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## **Deliberation and the First-Person Perspective\***

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RESUMEN

En este artículo se argumenta que el normativismo sobre la creencia no ha logrado considerar seriamente que a veces puede ser permisible creer algo sin una evidencia adecuada. De hecho, los normativistas suponen con frecuencia que la deliberación acerca de qué creer tiene necesariamente que prestar atención sólo a aquello que es evidencia adecuada para creer. No se puede dar por bueno este supuesto sin prejuzgar el propio problema que se supone que el normativismo aborda.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *creencia, evidencia, deliberación, transparencia, normatividad.*

ABSTRACT

This essay argues that normativists about belief have failed to take seriously the possibility that it may sometimes be permissible to believe without adequate evidence. Instead, they frequently assume that deliberation about what to believe must necessarily attend solely to what there is adequate evidence to believe. We cannot grant this assumption without prejudging the very issue which normativism is supposed to address.

KEYWORDS: *Belief, Evidence, Deliberation, Transparency, Normativity.*

### I. TWO TRADITIONS

Modern philosophy contains two seemingly incompatible traditions for thinking about the normative constraints on belief. On the one hand, there is a tradition which emphasises the need for belief to respect evidence and the dictates of reason. Locke argued that so as not to “transgress against our own light”, we should moderate the strength of our beliefs to the strength of our evidence [Locke (1690/1979), ch. 27, § 24]. And in Hume’s view, wise people proportion their beliefs to the evidence so that they obey the laws of probability [Hume (1748/1999), sec. 10, pt. 1]. On the other hand, there is a philosophical tradition which finds a role for belief precisely when evidence and reason give out. In Kant’s epistemology, belief functions as a “signpost or compass” by means of which

we can orient ourselves when we must pass judgement on matters about which we lack adequate evidence [Kant (1786/1998), AK 8, p. 136]. According to Wittgenstein, we have no choice but to take most of our beliefs on trust from others' testimony only to adjust them to evidence if doubt or observation allow us to do so [Wittgenstein (1969), §§ 159-62].

It would seem, therefore, that to resolve this conflict between evidentialism and non-evidentialism, we must delve deeper into the relation between belief, evidence, and rationality to find out whether it is ever permissible to believe without adequate evidence. Not everyone agrees, however. A more recent normativist strain in philosophy would have us take a different approach. According to this new normativism, it is a mistake to even inquire whether it is ever appropriate to believe without adequate evidence, since it is part of the very concept of belief that one ought only to believe that  $p$  if one has sufficient evidence that  $p$ .

Jonathan Adler, Nishi Shah and David Velleman have developed some of the most intriguing arguments for this view. Adler (2002) argues that it is not even possible, let alone permissible, to believe without adequate evidence, since this would amount to a contradiction in thought. Shah and Velleman (2005) claim that one cannot answer the deliberative question "Should I believe that  $p$ ?" without addressing the factual question "Is it true that  $p$ ?". The best explanation for this, they argue, is that it is part of the concept of belief that one ought only to believe that  $p$  if it is true that  $p$ .

I wish to probe each argument to see whether the conflict between evidentialism and non-evidentialism can be set aside like this. My conclusion is negative. Not only are both arguments subject to counterexample, they do not get off the ground without assuming the very conclusion which they are supposed to establish. Contrary to what Adler argues, believing without adequate evidence does not involve any contradiction in thought unless we assume that rational persons never believe without adequate evidence. Similarly, Shah and Velleman's argument only succeeds if we assume that belief ought always to be moderated to the evidence. Yet, this is exactly the assumption which the traditional debate between evidentialists and non-evidentialists brings into question. To resolve that question, we have no choice but to return to that debate.

## II. ADLER'S CONCEPTUAL ARGUMENT

Jonathan Adler devotes most of his book, *Belief's Own Ethics*, to arguing that evidentialism "is the ethics of belief imposed by the concept

of belief itself” [Adler (2002), p. 2]. Adler’s argument proceeds in two stages. First, he claims that it is impossible in full consciousness to regard oneself as believing something for which one does not have sufficient evidence. Second, he argues that the best explanation for why we are unable to do so is that it is part of the concept of what a belief is that it is only proper to believe that  $p$  if one has sufficient evidence that  $p$ .

Adler supports the first claim by way of examples and observations. The main example to which he refers throughout is the ancient challenge to believe the proposition “The number of stars is even”. It is impossible to meet this challenge, Adler claims, as there simply is not sufficient evidence that the number of stars is even. The same holds for any other proposition about which we lack adequate evidence. If we judge in full awareness that there is insufficient evidence for  $p$ , we thereby find ourselves unable fully to believe that  $p$ . Adler calls this the Subjective Principle of Sufficient Reason:

When one attends to any of one’s beliefs, one must regard it as believed for sufficient or adequate reasons [*ibid.* p. 26].

Adler offers three observations in support of the principle. First, he claims that “we find ourselves compelled to follow” the principle when attending to our own beliefs. If we attend to a belief and judge it not to be based on sufficient evidence, we thereby find ourselves compelled to revise it to something less than outright belief [*ibid.* p. 27]. Second, “[w]e also attribute acceptance of the subjective principle to others, at least for what they *assert*” [*ibid.*]. Finally, Adler argues that the subjective principle gains support from the fact that even delusional persons seem to recognise the principle. They should be the ones who have most reason to disregard the principle, but they too seek to rationalise their beliefs by adducing evidence in their support [*ibid.*].

This cannot be the whole of the argument, however. More still needs to be said to show why the subjective principle is grounded in the concept of belief and why possession of that concept puts us under any normative pressure. For all that has been said so far, the principle might only hold because we are *psychologically* unable to regard ourselves as believing on the basis of insufficient evidence. That does not show that there is an “ethics of belief imposed by the concept of belief itself”, but only goes to show that nature has built us a certain way.

This brings us to the second and central part of Adler’s argument. According to Adler, the subjective principle holds not just because it is

*psychologically* impossible to regard one's beliefs as being believed for insufficient reasons. Rather, the "must" governing the principle is supposed to express that it is *conceptually* impossible to regard oneself as believing for insufficient reasons. Why think that it is? According to Adler, the explanation for why it is not merely psychologically but conceptually impossible to violate the Subjective Principle of Sufficient Reason is that recognising that one believes that  $p$  while acknowledging that one does not have adequate evidence that  $p$  would be "*incoherent* (a stark contradiction)" [*ibid.* p. 29].

What makes such a recognition incoherent is not the sentence used to express it. "I believe that  $p$ , but I lack adequate evidence that  $p$ " is not a contradiction, since both conjuncts can be true at the same time. Rather, what would be incoherent according to Adler is the *thought* that is required to acknowledge oneself as believing that  $p$  on the basis of insufficient evidence. Take again the proposition that the number of stars is even. According to Adler, one cannot believe that proposition while acknowledging that one lacks sufficient evidence that the number of stars is even, because doing so would require one to have the following "Moore's Paradox-like thought":

I believe that the number of stars is even. All that can secure for me the belief's claim of truth is adequate evidence (reason) of its truth. I lack adequate evidence. So I am not in a position to judge that the number of stars is even. So I do not judge it true. So I do not believe that the number of stars is even [*ibid.* p. 30].

Thoughts like these are not only incoherent but impossible, Adler argues. One cannot in full consciousness believe the first and last proposition at the same time, since "[t]he initial statement is implicitly rejected by the end of the reasoning". The realisation that one lacks adequate evidence simply "erases" the original belief [*ibid.* pp. 30-1]. Likewise, he argues, it is impossible not to believe something for which one recognises there to be sufficient evidence. "Once one judges that the evidence or reasons are adequate, one thereby does hold the belief" [*ibid.* p. 32].

### III. WHAT CONTRADICTION IN THOUGHT?

Neither part of Adler's argument is convincing. Consider first the claim that one cannot regard oneself as fully believing something for which one lacks sufficient evidence. As it stands, it is not immune to

counterexamples. Adler mentions some putative counterexamples himself. For example, he concedes that subjects suffering from various delusions sometimes continue to hold beliefs which they in some circumstances concede are not supported by adequate evidence. Yet, Adler argues that these are not genuine counterexamples to the subjective principle of sufficient reason, since it is unclear whether such subjects are fully aware of the dissonance between their pathological beliefs and their own appraisal of those beliefs [*ibid.* p. 35].

Not all counterexamples can be brushed aside like this. Sometimes, it seems, even reflective individuals free from mental disorder fail to give up beliefs which they in full awareness judge not to be supported by adequate evidence. One example is this confession from Brian Ribeiro:

I do judge that there is a completely persuasive argument for radical skepticism. I do reflectively accept and (even publicly) endorse that argument. As far as I can tell, my acceptance of that argument's cogency is as clear-headed as my acceptance of anything is ... But I still believe I have two hands [Ribeiro (2011), p. 21].

Similar imagined examples are readily available. Eric Schwitzgebel asks us to imagine Kaipeng, a trembling Stoic who "quite sincerely judges, not just on one occasion but repeatedly, that death is not bad", but whose behaviour is "indistinguishable from the actions and reactions of someone who considers death bad" [Schwitzgebel (2010), pp. 532-3]. Similarly, Andrew Huddleston presents the example of Mary, a self-conscious believer who judges that she has no evidence that God exists, but nonetheless continues to believe in God [Huddleston (2012) p. 211]. All of these subjects seem fully aware of the dissonance between the beliefs they hold and their own appraisal of those beliefs. Yet, none of them can be fairly accused of mental disturbance without thereby imputing the same fault to a large part of humanity so unexceptional are these examples.

There are no doubt many ways in which one may resist the force of these examples. One may argue that skeptics who doubt the existence of an external world are operating with two concepts of belief, one used for evaluating beliefs from an epistemic standpoint, the other employed when going about their daily business. Similarly, one might argue that Kaipeng and Mary do not fully believe that death is bad and that God exists, but merely have a high degree of confidence in those propositions.

Or one might argue that Kaipeng and Mary neither are confident nor believe, but that they are in some other belief-like state.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, it would be groundless to opt for one of these views without further explanation as to why we cannot simply say that Ribeiro, Kaipeng, and Mary hold beliefs which they acknowledge are not supported by adequate evidence. As the putative counterexamples accumulate, Adler's view incurs a burden of proof to at least explain why it is impossible knowingly to believe something without adequate evidence. This is what the second part of Adler's argument is meant to explain. His answer, as we have seen, is that one cannot violate the subjective principle in full consciousness because doing so would involve a contradiction in thought.

Adler's account here builds on Sydney Shoemaker's analysis of Moore's Paradox. That paradox is usually introduced by noting the puzzling nature of sentences that take the form "*p*, but I do not believe that *p*". Such sentences are puzzling because their assertion sounds contradictory or at least logically anomalous even though both of their conjuncts can be true at the same time. Since the sentence "*p*, but I do not believe that *p*" is not a logical contradiction, some other explanation must be given for why it sounds contradictory.

According to one popular pragmatic analysis, statements of the form "*p*, but I do not believe that *p*" sound contradictory because in asserting the first conjunct one conversationally implies that one believes that *p* while in asserting the second conjunct one explicitly says that one does not believe that *p*. That is not the kind of explanation that Shoemaker favours, however. In his view, Moore's paradox is not primarily due to the conversational conventions that govern the expression of belief. Rather, he argues, Moore's paradox arises in the first instance because "there is something paradoxical or logically peculiar about the idea of someone's *believing* the propositional content of a Moore-paradoxical sentence, whether or not the person gives linguistic expression to this belief" [Shoemaker (1995/1996), pp. 75-6].

Shoemaker suggests two explanations for why that is so. The first relies on the premise that assertion "requires that the speaker be conscious of the belief being expressed by the assertion – or, to allow for insincere assertion, that the speaker present herself as conscious of the belief" [*ibid.* p. 76]. If we furthermore assume that to be conscious of a belief one must have a higher-order belief to the effect that one has that belief, then asserting a Moore-paradoxical sentence such as "It is raining, but I do not believe that it is raining" would require one to have – or at least present oneself as having – the higher order belief that "I believe

that it is raining, but I do not believe that it is raining". The content of that belief is incoherent, since the two conjuncts contradict each other. Accordingly, it appears that one cannot consciously believe the content of a Moore-paradoxical sentence without involving oneself in a self-contradiction.

The second explanation, which is the one that Shoemaker prefers, does not depend on any connection between assertion and conscious belief, but appeals to the idea that "believing something commits one to believing that one believes it" [*ibid.* p. 77]. Thus, Shoemaker argues that if one assents to the proposition that  $p$  – and the resulting (episodic) belief is available to serve as a guide to action and as a premise in one's reasoning – one must, on pain of irrationality, also assent to the proposition that one believes that one believes that  $p$  if presented with that proposition. If one does not, he argues, one is either joking or "has, at best, a very imperfect grasp of the concept of belief" [*ibid.* p. 78].

This gives us another answer as to why there is something paradoxical about the idea of someone believing the content of a Moore-paradoxical sentence. If someone were to assent to a sentence such as "It is raining, but I do not believe that it is raining", then it is reasonable to suppose that that belief is available to the person. On the present view, therefore, if one were to assent to that sentence one would, on pain of irrationality, also have to assent to the proposition "I believe that it is raining, but I do not believe that it is raining". Again, however, the content of that proposition would be self-contradictory, so one could not believe the Moore-paradoxical sentence without contradicting oneself.

Adler's argument is supposed to follow the same strategy as Shoemaker's. Although he does not say which of Shoemaker's two explanations he supports, he claims that just as Moore-paradoxical sentences are unassertable, because they express a contradiction in thought, so one cannot violate the subjective principle of sufficient reason because that, too, would involve a contradiction in thought [Adler (2002), p. 30]. This is a false analogy, however. On closer inspection, it turns out that neither of Shoemaker's two explanations can be transposed to explain why believing " $p$ , but I lack adequate evidence that  $p$ " involves a contradiction in thought.

Suppose first, in line with Shoemaker's first explanation, that to recognise oneself as believing something, one must be conscious of that belief, and that being conscious of a belief is a matter of having a second-order belief to the effect that one has the first belief. In that case, recognising that " $p$ , but I lack adequate evidence that  $p$ " would require one also to have the second-order belief "I believe that  $p$ , but I lack

adequate evidence that  $p$ ". That is not a contradiction, however, since both conjuncts can be true at the same time. If, on the other hand, we follow the second explanation and assume that believing something commits one to believing that one believes it, then believing that  $p$ , but recognising that one lacks adequate evidence that  $p$ , would commit one to believing that one believes that  $p$ , but that one lacks adequate evidence that  $p$ . Again, however, that is not a contradiction, since the last two conjuncts may be true at the same time.

Clearly, Adler's derivation of a contradiction from the sentence " $p$ , but I lack adequate evidence that  $p$ " depends on the tacit assumption that in realising that one lacks adequate evidence that  $p$  one must also cease to believe that  $p$ . That Adler makes this assumption is clear from his explanation of why it is impossible to believe that the number of stars is even. Consider again Adler's characterisation of the contradiction in thought that he claims would ensue if one were to believe that proposition. In numbered form, it goes as follows:

- i) I believe that the number of stars is even.
- ii) All that can secure for me the belief's claim of truth is adequate evidence (reason) of its truth.
- iii) I lack adequate evidence.
- iv) So I am not in a position to judge that the number of stars is even.
- v) So I do not judge it true.
- vi) So I do not believe that the number of stars is even. [*ibid.* p. 30]

Evidently, a contradiction only arises between (i) and (vi) because Adler assumes that one must stop believing that  $p$  if one judges that one does not have adequate evidence that  $p$ . This assumption is too strong. Even if it holds for most beliefs, it is not true that one must always stop believing that  $p$  if one judges that one does not have adequate evidence that  $p$ . Nor is it true that "[o]nce one judges that the evidence or reasons" for some belief are adequate, "one thereby does hold the belief" [*ibid.* pp. 30-2]. The cases mentioned above are *prima facie* counterexamples to both of these theses. Mary's realisation that she lacks adequate evidence that God exists does not erase her belief in God. Nor is it true that once Kaipeng judges that he has sufficient reason to believe that death is not bad, he thereby believes that death is not bad.

Cases like these may be atypical, but that does not mean that they do not happen. Nor should we expect them not to occur. Although we can distinguish between different types of mental states based on the functional role they play in a subject's cognitive economy, each token state need not always manifest the functional profile of the type to which it belongs. Although it may be definitive of belief as a mental state that a subject *S* is disposed to not believe that *p* if *S* judges that there is not sufficient evidence that *p*, that does not mean that *S* will never believe that *p* if he or she judges that there is not sufficient evidence that *p*. Sometimes *S* may simply fail to manifest that disposition and continue to believe that *p* despite judging that there is not sufficient evidence that *p*.

I conclude that Adler's conceptual argument for evidentialism fails. If evidentialism is a conceptual truth about belief, it is not because believing without adequate evidence involves a contradiction in thought. Perhaps Adler could rest his case for evidentialism on a different claim, however. He sometimes suggests that evidentialism is true not because it is impossible to believe without adequate evidence, but because belief aims at truth. For example, he suggests that "[a]ll that can secure for me the belief's claim of truth is adequate evidence (reason) of its truth" [*ibid.* p. 30]. I turn to this claim next.

#### IV. THE TRANSPARENCY ARGUMENT FOR NORMATIVISM

Many philosophers claim that what distinguishes belief from other propositional attitudes such as imagination and desire is that belief in some sense "aims at truth". If this is so, then perhaps evidentialism is true even if it is possible to believe without adequate evidence. Whether the thesis that belief aims at truth entails that one should only believe that *p* if one has adequate evidence that *p* depends on how we interpret it, however. As it stands, the thesis is expressed in metaphorical terms. "Beliefs", as Ralph Wedgwood puts it, "are not little archers armed with little bows and arrows: they do not literally "aim" at anything" [Wedgwood (2002), p. 267].

Those who claim to glimpse some grain of truth in the metaphor must, therefore, explain in what sense exactly belief aims at truth. Only if that relation turns out to be normative in nature can we use it to draw any conclusions about what one ought to believe. Kathrin Glüer and Åsa Wikforss make this clear in their elucidation of the metaphor. They wish to take seriously the claim that belief aims at truth, but argue that the

metaphor is to be understood in purely functionalist terms. In terms of input, belief aims at truth, since it is sensitive to evidence. In terms of output, belief aims at truth, since it can be employed in further practical and theoretical reasoning to act and draw inference on the basis of what one takes to be true [Glüer & Wikforss (2013), p. 140].

Less obviously, David Velleman's early teleological account of belief also does not say anything about what one ought to believe. Velleman (2000) argues that belief aims at truth because it involves regarding a proposition as true with the aim of regarding it as true only if it is true. This aim can be realised in different ways. A belief may aim at truth if one intentionally aims at believing  $p$  only if  $p$  is true, or it may aim at truth if the cognitive processes that govern its formation function to regulate belief in response to evidence that the belief is true [Velleman (2000), pp. 252-3]. None of this has normative implications, however, since, as Velleman himself now acknowledges, "how an attitude *ought* to turn out is not necessarily determined by how it *is* regulated" [Velleman (2005), p. 499].<sup>2</sup>

One possible lesson to take from this is to acknowledge that if belief aims at truth, it does not do so in any normative sense. Rather, the metaphor simply captures a descriptive fact about the nature of belief. Velleman, however, takes the lesson to show that his work is not over. Rather than conclude that belief does not aim at truth in any normative sense, he concludes that we must add to the concept of belief a separate standard of correctness. Together with Nishi Shah, he suggests that:

... conceiving of an attitude as a belief must entail not only conceiving of it as regulated for truth but also, and independently, applying to it the standard of being correct if and only if true. The concept of belief, in short, is that of a cognition that is governed, both normatively and descriptively, by the standard of truth [Shah & Velleman (2005), p. 499].

Yet, more needs to be said about why including a standard or correctness in the concept of belief adds to it any normative component. As Gideon Rosen points out:

The simple fact that A would be incorrect does not constitute a reason not to perform it unless there is in the background a substantive synthetic principle to the effect that one has a reason not to do what is incorrect. [Rosen (1999), p. 19].<sup>3</sup>

This is also how considerations about correctness typically figure in deliberation. For example, the fact that it is wrong etiquette to place the fork to the right of the plate when laying a table does not in and of itself strike us as a reason not to place the fork to the right. Only if we have a further interest in complying with the rules of etiquette would we have a reason not to place the fork to the right.<sup>4</sup>

According to Shah and Velleman, however, things are different when it comes to belief. To say that a belief is correct if and only if it is true is not a mere judgement of fact. Rather, it is a normative judgement to the effect that one ought to hold the belief if and only if it is true.<sup>5</sup> Why think that the concept of belief includes a standard of correctness in this normative sense? Shah and Velleman say that we must attribute such a standard to the concept of belief, since it best explains an important feature of doxastic deliberation.

What Shah and Velleman want to draw attention to is that when we deliberate about what to believe, the question of whether we should believe that *p* is *transparent* to the question whether *p* is true, since the only way to answer the former question is by way of answering the latter. In their words:

The feature that we call transparency is this: The deliberative question *whether to believe that p* inevitably gives way to the factual question *whether p*, because the answer to the latter question will determine the answer to the former. That is, the only way to answer the question *whether to believe that p* is to answer the question *whether p* [Shah & Velleman (2005), p. 499].

Not so with other attitudes, Shah and Velleman argue. When we deliberate about whether to suppose or imagine that *p*, “the answer to the question *whether p* will not settle either the question *whether to suppose that p* nor the question *whether to imagine that p*” [*ibid.* p. 499]. Instead, all kinds of other considerations may be relevant to whether one should suppose or imagine that *p*. For example, the fact that it would be useful to suppose that *p* for the sake of argument may be a reason to suppose that *p* even if it is not true that *p*.

This calls for an explanation, Shah and Velleman claim, and according to them, “[t]he best explanation for the transparency of doxastic deliberation to factual inquiry [...] is that the very concept of belief includes a standard of correctness, to the effect that a belief is correct if and only if it is true” [*ibid.* pp. 499-500]. Moreover, this standard carries genuine

normative force, since in deliberating about what to believe one is already engaged in a practice to which the standard applies:

When one deliberates whether to have an attitude conceived as a belief that  $p$ , one deliberates about an attitude to which one already applies the standard of being correct if and only if  $p$  is true, and so one is already committed to consider it with an eye exclusively to whether  $p$  [*ibid.* p. 501].

Alternative accounts of belief cannot explain this exclusive focus, Shah and Velleman argue. The nearest competitor, the teleological account of belief, cannot accommodate transparency, since it must allow for the possibility that we are sometimes influenced by evidentially irrelevant considerations such as wishful thoughts. That there are such influences seems undeniable even if belief is mainly responsive to evidential considerations. Hence, the teleological account cannot explain transparency if it is also to respect another common feature of belief. To explain why truth occupies the sole focus in doxastic deliberation, we must add that in deliberating about whether to believe that  $p$ , we are committed to it being correct to believe that  $p$  only if it is true that  $p$  [*ibid.* pp. 500-1].<sup>6</sup>

#### V. WHAT TRANSPARENCY?

Since Shah and Velleman's argument rests on an inference to the best explanation, it leaves itself open to three types of objection. One is that their account of belief does not provide an adequate explanation of transparency. Another is that the phenomenon is better explained by some alternative hypothesis – be it one that Shah and Velleman have failed to consider, or one whose strengths they have failed to appreciate. Finally, one may object that the phenomenon which they take to stand in need of explanation is not a genuine phenomenon and so does not provide a basis for abductive argumentation.

The first two routes have been pursued by several authors. For example, Asbjørn Steglich-Petersen argues that normativism fails to account for transparency, because it is implausible to suppose that the mere acceptance of a norm of truth could motivate us always only to deliberate whether  $p$  when deliberating whether to believe that  $p$ . After all, we sometimes fail to comply with norms that we accept. Just think of those cases when we fail to keep a promise even though we accept that one ought only to make a promise if one will keep it [Steglich-Petersen (2006), pp. 506-7]. Secondly, Steglich-Petersen argues that no norm is

needed to explain transparency. Teleological accounts of belief can provide an adequate explanation once we acknowledge that when we deliberate about what to believe, we do so in the interest of getting to the truth [*ibid.* pp. 510-6].<sup>7</sup>

I wish to concentrate on the much less explored possibility that transparency is not as robust a phenomenon as Shah and Velleman contend. This really is the question that needs to be asked before considering the first two objections. If the explanandum which Shah and Velleman's account is supposed to help explain is not a genuine phenomenon, their account is not called for. If transparency is not quite the phenomenon they describe it to be, other accounts of belief may provide sufficient resources to explain it.<sup>8</sup>

To see if there is such a thing as transparency and, if so, what exactly it is, we must look more closely at Shah and Velleman's characterization of the phenomenon. Their description involves three claims. First, they claim that:

- (A) doxastic deliberation is transparent in the sense that “[t]he deliberative question *whether to believe that p* inevitably gives way to the factual question *whether p*”.

Second, they argue that:

- (B) the first question gives way to the second, “because the answer to the latter question will determine the answer to the former.”

Third, they argue that:

- (C) the first question gives way to the second, since “the only way to answer the question *whether to believe that p* is to answer the question *whether p*” [Shah & Velleman (2005), p. 499].

None of these claims are equivalent. (A) does not entail (B) and (C), since it could be part of one's psychological make-up that deliberation about question *x* inevitably gives way to deliberation about question *y* even though answering *x* will not provide an answer to *y*. (B) does not entail (C), because the answer to question *y* could determine the answer to question *x* without it being the only way to answer *x*. Conversely, (C) does not entail (B) either. For even if considering whether *p* is the only way to answer whether to believe that *p*, the answer to the former ques-

tion may not determine the answer to the latter if one is uncertain whether  $p$  is credible enough to merit belief. To see whether there is a kernel of truth in Shah and Velleman's argument, let us therefore consider each claim in turn.

#### *Evaluating (A)*

Take first the claim that doxastic deliberation is transparent because “[t]he deliberative question *whether to believe that p* inevitably gives way to the factual question *whether p*”. It is open to counterexample, since there are all kinds of obstacles which may prevent one from even getting to the factual question when considering the deliberative question. One might get distracted, fall asleep, get hit by a car, etc., before one even gets to the factual question whether  $p$ . This is enough to falsify the claim that doxastic deliberation is transparent, because the deliberative question whether to believe that  $p$  *inevitably* gives way to the factual question whether  $p$ .

Perhaps Shah and Velleman do not intend to make such a strong claim, however. Perhaps the claim is just that *barring external interference*, deliberation about whether to believe that  $p$  inevitably gives way to deliberation about whether  $p$ . This too is open to counterexample, however. Although we may not often do so, nothing prevents one from considering how good, funny, or well-liked it would be to believe that  $p$  when deliberating about whether to believe that  $p$ .

Indeed, such reasoning is not unheard of in philosophy. Take only Blaise Pascal. Whatever one may think of his wager argument, Pascal himself concludes that considerations of expected utility favour theism even if we have no way to ascertain whether or not God exists. If one person was able to deliberate this way, it cannot be *inevitable* that considering whether  $p$  should lead one only to consider whether  $p$  is true.

#### *Evaluating (B)*

Perhaps (B) better captures what transparency is supposed to be. Perhaps the claim is not that considering whether to believe that  $p$  *inevitably* gives way to considering whether it is true that  $p$ , but that doxastic deliberation is transparent “because the answer to the latter question will determine the answer to the former.” It is not clear what this means, however. The word “determine” stands in need of further clarification, since it is ambiguous between a normative and a descriptive reading. On the one hand, (B) could be taken to mean that:

(ought<sub>B</sub>) Doxastic deliberation is transparent, because the answer to whether *p* will determine whether one *ought* to believe that *p*.

On the other hand, the claim could be taken to mean that:

(is<sub>B</sub>) Doxastic deliberation is transparent, because the answer to whether *p* will determine whether one believes that *p*.

The latter statement may seem trivial. After all, “to judge that *p*” is commonly used as a synonym for “to believe that *p*”. What judgement one passes as to *whether p* will therefore determine whether one believes that *p*. No normative conclusion can be drawn from this lesson, however. From the fact that our judgement *whether p* determines whether we believe that *p*, it does not follow that the former ought to determine the latter.

If transparency is to ground a normative theory of belief, (B) must therefore be read in the normative sense. This is also the more natural reading, since the infinitive marker “to” in the clause “whether to believe that *p*” is most naturally read as raising the normative question what one is to believe. Yet, if this is what (B) is supposed to be, the claim is beset by a fatal problem which surfaces as soon as we try to clarify how an answer to whether *p* is supposed to determine whether we ought to believe that *p*. Is it that:

(objective norm) One ought only to believe that *p* if it is true that *p*?

Or is it that:

(subjective norm) One ought only believe that *p* if one has sufficient evidence that *p*?

Shah and Velleman sometimes suggest that both interpretations are correct, since the latter norm specifies a means to satisfying the former. Yet, neither interpretation clarifies (B) without rendering their view question-begging. The objective norm is unacceptable, because in assuming that one ought only to believe that *p* if it is true that *p* it assumes the very thesis that the phenomenon of transparency is supposed to motivate. The subjective norm is unacceptable, since it assumes evidentialism – the view that one ought only to believe that *p* if one has adequate evidence that *p* – which in Shah and Velleman’s view is supposed to be a corollary of normativism about belief.<sup>9</sup> If we are out to defend normativism, we cannot, therefore, take either norm for granted.

One could try to escape this problem by weakening (B) so that it only says that the answer to whether  $p$  determines whether it is *rational* to believe that  $p$ , not whether one *ought* to believe that  $p$  all things considered. This would not rescue Shah and Velleman's argument, however. First, it is unclear whether rationality is at all normative, since it is not clear that its being rational to have some attitude is a reason to have that attitude.<sup>10</sup> Some are skeptical that it is even a *pro tanto* reason. If they are right, the fact that whether  $p$  determines whether it is rational to believe that  $p$  does not provide a reason for or against believing that  $p$ . Second, even if rationality turns out to be normative, it still needs to be shown why only an answer to whether  $p$  can determine whether it is rational to believe that  $p$ . Pascal's argument for the rationality of religious belief once more comes to mind. Without an argument for why Pascal was wrong to defend religious belief on grounds of its expected benefit, this rationalist reading of (B) is just as question-begging as the normativist reading.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Evaluating (C)*

What about (C)? Perhaps what Shah and Velleman really mean is that doxastic deliberation is transparent because the answer to whether  $p$  determines whether to believe that  $p$ , and that this is so because "the only way to answer the question *whether to believe that p* is to answer the question *whether p*." This may seem to do away with the problems that (B) encounters, since it purports to explain why answering whether  $p$  determines whether to believe that  $p$ : it does so because there is no other way of answering whether to believe that  $p$ .

Again, however, we must clarify whether (C) is a descriptive or normative claim. Suppose first it amounts to the normative claim that:

(ought<sub>C</sub>) Doxastic deliberation is transparent, because the only way to answer the question whether one ought to believe that  $p$  is to answer the question whether  $p$ .

Immediately, the previous charge of question-begging reappears. Pascali-ans would deny that (ought<sub>C</sub>) describes the only way to find out whether one ought to believe that  $p$ . They argue that sometimes one must also take into account the belief's expected benefit. Hence, Shah and Velleman cannot take (ought<sub>C</sub>) for granted. Doing so would be to build into transparency the very claim which it is supposed to establish.<sup>12</sup>

The same problem does not arise if we opt for the descriptive reading that:

- (is.c) Doxastic deliberation is transparent, because the only way to answer the question whether one believes that  $p$  is to answer the question whether  $p$ .<sup>13</sup>

This does not entail any normative conclusion. From the fact that there is only one way to answer a question, it does not follow that we *ought* ever to answer the question that way. (The question may simply not be worth answering). Yet, even when evaluated purely for its descriptive merits does (is.c) meet with problems. It is true, of course, that rarely, if ever, is answering whether it would be good to believe that  $p$  a way of answering whether one believes that  $p$ . That does not mean that answering whether  $p$  is the only way of so doing, however. There are at least two alternatives: practical reasoning and testimony.

When  $p$  describes a future state of affairs within the control of our will, we can often answer whether we believe that  $p$  not by answering whether  $p$ , but by answering whether we intend that  $p$ . We can, since intending that  $p$  commonly brings with it believing that  $p$ . Suppose, for example, that someone asks whether one believes that one will be at a friend's wedding. Other things being equal, one can answer that question simply by forming or affirming the intention to attend the wedding. One can, since the fact that one intends to be at the wedding is a reason to believe that one will be at the wedding. In such cases, it seems perfectly acceptable to answer "I believe that  $p$  because I intend that  $p$ ".

Similarly, if  $p$  is a proposition that we have been told by someone, we can often answer whether we believe that  $p$  not by answering whether  $p$ , but by deciding to trust the person who told us that  $p$ . We can, since trusting someone typically involves believing what they say. Indeed, it would be a sign of distrust to wonder whether  $p$  when someone has told one that  $p$ . There are therefore at least two counterexamples to (is.c). Hence, it cannot be that doxastic deliberation is transparent, because the only way to answer whether one believes that  $p$  is to answer whether  $p$ .

## VI. THE OPACITY OF DOXASTIC DELIBERATION

I have not been able to find any sense in which doxastic deliberation is necessarily transparent. Instead, the phenomenology of doxastic deliberation appears to be more complex than Shah and Velleman suggest. Con-

text is crucial here, since most of our beliefs are not formed via deliberation. Many more are formed via perception or testimony without recourse to deliberation. Only certain circumstances call for deliberation. One case is when perception or testimony cannot establish whether  $p$ . We are then confined to trying to infer whether  $p$  based on what we already know or believe. This may well involve deliberation, but not necessarily doxastic deliberation. If it is  $p$  that we are interested in, we are often better off moving straight to the question whether  $p$  rather than raising the question whether to believe that  $p$ .

The doxastic question only becomes salient when it is not possible to say for sure whether  $p$ . I, for my part, only find myself deliberating about whether to believe that  $p$  when I cannot ascertain whether  $p$ . Yet, contrary to Shah and Velleman, I do not try to answer that question by answering whether  $p$ . Usually, it is precisely because I have failed to determine whether  $p$  that the question whether to believe that  $p$  arises. It therefore seems pointless to attempt once more to determine whether  $p$ . Instead, the best option is to weigh whatever evidence is available to see whether it is strong enough to warrant belief.

Take this as a description of deliberation instigated by oneself. Things are different when others prompt it. If someone asserts that  $p$ , I *do* sometimes deliberate about whether to believe that  $p$ . It happens when I suspect either that they are mistaken, or that they are out to mislead me. When this happens, I sometimes also do try to find an answer to whether to believe that  $p$  by answering whether  $p$ . I do so if I think that it will allow me to reach a conclusion on the matter. In cases like these, it is as if the former question gives way to the latter, as Shah and Velleman put it.

Still, I do not move to this second question because I am somehow compelled to do so. I do it out of my own accord, since what I want to know is whether I am being misled. If I wanted to, I could try to answer whether to believe that  $p$  by considering how good, funny, or well-liked it would be to believe that  $p$ . Doing so seems a bit pointless, however, as what I want to know is none of these things, but whether  $p$ .<sup>14</sup> It is a shame that Shah and Velleman do not say more about testimonial cases of this kind. Such cases seem to be exactly what they have in mind when talking about doxastic deliberation. They write:

We think that doxastic deliberation is not only possible but commonplace. When someone makes an assertion that is not in itself convincing, the question that naturally comes to mind is whether to believe what he has said. When the president asserts that Iraq is harboring weapons of mass

destruction, the natural question to ask is not “Is Iraq harboring weapons of mass destruction?” but rather “Should I believe that?” – whereupon this question transparently gives way to an inquiry into the truth of the president’s claim [Shah & Velleman (2005), p. 502].

I doubt that in cases like these we can always find out what to believe in the way that Shah and Velleman suggest. Whether we can depends on whether  $p$  describes a state of affairs to which we have access. If  $A$  and  $B$  give conflicting testimony about  $p$ , and we can check whether  $p$ , we can find out whom to believe simply by seeing for ourselves whether  $p$  is true. This is not a straightforward case of testimony. When we ask whom to trust in cases such as this, what we mean is usually not whose testimony to believe here and now, but who is more trustworthy as a source of information. If on finding out that  $p$ , we decide that informant  $A$  is more trustworthy than  $B$ , we do not believe that  $p$  because  $A$  told us so. We believe that  $p$  because we found out that  $p$  for ourselves. If  $A$  said that  $p$  and  $B$  said that not- $p$ , we may well also conclude that our findings confirm that  $A$  is more trustworthy than  $B$ . In that case, our inquiry serves a double purpose: to find out whether  $p$  and to determine whom to trust in the future.

Shah and Velleman’s example is not one of these cases, however. At least not for most people. I, for one, know too little about weapons of mass destruction to determine whether Iraq has any. Nor can I afford to send experts to find out for me. What one can do, of course, is listen to people who are in a better position to know, but there is no guarantee that this will settle the matter. There always remains the question of whom, if anyone, to believe.

This last point bears elaborating. Shah and Velleman say that “When someone makes an assertion that is not in itself convincing, the question that naturally comes to mind is whether to believe what he has said” (*ibid.*). I am not so sure. An equally natural question to ask is whether to believe that person. There is a difference between believing someone and believing what they say. After all, it is only when we believe someone that we base our own belief on their testimony. If we instead ask whether to believe what they say, we seem more intent on finding out for ourselves whether what they say is true.

When George W. Bush and his allies argued that armed intervention was necessary to halt Iraq’s acquisition of WMDs, they were gain-said by Hans Blix whose UN commission had failed to unearth any significant evidence that Iraq had such weapons. All the same, Bush & co. decided to forge ahead on the ground that they themselves were in

possession of classified evidence that Iraq was harbouring weapons of mass destruction. How can we find out whom to believe in such a situation? This is perhaps the most urgent question which recent history throws up for the ethics of belief.

This question requires a whole investigation of its own, something we cannot hope to accomplish here. What seems clear, however, is that when two parties try to inform us about some matter to which we have no access, we cannot find out whom to believe by taking it upon ourselves to establish whether what they say is true. Instead, we are forced to rely in part on non-epistemic considerations: what interest our informants have in the matter; what interest they have in us believing what they say; and so on. None of these are necessarily evidence for or against what we are being told, since a person's interests need not affect whether they speak truly or not. Yet, if this is so, evidence alone will not always be enough to determine what we are to believe.

#### CONCLUSION

Normativists have long argued that belief and truth are bound together by a normative connection enjoining us only to believe what is true or that for which we have adequate evidence. That connection has come undone in this paper. First, Adler's argument that it is not even possible knowingly to believe without adequate evidence has been shown to work only if we assume that very view. Second, Shah and Velleman's argument from doxastic deliberation has been shown to either presuppose normativism, or else to describe a phenomenon which does not have normative implications. What is more, we have seen that doxastic deliberation is called for precisely when we cannot say for sure whether  $p$ , but have to make up our minds in the absence of conclusive evidence. How we ought to proceed under these conditions is a topic for future work.<sup>15</sup>

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> This is indeed the view which Schwitzgebel uses his example to motivate.

<sup>2</sup> The concession is made in response to Shah’s (2003) criticisms.

<sup>3</sup> See also Hattiangadi (2007).

<sup>4</sup> This is also how considerations concerning correctness typically figure in practical deliberation. When we deliberate about what to do, considerations about what is correct only motivate us to act if we have a prior interest in doing what is correct. Someone with an interest in adhering to the rules of etiquette will take the fact that it is correct to place the fork to the left of the plate as a reason to do so. Yet, a nonconformist may well take the same consideration as a reason not to place the fork to the left.

<sup>5</sup> How exactly we should formulate this norm is a matter of debate. See Bykvist & Hattiangadi (2007) for counterexamples to many of the most common ways of formulating the norm.

<sup>6</sup> Shah (2003) develops this point in greater detail.

<sup>7</sup> See also McHugh (2013) for further objections.

<sup>8</sup> Steglich-Petersen (2013) offers a deflationary account of transparency.

<sup>9</sup> This is especially clear in Shah (2006).

<sup>10</sup> See Kolodny (2005).

<sup>11</sup> Still more, even if we grant that the only way to answer whether it is rational to believe that  $p$  is to seek out an answer to whether  $p$ , it is not true that “the answer to the latter question will determine the answer to the former.” At least, it will not if we allow that the answer to whether  $p$  can come in degrees, but that it can be rational to adopt a course-grained attitude towards  $p$ . Suppose, for example, that one determines that given one’s evidence, the probability of  $p$ ’s being true is 0.9. Should or should one not believe that  $p$ ? The answer depends on how one thinks belief should reflect probability. Probabilists will say that one should have a 0.9 credence that  $p$ . Suppose, however, that one thinks – as do Shah and Velleman – that coarser attitudes have an important role to play in our cognitive economy. What should one then do? Should one believe that  $p$ , or should one suspend judgment? Evidence alone cannot answer this question, since we must appeal to some other factor which turns evidence into a reason for belief: a threshold which the probability that  $p$  given the evidence must exceed; a safety condition that rules out alternative possibilities; or some third factor.

<sup>12</sup> One could, of course, interpret (C) in terms of some other notion such as rationality or justification. E.g. “Doxastic deliberation is transparent, because the only way to answer the question whether it is rational/epistemically justified to believe that  $p$  is to answer the question whether  $p$ .” Yet, this would not help the normativist case for the same reasons as mentioned in the previous section.

<sup>13</sup> I have changed the “whether to believe” construction to “whether one believes” in order to avoid any normative connotations.

<sup>14</sup> Foley makes the same point. He argues that the explanation for why “you ordinarily don’t consider what practical reasons you might have to believe something” is not that there are no such reasons. Rather, the explanation is that “[d]eliberations concerning your practical reasons are customarily inefficacious and hence pointless” [Foley (1993), p. 16].

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