



Problems with purely pragmatic belief

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Abstract Rinard (Philos Stud 176(7):1923–1950, 2019) brings to our attention the fact that, typically, the questions *What should I believe?* and *What should I do?* are treated differently. A typical answer to the first question is *Believe according to the evidence*, and a typical answer to the second question is *Do what is right*. But Rinard rejects this dichotomy. In its place, she argues for a view which she calls “Equal Treatment” in which one should believe according to the same considerations that govern what one should do. Christensen (Philos Phenomenol Res. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12712>, 2020) aptly situates Equal Treatment as a limit case of a recent movement towards taking pragmatic factors as *partly* determining what one should believe, in that Equal Treatment is a *purely* pragmatic view. Does Rinard’s case for a purely pragmatic view succeed? This paper argues that the answer is no. Three objections that target key parts of Rinard’s case for Equal Treatment are presented. The upshot is that the dichotomy between the answers to *What should I believe?* and *What should I do?* seems robust against strong attempts to dismantle it.

Keywords Epistemic rationality · Pragmatic rationality · Evidentialism

1 Introduction

Rinard (2019) brings to our attention the fact that, typically, the questions *What should I believe?* and *What should I do?* are treated differently. A typical answer to the first question is *Believe according to the evidence*, and a typical answer to the second question is *Do what is right*. But Rinard rejects this dichotomy. According to her meta-normative view, which she calls “Equal Treatment” (hereafter, “ET”), both questions

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are to be answered in the same way. For example, suppose that one should do whichever action maximizes expected utility. According to ET, it follows that one should believe whichever belief is such that believing that belief maximizes expected utility—whether or not the evidence supports that belief. As such, evidential reasoning by itself never determines what one should believe. Instead, pragmatic reasoning determines not only what one should do but also what one should believe.

Christensen (2020) aptly situates ET as a limit case of a recent movement towards taking pragmatic factors as *partly* determining what one should believe. For example, proponents of “pragmatic encroachment” defend views in which one’s pragmatic circumstances, such as whether it is important to deposit a check at the bank, affect whether one knows some proposition, such as whether the bank is open tomorrow.¹ As another example, proponents of “moral encroachment” defend views in which whether one should hold a belief, such as the belief that a person is likely to steal one’s purse, depend on the moral features of such beliefs, such as whether the belief is based on the person’s race.² Christensen aptly situates ET as a limit case in which pragmatic factors do not *partly* determine, but rather *entirely* determine, that which one should believe. For this reason, ET is what Christensen calls a “purely pragmatic” view of epistemic rationality. Christensen criticizes the viability of such purely pragmatic views by working from the outside-in: Christensen argues in effect that any such view should satisfy certain desiderata, but none of three representative purely pragmatic views succeed in doing so.

The present paper also criticizes Rinard’s view, but by working from the inside-out: three objections are presented that specifically target key parts of Rinard’s positive case for ET. The positive case for ET relies on arguments that ET is preferable to a rival view. The objections to ET in the present paper aim to show that, actually, this rival view wins each of three key contests against ET, as follows:

§2 reviews a key thought experiment of Rinard’s which putatively shows that ET delivers better verdicts than the rival view regarding the allocation of praise and blame. It is argued that careful examination of the thought experiment suggests that this conclusion is not warranted.

§3 reviews Rinard’s key practical application of ET to racial profiling. It is argued that this application is better handled by the rival view.

§4 considers a key theoretical question raised by Rinard as to whether ET or the rival view is committed to dilemmas. It is argued that ET (but not the rival view) is committed to dilemmas.

If these objections succeed, then the dichotomy between the answers to *What should I believe?* and *What should I do?* seems robust against strong attempts to dismantle it.

Before proceeding, let us define the rival view and show how it differs from ET. The rival view is called “Different Objects” (hereafter, “DO”) by Rinard. DO is so

¹ See Stanley (2005) for a discussion of this case.

² See Moss (2018) for a discussion of this case.

called because the view distinguishes different objects to which obligations apply. In particular, DO distinguishes between whether one should *believe* that P and whether one should *try to* believe that P. Rinard does not give a formal specification of DO, but one way to formalize DO is as follows:

(PODO) X should ϕ iff:

- (i) ϕ is of the form ‘believe that P’ and P is supported by X’s evidence, or
- (ii) ϕ is not of the form ‘believe that P’ and $C(X, \phi)$ hold.

“PODO” stands for “Principle Of Different Objects”. PODO bifurcates into two clauses as a function of whether ϕ is or is not an imperative to believe a proposition. Clause (i) is operative whenever ϕ is an imperative to believe a proposition P, in which case X should believe that P whenever X’s evidence supports such belief. Otherwise, clause (ii) is operative. In clause (ii), $C(X, \phi)$ are the conditions under which X should ϕ , if ϕ is not an imperative to believe a proposition. For example, $C(X, \phi)$ could be the set of conditions in which X’s ϕ -ing would maximize expected utility. So, whether one should *believe* that P is governed by clause (i) of PODO, and whether one should *try to* believe that P is governed by clause (ii) of PODO.

A formal specification of ET can be given more simply, as follows:

(POET) X should ϕ iff $C(X, \phi)$ hold.

“POET” stands for “Principle Of Equal Treatment”. Using the same example as above, if it is true that one should maximize expected utility, then $C(X, \phi)$ are the set of conditions in which X’s ϕ -ing would maximize expected utility.

Rinard discusses how “should” is to be understood as the term applies to ET, although she does not commit to any one definition of “should”. In brief, “should” is to be understood as subjective in some sense (for example, in the sense of relying only on the subject’s beliefs) and guidance-giving in some sense (for example, in the sense of settling what to do). The present paper follows Rinard in using the term “should” in the same way.

2 Which of ET and DO delivers better verdicts about praise and blame?

Rinard claims that ET is better than DO at delivering verdicts about the allocation of praise and blame. She offers the following case:

“There are two mines that each contain hundreds of trapped miners... An eccentric billionaire has the power to rescue the miners, but he has one condition: he will rescue those in a mine only if the captain of that mine believes that the number of stars is even. Both captains share the same evidence, and it is neutral on whether the number of stars is even... Captain Merriweather tries to believe—and succeeds! He thereby saves the lives of all the hundreds on his team. Captain Bellwether, however, tries to believe and fails. The hundreds in his team die... According to Different Objects, it seems we must think of Captain Bellwether, paradoxically, as the hero of the story—

he did everything he should have done: he tried to believe, and then he did not believe. He is, it seems, beyond reproach. Captain Merriweather, however, only did one of the things he should have done. He did, as he should have, try to believe—but then, rather than not believing, as he (according to Different Objects) should have, he ended up believing. ...[T]his assessment... gets things backwards. It is Captain Merriweather who is the hero, and beyond reproach—he succeeded in a difficult task (believing beyond his evidence), thereby saving the lives of hundreds! Captain Bellwether, on the other hand, failed in what really mattered—actually believing that the number of stars is even—and thereby caused the death of hundreds. Equal Treatment can do justice to these reactions to the case. According to ET, in believing, Merriweather did as he should; in failing to believe, Bellwether failed to do as he should.” (pp. 1933–1934)

Rinard’s claim that ET delivers better verdicts than DO about the allocation of praise and blame in this case is based on the snap intuition that Merriweather is more praiseworthy than Bellwether. But does this snap intuition survive considered reflection? This section argues that the answer is no. Instead, the considered verdict is that the captains are equally praiseworthy. The argument for why the answer is no also helps diagnose why the snap intuition might initially arise. The upshot is that DO delivers better verdicts than ET about the allocation of praise and blame in this case.

To challenge the snap intuition, this section reverse-engineers the case. To do so, a series of variants of the case is presented. The first variant is one in which it is unambiguously true that Merriweather and Bellwether are equally praiseworthy. Subsequent variants are then presented that each differ by a single factor from the previous variant. It is argued that, intuitively, each single factor does not deem Merriweather more praiseworthy than Bellwether. In other words, *if* Merriweather and Bellwether are equally praiseworthy in one variant, *then* Merriweather and Bellwether *continue* to be equally praiseworthy in the subsequent variant. The final variant is the original case. The series of variants thereby form a chain of syllogisms by which it follows that Merriweather and Bellwether are equally praiseworthy.

As a convenient shorthand, let us refer to Merriweather as “M” and Bellwether as “B” and the proposition that the number of stars is even as “NSE”.

(Variant 1) Suppose that the eccentric billionaire makes a different offer: the billionaire will save the miners if the captains tell the billionaire where the mines are located.

In Variant 1, the captains are obligated by any plausible moral theory to tell the billionaire where the mines are located. So, in this variant, both captains tell the billionaire where the mines are located. The billionaire rescues the miners and the stories of both captains’ miners end with identical happy endings.

In Variant 1, are M and B praiseworthy? Yes, but to a tiny degree. After all, it is the *eccentric billionaire* who rescued the miners. The eccentric billionaire is the “hero of the story” if anyone is. The captains did their part: they provided the billionaire with the location of the mines. Doing one’s part is worthy of praise, so

the captains are indeed praiseworthy. But, intuitively, the captains did nothing heroic. If the captains had incurred significant cost, or if the captains' actions had gone beyond the call of duty, then perhaps the intuition would arise that the captains did something heroic. As it stands, however, intuitively, we only ascribe a tiny degree of praise to the captains.

Since Variant 1 is perfectly symmetric between the captains, M and B are equally praiseworthy.

(Variant 2) Suppose that the eccentric billionaire makes a different offer: they will save a captain's miners if the captain requests a coin toss and the coin lands heads.

As in Variant 1, any plausible moral theory obligates both captains to request the coin toss so that their miners have a chance of being rescued. The coin lands heads for M and tails for B. M's miners are rescued by the billionaire, and B's miners die.

In Variant 1, the hero was the billionaire. Who is the hero in Variant 2? The most plausible answer is that *there is no hero*. While it is true that the billionaire in Variant 2 rescues M's miners, the billionaire had the power to rescue B's miners but didn't. The billionaire didn't rescue B's miners because the billionaire chose to play a cruel and capricious game to determine whether or not to save the miners' lives. Intuitively, the billionaire has a severely defective moral compass, and is not praiseworthy.

But aren't the captains praiseworthy? Yes, but to the *same tiny degree*. As in Variant 1, they did their part: they requested the coin toss. But, as before, merely requesting the coin toss is not heroic.

M's miners died and B's miners lived; does that make B more blameworthy than M? Intuitively, the answer is no. The outcome of the coin toss was entirely outside of each captain's control. Perhaps M's name would be associated with celebration and B's name would be associated with mourning, but such association does not undermine the strong intuition that B does not accrue blame for the deaths of their miners. Likewise, M does not accrue praise for the rescue of their miners, beyond the praise that M and B both share for requesting the coin toss. Whether or to what extent there can be cases of "moral luck" in the sense of Nagel (1979), this does not intuitively seem like such a case.

It follows that the intuitive verdict in Variant 2 is that M and B are equally praiseworthy.

(Variant 3) Suppose that the eccentric billionaire makes a different offer: they will save a captain's miners if that captain believes NSE. Suppose further that the *only* means by which a captain can believe NSE is by taking a pill which has a 50% random chance of implanting a belief that NSE.

Variant 3 is very close to Variant 2. Instead of a coin toss, a pill is taken. Just as the coin has a 50% chance of coming up heads, the pill has a 50% chance of implanting a belief that NSE. Just as a captain's coin landing heads would cause the billionaire to rescue that captain's miners, so too would a captain's having the belief that NSE cause the billionaire to rescue that captain's miners.

Is it morally compulsory for each captain to take the pill in this variant, as it was morally compulsory for each captain to request a coin toss in Variant 2? The intuitive answer is clearly yes. This intuitive answer seems correct despite the fact that it is bad to believe NSE. That it is bad to believe NSE can be brought out by considering the fact that one should not teach NSE to one's children or students. Nonetheless, the cost of believing NSE is ordinarily tiny. Whether one believes NSE will ordinarily have no significant impact on anyone's life.

Let us suppose that the captains' luck in Variant 3 matches the captains' luck in Variant 2: M's pill implants the belief that NSE and M's miners are rescued, whereas B's pill does not implant the belief that NSE and B's miners die. M and B appear to be equally praiseworthy in this variant, just as they were in Variant 2. The outcomes of the coin toss and the pill taking were entirely beyond the captains' control, and a matter of luck that intuitively does not merit praise or blame.

(Variant 4) Suppose that the eccentric billionaire makes the following offer: they will save a captain's miners if that captain believes NSE. Each captain expends maximal effort to acquire the belief that NSE. For both captains, the method they use is a fallible method with an X% random chance of believing NSE.

The difference between Variant 3 and Variant 4 is that some information regarding the method by which the captains try to believe NSE is left unspecified. Nonetheless, there appears to be enough information in Variant 4 to assess praise and blame. Both captains continue to be praiseworthy for using some method to believe NSE; the defeater for praiseworthiness that the captains do not expend their maximal effort is ruled out. As in Variant 2 and Variant 3, the captains accrue no praise or blame for the fates of their miners, since the outcome of the method is still determined by the same random chance. It follows that the intuitive verdict regarding this variant is that the captains are equally praiseworthy.

(Variant 5) Suppose that the eccentric billionaire makes the following offer: they will save a captain's miners if that captain believes NSE.

Variant 5 is the original case. The only difference between Variant 4 and Variant 5 is that the description of Variant 5 omits the text following the first sentence. But the assumptions in this omitted text are implicit in the original case, for the following reasons.

The assumption that both captains expend maximal effort to believe NSE is required to avoid begging the question against DO. If the fact that the different outcomes of the captains' miners is due in any part to the degree of effort expended by the captains, then such difference in effort is good grounds for differentially praising M and blaming B. Since the difference between ET and DO regarding the attribution of praise and blame to M and B is meant to hinge only on the obligations entailed by ET and DO, we must assume that M and B expended equal effort, on pain of begging the question against DO.

The assumption that believing NSE requires *some* fallible method is true in virtue of the fact that the captains are human. In a context unrelated to the miners, Rinard mentions "metaphysically possible creatures" which "have direct control over their

beliefs, much the same way we have direct control over whether we visually imagine a red tomato.” (p. 1927) But it is fair to say that no human can choose to directly and infallibly will themselves into believing NSE. Instead, the captains must undertake a method akin to ones mentioned in Rinard’s paper, which include taking a belief-inducing pill (such as the ones contemplated above) or immersing oneself in a religious community (such as a cult whose central tenet is that NSE is true).

Likewise, the assumption that the fallible methods used by the captains have outcomes determined by identical random chance is also required to avoid begging the question against DO. If this assumption did not hold, the fates of the captains’ miners could have been due to factors that could be attributed to one captain’s differential access to better or worse methods. Such factors could be grounds on which to differentially praise M and blame B. As such, we must assume that the captains used fallible methods offering an identical random chance of success, on pain of begging the question against DO.

Since Variant 5 is the original case, and since the assumptions contained in Variant 4 are implicit in the original case, and since M and B are equally praiseworthy in Variant 4, it follows M and B are equally praiseworthy in the original case. Therefore, a snap intuition that M is more praiseworthy than B does not survive considered reflection.

Why, then, might a reader of the original case *initially* have a snap intuition that M is more praiseworthy than B? The foregoing argument helps answer this question. The answer is that several linguistic devices in the original description of the case steer the reader towards this hasty conclusion.

First, the original description of the case implicitly invites the reader to answer the question: *who* is “the hero”? But just because the story involves the successful rescue of miners does not mean that the story has a hero. The description therefore steers the reader towards the assumption that there is significant praise to be allocated to *someone*. A natural but overly hasty inference is that that someone is one of the captains. Indeed, that the captains should be the recipients of the praise is prompted by the captains’ title of “captain”. One might be less inclined to asymmetrically allocate praise and blame if M’s and B’s titles were, say, “assistant”.

Second, a snap intuition that the captains are praiseworthy or blameworthy for the fates of their miners is also encouraged by the questionable usage of the word “thereby”: “Merriweather... thereby [saved] the lives of hundreds!” “Bellwether... thereby caused the death of hundreds.” One ought to question this usage of “thereby” because it would seemingly apply even in Variant 2, in which it would be questionable to assert, for example, “Merriweather requested the coin toss, thereby saving the lives of hundreds!” It does not capture our intuitions about praise or blame in Variant 2 to say, for example, that M deserves to be celebrated as a hero for requesting a coin toss since by making this request M “thereby” saved their miners.

In a similar vein, one ought to question the phraseology in “Merriweather... succeeds! ...Bellwether... fails.” It would not capture our intuitions about praise or

blame to say, in Variant 2, “Merriweather’s coin lands heads—Merriweather succeeds! Bellwether’s coin lands tails—Bellwether fails.”

Lastly, another linguistic device subtly encourages a differential assessment of the degree of effort expended by the captains. The original description of the case includes: “Captain Merriweather... is the hero, and beyond reproach—he succeeded in a difficult task...” But the description excludes any indication that B exerted the same effort on this “difficult task”. One might infer that M believed NSE, and B did not believe NSE, at least partly due to a difference in expended effort. As discussed in the analysis of Variant 5, this assumption must be false.

Together, these linguistic devices steer the reader towards a hasty snap intuition that M is more praiseworthy than B. But, as argued above, this snap intuition does not survive considered reflection. The considered verdict is that the captains are equally praiseworthy.

One last point is worth noting. Supposing that the captains are equally praiseworthy, is there nonetheless a problem here for DO? After all, according to DO, M violates one obligation whereas B does not. As such, shouldn’t DO deem M to be at least somewhat blameworthy? Not necessarily. A proponent of DO need not accept the claim that a person is blameworthy whenever that person violates an obligation. A full treatment of how a proponent of DO can reject this assumption is beyond the scope of this paper. But it is worth noting that DO has the resources to support a theory of praise and blame that denies this assumption. As discussed, we humans are not instances of “metaphysically possible creatures” who can immediately and infallibly will ourselves to form beliefs that we should believe. We cannot do so even in cases in which we know that we should believe such beliefs. Since we are unable to do so even in such cases, we are arguably not blameworthy for our failure to believe. On the other hand, if we have a method by which we can acquire such beliefs, then we may be blameworthy for not using such a method. Therefore, a proponent of DO may take the plausible position that while some or all violations of obligations arising from clause (ii) of PODO entail attribution of blame, violations of obligations arising from clause (i) of PODO do not. This is why DO need not entail that M is blameworthy for believing NSE.

DO therefore has the resources to deem the captains equally praiseworthy. By contrast, it seems that ET is stuck with a snap intuition that does not survive considered reflection. The upshot is that DO delivers better verdicts than ET about the allocation of praise and blame in this case.

3 Which of ET and DO is better at giving guidance in practical applications?

Rinard presents practical applications in which ET putatively provides good guidance. She leads with the example of racial profiling:

“[W]hat if actual commission rates, for certain crimes, vary between races? ...[I]f so, it has seemed to some that a police officer or security agent would be warranted in taking race into consideration in deciding whether to detain or

search an individual. And yet, this seems deeply wrong... [because] racial profiling has a wide range of terrible consequences... When considering what to do, that a particular action would have [terrible consequences] is clearly a powerful reason against doing it. The same is true, says a defender of Equal Treatment, of belief. Even if the evidence supports that a member of one race is more likely to have committed a crime than a member of another race, it doesn't follow that we should believe it. If believing this would have the consequences mentioned above, that is a powerful reason not to.... Equal Treatment acknowledges the moral dimension as highly relevant to the question of what we should believe." (pp. 1947–1948)

This section presents a case about racial profiling to highlight the practical *danger* of not believing the evidence. The case is as follows. Suppose that Z is Rinard's "police officer or security agent" who knows that racial profiling has terrible consequences. Suppose further that Z reads a report which states that a member of one race is more likely to have committed a crime than a member of another race, and suppose that Z knows that the report is prepared by a research team whose reports are always perfectly accurate. Should Z believe that a member of one race is more likely to have committed a crime than a member of another race?

The passage quoted above suggests that, according to ET, Z should not believe this proposition. The passage states in effect that *some* persons should not believe this proposition, regardless of the fact that the evidence supports this proposition, and the passage suggests that a police officer or security agent who knows that racial profiling has terrible consequences is a paradigm example of such a person. Therefore, Z should not believe this proposition, and so Z should not engage in racial profiling, since it would be irrational to engage in racial profiling in the absence of belief in this proposition. And the ET version of this story ends here: Z should, in effect, throw out the report and focus their attention elsewhere.

By contrast, DO does not leave open the option of throwing out the report. Clause (i) of PODO entails that Z should believe that which is supported by the evidence, and so Z should believe that a member of one race is more likely to have committed a crime than a member of another race. But PODO does not entail that Z should engage in racial profiling. Whether Z should engage in racial profiling is governed by clause (ii) of PODO, which depends on $C(X, \phi)$. Assuming that clause (ii) of PODO is governed by the same $C(X, \phi)$ as POET, PODO entails that Z should not engage in racial profiling.

If Z should not engage in racial profiling regardless of whether Z's obligations are governed by ET or DO, is there any difference in this case between ET and DO? Yes. The key difference is that, in this case, ET precludes actions based on belief in the proposition that a member of one race is more likely to have committed a crime than a member of another race. For example, as noted, ET precludes engaging in racial profiling, since racial profiling is irrational in the absence of belief in this proposition. As another example, ET precludes investigating whether this proposition obtains because of underlying systemic injustices. According to ET, Z should not believe *that* this proposition obtains, so it would be irrational for Z to investigate *why* this proposition obtains.

By contrast, according to DO, it is not irrational for Z to investigate whether this proposition obtains because of underlying systemic injustices. Suppose that Z does investigate this question and suppose that Z learns that members of one race are systemically discriminated against at grocery stores. The discrimination is such that members of this race are simply not allowed to buy groceries. Thus, some members of this race break into grocery stores at night, take groceries, and leave the correct amount of money on the cash registers. In doing so, some members of this race commit the crime of breaking and entering, and they are sometimes caught and convicted of this crime. Having learned all of this, in order to act against the underlying systemic injustice committed against members of the race who suffer the aforementioned discrimination, Z campaigns for the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws at grocery stores. Z also resolves to take further actions to discover and act against any additional injustices.

The foregoing seems like a good outcome. However, this good outcome seems blocked by ET. In the ET version of the story, Z did not believe the evidence that a member of one race is more likely to have committed a crime than a member of another race, and so Z did not discover an injustice that they were in a position to act against.

The example of Z is, of course, a somewhat stylized story. But there are highly analogous situations in the real world. For example, one can easily obtain evidence that racial demographics of prison populations in the United States are highly skewed. Would ET therefore counsel that one should not believe this evidence? After all, some may take such evidence to support a policy of racial profiling. However, not believing this evidence seems to preclude investigating whether the demographic skew is due to underlying systemic injustices, such as, for example, that members of some races are sentenced to longer prison terms for a given crime than members of other races.

The example of racial profiling is supposed to demonstrate that ET provides good guidance in practical applications. However, the foregoing illustrates the practical danger of taking moral considerations to be relevant to what we should believe. In the example of racial profiling, it seems that DO, rather than ET, is better suited to promote the pursuit of justice.

4 Which of ET and DO is committed to dilemmas?

Rinard highlights the very plausible claim that a commitment to *any* kind of dilemma renders a normative view less attractive:

“What should be relatively uncontroversial is that, other things equal, a view that does not involve commitment to dilemmas is preferable to one that does... Dilemmas reduce the guidance value of ought statements. Being told that one ought to ϕ , and that one ought to ψ , where doing both is impossible, is of limited help to one who is trying to figure out what to do... Telling individuals... that they should [ϕ and ψ] (where doing both is impossible) is not particularly clear or useful advice.” (p. 1933)

Rinard argues (pp. 1932–1933) that there is *a version of DO* which is arguably committed to certain dilemmas. However, she concedes (p. 1933) that *another* version of DO (namely, the version of DO targeted by her case of the miners discussed in §2) is *not* committed to such dilemmas. So, should we call it a tie between ET and DO on this score, since the best versions of both views are not committed to dilemmas? This section argues that the answer is *no* because ET (and not DO) is arguably committed to dilemmas. In particular, ET (and not DO) is arguably committed to epistemic dilemmas in which one should believe a proposition P while it is also the case that one should not believe P.

This problem can be shown to arise for ET as follows. Let us revisit the case of the miners discussed in §2. Suppose that the eccentric billionaire makes the following offer: they will save a captain's miners if the captain believes NSE *and* the captain does not believe any proposition P if ET entails that the captain should believe that P. By application of POET with any morally plausible choice of $C(X, \varphi)$, ET entails the following proposition:

- (a) The captain should believe NSE and not believe any proposition P if ET entails that the captain should believe P.

(If it is doubted that the above follows for any morally plausible choice of $C(X, \varphi)$, it suffices to increase the stakes of not complying with the eccentric billionaire's offer until such doubts are settled.)

Now suppose that we accept the following principle:

(De-agglomeration) If one should $[\varphi$ and $\psi]$, then one should φ and one should ψ .

By application of De-agglomeration to (a), ET entails the following two propositions:

- (b) The captain should believe NSE.
 (c) The captain should not believe any proposition P if ET entails that the captain should believe P.

De-agglomeration is highly plausible. De-agglomeration has been criticized, and it is beyond the scope of the present paper to defend the principle. However, it is worth noting that putative exceptions to De-agglomeration may not be relevant in the present context. Putative exceptions to De-agglomeration include cases in which an agent should $[\varphi$ and $\psi]$ and yet the agent should not φ because the agent will not ψ for reasons particular to ψ itself. It has been claimed, for example, that a professor should [accept the task of writing a book review and write the book review], but they should not [accept the task of writing a book review] because they know that they would procrastinate and not [write the book review].³ However, this type of putative exception to De-agglomeration does not seem relevant to the present case of the captain, since there are no reasons particular to (c) itself (such as a tendency

³ See Jackson's (1985) discussion of "Professor Procrastinate", pp. 193–194, which is a case based on Goldman (1978, pp. 185–186).

to procrastinate) that would prevent the captain from fulfilling (c). As such, even if one accepts that De-agglomeration admits of exceptions, it is not clear that the present case of the captain is plausibly an instance of such an exception.

Given that ET entails (b), NSE is an instance of a proposition which ET entails the captain should believe. It thereby follows from (c) and universal elimination that:

- (d) The captain should not believe NSE.

Therefore, per (b) and (d), ET entails that the captain should both believe NSE and not believe NSE.

Note that DO is *not* committed to this epistemic dilemma. Suppose that the eccentric billionaire makes the analogous offer regarding DO: they will save a captain's miners if the captain believes NSE *and* the captain does not believe any proposition P if DO entails that the captain should believe P. According to PODO, the captain should *not* believe NSE because NSE is not supported by the captain's evidence. It follows that DO entails that the captain should *not* believe in accordance with the eccentric billionaire's offer. As such, no epistemic dilemma arises.

Therefore, ET (and not DO) is committed to dilemmas. For the reasons given by Rinard, this renders DO preferable to ET, all other things being equal. Moreover, a commitment to *epistemic* dilemmas is arguably more costly to a view than a mere commitment to *pragmatic* dilemmas. It is controversial whether there are bona fide moral dilemmas in which one should ϕ and one should not ϕ . However, there has been little work supporting the thesis that there are bona fide epistemic dilemmas in which one should believe P and one should not believe P.⁴ As such, the degree to which DO is preferable to ET is arguably all the greater for avoiding not just dilemmas in general, but epistemic dilemmas in particular.

A referee points out that, given De-agglomeration, ET's commitment to dilemmas is arguably demonstrated more directly with a simpler offer from the billionaire: they will save a captain's miners if the captain believes NSE and the captain does not believe NSE. It is nonetheless worthwhile considering the epistemic dilemma as described above because it resembles a practical case considered by Rinard. In the course of arguing that non-evidential considerations can be reasons for which one believes, Rinard considers a case in which "you know your family will break up unless you believe in God." (p. 1942) A similar case is one in which you know your family will break up unless you believe what a local religious leader tells you to believe. Suppose this local religious leader, who is aware of your affinity for ET, says: "Put aside the beliefs that you hold because of your devotion to ET. I will tell you what to believe. First, you are possessed by a demon." ET entails an epistemic dilemma in this case for exactly the same reasons as the case of the captain discussed above. This is because ET entails that you should believe that you are possessed by a demon, but—since in this case ET entails

⁴ Hughes (2019) is an example of such work, and Hughes cites only a handful of papers that support the thesis or come close to supporting the thesis.

that you should not believe whatever ET entails that you should believe—ET further entails that you should *not* believe that you are possessed by a demon. Thus, epistemic dilemmas arise for ET in just the kind of practical cases in which ET is supposed to be helpful.

5 Conclusion

Typically, the questions *What should I believe?* and *What should I do?* are answered differently. Can this dichotomy be dismantled? Rinard presents what is arguably the strongest attempt to do so. But this paper presents three serious problems with her attempt. First, a careful analysis of her key thought experiment about the miners suggests that a snap intuition in support of ET and against DO does not survive considered reflection. Second, her key practical application of ET to racial profiling is better handled by DO. Third, ET (but not DO) is arguably committed to epistemic dilemmas. These problems suggest that the dichotomy between the answers to the questions *What should I believe?* and *What should I do?* is robust.

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