have a belief_{improve-understanding} that p , while it is not only not permitted for one to believe_{figuring-it-out} that p , but one is permitted to believe_{figuring-it-out} that not- p . In such a situation, should one believe that p or believe that not- p ? We can imagine a situation where one has evidence that is slightly in favor of not- p . At the same time, pragmatic factors appear to speak more strongly in favor of one believing that p . One might think such a situation is possible given the view presented here. But if so, the initial tension is reproduced at this more fine-grained level of distinguishing sorts of belief by appealing to different inquisitive projects they may be part of. The rationality of distinct sorts of beliefs is determined according to this view by the corresponding sort of reasons (reasons that have to deal with figuring it out versus reasons that deal with improving understanding). But on pre-theoretical grounds, we might just want to know which belief one is supposed to have. On pre-theoretical grounds, one might think that norms cannot recommend one having contradictory beliefs, even if these are beliefs of distinct sorts.

There are three lines of reply to this intriguing worry that I want to present briefly. Before that, however, let me note that similar worries will concern any dualist or pluralist view of belief. For instance, belief-credence dualism, according to which both categorical belief and degrees of belief (credences) are genuine and distinct mental states (cf. (Jackson 2020)). According to one line of objection to dualism, either the two states have nothing in common, in which case it is not clear why both of these are belief states; on the other hand, if they do share a common element, then why does the apparent norms of rationality of categorical beliefs and degrees of belief pull in different directions, as, illustrated by the lottery paradox (cf. (Weisberg 2020), (Logins 2020)). Similar problems appear for views that distinguish belief from acceptance (cf. (Engel 1998)), strong belief from weak belief (Hawthorne, Rothschild, and Spectre 2016), active belief from passive belief (cf. (Boyle 2009)), belief from alief (cf. (Gendler 2008)), Spinozan belief from Cartesian belief (Mandelbaum 2014), belief from endorsement (cf. (Fleisher 2018)), and so on.

The first possible reply to the worry would be the most economical but probably the less satisfying. According to it, we should restrict the above-developed proposal to addressing only moderate pragmatists, that is, pragmatists who think that evidential and pragmatic reasons can be weighted one against another and that such a weighing happens only in some specific limited case situations and specific ways. Namely, it happens only in cases where the evidence slightly favors p over not p and where pragmatic factors are merely reasons to not believe that p and thus, taken together with evidence for p , establish that one should suspend judgment (cf. (Schroeder2021)). The situation where contradictory beliefs are permitted is not available in this sort of pragmatism. Attractive as it may seem, this response is not my preferred way of dealing with the above worry.

The second reply is to give up on belief altogether. The idea here is to suggest that there is no one sort of mental state that we may properly call 'belief.' Such a notion would be incoherent since belief is a mere umbrella term encompassing states with little to nothing in common. Take, for instance, the dualist and pluralist views mentioned above. It is highly unlikely that all the proposed distinctions among possible belief-like states can be unified into one coherent categorization of belief. Norms of rationality of these various states are likely to stand in tension. Most likely, there will be states from the above list such that one norm of rationality recommends having one sort of state $M1$ towards p , while a distinct norm of rationality of another sort of state $M2$ will recommend having a state with not- p as a content. One might think that such tensions show not only that efforts to identify principles of rationality for belief *simpliciter* are futile but that there is no such thing as belief. All we have are totally unconnected mental states that only

appear, given some rough similarities, to fall under a unified category of belief. There is no coherent category of belief; all we do when we ask for principles for rational belief is to lump together principles for distinct mental phenomena. Thus, according to this line of reply, when one asks what one should believe in a given situation, one has asked an ill-formulated question. Despite its attractiveness, such a belief skepticism should be our last resort.

The third response, which is my preferred option, is to suggest that the pre-theoretical intuitions that seem to be elicited in the above worry concern specifically deliberative ought. According to a prominent view, *perspectivism* in recent meta-normative debates, deliberative (or subjective) ought is to be distinguished from objective ought, and crucially, it is the deliberative ought that is central for, say, ethics and epistemology (see (Kiesewetter 2017; Lord 2015), among others). Deliberative ought is dependent on one's evidence or, more generally, one's epistemic states. According to the line of thought I would like to sketch here, this deliberative ought is connected to deliberative rationality and is best understood as connected to the reasons of reasoning and argument-seeking sense. So, the answer to the pre-theoretical question "what should I believe?" as far as it is typically understood in the deliberative normative sense, will always have an answer that picks out a response about belief_{figuring-it-out} that p or not p. It will not concern belief_{improve-understanding}. Insofar as deliberative ought, and deliberative rationality are connected to one's epistemic states and evidence, the reasons relevant to deliberative rationality will always be evidential. In our terminology, these will be reasons concerned with the argument-seeking reading of "Why believe p?" questions. If this is right, the simple question "What should I believe?" that one might be asking oneself in some specific circumstances is best understood as a question that picks out the belief of belief_{figuring-it-out} sort.

One way of elaborating on the proposal is to insist that the "Why believe that p?" questions can have addressees that are not also subjects of the question. In the deliberative context, the addressee is typically also the subject, that is, the potential believer. However, in the context of, say, philosophical theorizing, the addressee might be a theoretician, someone who takes a third-person perspective on the situation. In these contexts, pragmatic considerations might well appear as relevant since the question might not be addressed to the subject. A theoretician might form a verdict that the subject ought or is permitted to believe_{improve-understanding} that p even if p is not supported by one's evidence. The ought or permission picked out by theoreticians' analysis in these contexts is not deliberative; it is an objective ought. A theoretician might recognize that there is a sense in which the subject ought or is permitted to believe that there is life on Mars, perhaps,

because that would make the world a better place. It might then be that there is a sense in which the subject's belief_{improve-understanding} that there is life on Mars can be rational (in an objective sense). That is, provided that the subject can even form belief_{improve-understanding} that there is life on Mars while also believing_{figuring-it-out} that there is no life on Mars. This might appear as a fundamental tension. However, it might be our best attempt to reconcile the intuitions that pull us in two apparently opposite directions: evidentialist and pragmatist intuitions. This might show that there is simply something dramatic about our human condition. Unfortunately, it might happen that distinct norms pull us in different directions, and all we can do is register that fully conforming to these norms compartmentalizes our doxastic lives.

6. Conclusion

The evidentialist-pragmatist debate about rational belief has entered a deadlock situation. Focusing on a view on which normative reasons are answers to normative questions enables us to accept that there can be both evidential and pragmatic reasons to believe. Nevertheless, the problem of how to think about rationality remained. The solution offered in this article focuses on belief as related to inquiry and inquiry as aiming at finding reasons, where reasons are answers to normative Why F? questions. Putting these elements together, we can see how it can be maintained that, in a sense, both evidentialists and pragmatists are right. Evidentialism specifies conditions for the rationality of the argument-seeking inquiry, closing state of belief. In contrast, pragmatism specifies conditions for the rationality of the explanation-seeking inquiry, closing state of belief.

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