



## The Ethics of Belief

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### CHAPTER

## 7 Wide-Scope Requirements and the Ethics of Belief

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### Abstract

This chapter examines an evidentialist ethics of belief, and W. K. Clifford's proposal in particular. It argues that regardless of how one understands the notion of evidence, it is implausible that we could have a moral obligation to refrain from believing something whenever we lack sufficient evidence. Alternatively, this chapter argues that there are wide-scope conditional requirements on beliefs but that these requirements can be met without having sufficient evidence for the belief in question. It then argues that we are epistemically, though not morally, required to form epistemically valuable beliefs. However, these beliefs, too, need not be beliefs for which we have sufficient evidence—epistemically good beliefs need not be based on sufficient evidence.

**Keywords:** [evidence](#), [evidentialism](#), [epistemology](#), [rationality](#), [value](#)

**Subject:** [Epistemology](#), [Moral Philosophy](#)

William Kingdon Clifford proposed a vigorous ethics of belief, according to which you are morally prohibited from believing something on insufficient evidence. Though Clifford offers numerous considerations in favor of his ethical theory, the conclusion he wants to draw turns out not to follow from any reasonable assumptions. In fact, I will argue, regardless of how you propose to understand the notion of evidence, it is implausible that we could have a moral obligation to refrain from believing something whenever we lack sufficient evidence. I will argue, however, that there are wide-scope conditional requirements on beliefs but the beliefs in question need not be beliefs for which we have sufficient evidence. I then argue that we are epistemically, but not morally, required to form epistemically valuable beliefs. However, these beliefs, too, need not be beliefs for which we have sufficient evidence.

### 7.1 Moral Requirement and Beliefs

When Clifford proposed his ethics of belief, what he had in mind was the conditions under which we are *morally* required to form or withhold belief. His stern view of the ethics of belief is that “It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence” (1877: 295). One of his most famous arguments for this view originates in the case of the ship owner:

### Ship Owner

A cruise owner selling cruise tickets discovers that something is wrong with one of his cruise ships. Being desperately in need of money, he manages to suppress his concerns and form the “sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy” (1877: 70). He continues selling tickets. The ship goes down in mid-ocean, and he collects the insurance money.

p. 131 Clifford argues that the ship owner is responsible for the death of the passengers on that ship because he believed the ship was safe on insufficient evidence. Clifford argues that even if we changed the ending of the story, and the ship arrived safely at its destination, the ship owner would still be to blame for believing on insufficient evidence.

We might articulate Clifford’s argument more formally as follows:

- (1) When you believe on insufficient evidence, your belief is likely to be false.
- (2) False beliefs could have morally harmful consequences.
- (3) So, when you believe on insufficient evidence, you may be the author of morally harmful consequences.
- (4) You should attempt to avoid being the author of morally harmful consequences
- (5) So, you ought to believe only on sufficient evidence.

Clifford himself does not articulate the argument underlying his case and his views. But it seems plausible that this sort of argument was what he had in mind. This argument, however, is unsound. While it is true that the ship owner in Clifford’s example was to blame for not repairing the ship before departure, it is not clear that examples like these show that one should never believe something on insufficient evidence. Consider the following counter-case:<sup>1</sup>

### Evil Doctor

A very evil doctor, who has brain cancer, invents a medication that can cure cancer and has no side effects. Being extremely evil the doctor intends to cure his own cancer but also intends not to share the results with the rest of the world. He cures his own cancer but the small brain lesions that remain from the tumor cause him to believe the medication is a poison that will make people undergo a slow and painful death. He gains access to the water supplies for the New York area and releases large quantities of the drug into the drinking water. As a consequence of his actions, he saves the lives of thousands of people who were otherwise going to die from cancer.

In this case believing on insufficient evidence leads to a very good outcome. Based on a case like this, we could formulate an argument analogous to the one above as follows:

- (1) When you believe on insufficient evidence, your belief is likely to be false.
- (2) False beliefs could have morally good consequences.
- (3) So, when you believe on insufficient evidence, you may be the author of morally good consequences.
- (4) You should attempt to be the author of morally good consequences.
- (5) So, you ought to believe only on insufficient evidence.

p. 132 The argument's conclusion, of course, is absurd. But it helps us identify what is wrong with Clifford's argument. The problem with the argument, I think, lies with the move  $\hookrightarrow$  from (3) and (4) to (5). While (3) and (4) may be true, the move itself is invalid. You could be the author of morally good or bad consequences, when you believe on insufficient evidence, but it doesn't follow from (3) and (4) that you ought to believe only on sufficient (or insufficient) evidence.

Clifford's argument, as I have reconstructed it, is unsound. But the question remains whether there is a different route to the conclusion that it is always wrong to believe on insufficient evidence.

One proposal of how to get to something like Clifford's conclusion is to start off with the assumption that we are epistemically required to believe anything only on sufficient evidence.

While it is still an open question whether we are morally obliged to believe only on sufficient evidence, it is prima facie plausible that we are epistemically required to believe only on sufficient evidence. This claim is implied by Richard Feldman's (2000) version of evidentialism:

For any proposition  $p$ , time  $t$ , and person  $S$ , if  $S$  has any doxastic attitude at all toward  $p$  at  $t$ , then  $S$  epistemically ought to have at  $t$  the attitude towards  $p$  supported by  $S$ 's evidence at  $t$ .

I will question this position below. But I will grant it here for argument's sake. Given this assumption it may be thought that we can get to Clifford's conclusion in the following way (Chignell 2010):

- (1) We have an epistemic obligation to possess sufficient evidence for all of our beliefs.
- (2) We have a moral obligation to uphold our epistemic obligations.
- (3) Thus, we have a moral obligation to possess sufficient evidence for all of our beliefs.

While initially compelling, the argument is unsound. As I will argue below, the first premise is false. But let it be granted, for argument's sake at least, that premise 1 is true. The question then becomes whether there are grounds for believing premise 2. As it turns out, premise 2, given the truth of premise 1, is false. It is not hard to find a counterexample to premise 2. Consider the following case:

#### Belief Detector

Mary, a successful journalist for a major newspaper, has strong evidence for believing that the tea party movement, were it to gain too many supporters, would seriously damage the welfare of the country. One of her former friends, now a supporter of the tea party movement and also a successful inventor, has just invented a belief detector that can measure what people believe and whether people have successfully suppressed their beliefs. One fateful day he shows up at Mary's office and threatens to kill her 3-year-old daughter and make it look like an accident, unless she suppresses all of her beliefs about the tea party movement.

p. 133 In this case Mary has sufficient evidence for believing that the tea party movement, were it to gain too many supporters, would seriously damage the welfare of the country. So, if premise 1 is true, she is epistemically required to hold this belief. However, if she continues to hold the belief, then her daughter will likely die, and she and her daughter's father will be miserable for the rest of their lives. If she suppresses her belief, on the other hand, nothing of consequence will happen (let's suppose). So, morally speaking, Mary ought to suppress her belief, which is to say, she does not have a moral obligation to uphold her epistemic obligations. If the first premise of the argument is true, as we have assumed, then the second premise is false. So the argument is unsound.

It may be thought that we can still maintain a version of Clifford's thesis if we draw a distinction between *prima facie* and *ultima facie* moral requirements.<sup>2</sup> For example, one might hold that you have a *prima facie* moral requirement not to lie but that this *prima facie* moral requirement can be overridden, for example, in circumstances in which lying saves someone's life. Given the distinction between *prima facie* and *ultima facie* moral requirements, one might offer the following variation on Clifford's thesis:

It is *prima facie*, but not necessarily *ultima facie*, morally wrong to believe something on insufficient evidence.

I have two worries about this weakened principle. First, it plainly is not a way to read Clifford's thesis. He clearly specifies that believing on insufficient evidence is wrong *always, everywhere and for anyone*. To say that it is *prima facie* wrong to believe anything on insufficient evidence is to say that there potentially are circumstances in which it is not wrong to believe something on insufficient evidence. So the weakened principle entails the negation of the thesis that we have a categorical moral requirement to believe only on sufficient evidence. It is, for this very reason, inconsistent with Clifford's evidentialism.

Second, I doubt that *prima facie* moral requirements are very informative. We have a *prima facie* moral requirement not to lie. This means, roughly, that in the absence of overruling moral considerations, we should not lie. But it is also true then that it is *prima facie* morally permissible to lie. It is certainly true that in the absence of overruling moral considerations, lying is permissible. So *prima facie* lying is both permissible and impermissible. Any act that is merely *prima facie* morally impermissible is also *prima facie* morally permissible. So *prima facie* moral requirements by themselves cannot be action guiding. They are, therefore, uninformative.

## 7.2 Wide-Scope Moral Requirements

p. 134 There is a potential worry about the very idea of there being moral requirements pertaining to belief. Moral requirements are supposed to guide *action*, not belief formation. Believing by itself as opposed to expressing what you believe or acting on what you believe does not seem to be the kind of thing that could be morally impermissible.<sup>3</sup> Clifford's claim that 'no one man's belief is in any case a private matter which concerns himself alone' appears to be false (Clifford 1877: 292). Belief alone does not lead to action and hence does not lead to, or constitute, moral wrongdoing.

But suppose now that you hold a desire that together with your belief will motivate you to act on your belief.<sup>4</sup> It is exceedingly plausible that if you are morally required not to do A and you believe B leads to A, then you are morally required not to do B. So if you act on your belief-desire pair, and your action is morally wrong, then you ought to either give up your desire to do B or you believe that B leads to A. Consider the following case:

### Envious Dean

You are the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. You don't want your successful younger colleague to get tenure because you are envious of her achievements, so you come to believe mistakenly that you ought to deny her tenure owing to flaws in her factual record. As a dean you can seriously affect your colleague's chance of getting tenure. Your belief and your desire together motivate you to deny your colleague tenure. So you deny your colleague tenure. Because of the bad job market, your colleague never finds a new position and must live from adjunct job to adjunct job. Her kids are starving and soon enough a bankruptcy trustee takes possession of her non-exempt property.

In this case, it seems right to say that you were morally required to give up either your desire or your belief. The most natural reaction to this case probably is to morally blame you for your lack of evidence for your belief. But notice that the only reason we would morally blame you for your lack of evidence for your belief is that you were motivated to act on your belief. If you had believed you ought to deny your colleague tenure because of flaws in her record but had had an overruling desire not to deny her tenure, you would be a strange bird, perhaps even subject to epistemic blame, but you wouldn't have been motivated to act on your belief, so you wouldn't have been morally blameworthy.

We can formulate these kinds of conditional moral requirements as wide-scope conditional requirements of the following form (where "belief" refers to beliefs for which you have insufficient evidence and which are likely to lead to morally bad consequences if you act on them):

You ought to (if you dominantly desire that p, then you do not believe that q).

p. 135 A dominant or overruling desire should here be understood as the strongest desire among all your desires, the desire that wins out when all is said and done. Consider a simple case: the waitress tells you that your desert options are Dark Chocolate Torte with vanilla ice cream, Chocolate Hazelnut Tartufo, or old-fashioned apple crisp with whipped cream. You have a sweet tooth and are having trouble deciding among the three delicious options. After much deliberation you decide on the Dark Chocolate Torte. In this case, you had a desire for any one of three desert options, but you had an overruling desire for the Dark Chocolate Torte. An overruling desire need not be one whose satisfaction is associated with any feelings of satisfaction (Smith 2010). An agent may "reluctantly" do something, which is to say that the satisfaction of the overruling desire lacks pleasure and perhaps causes the agent great pain (for example, leaving someone you love on the grounds that love just isn't enough to make the relationship work can be immensely painful. But if you decide to leave a person, you nonetheless have an overruling desire to do just that).

Wide-scope requirements are not reducible to narrow-scope requirements.<sup>5</sup> For example, it seems plausible that while you shouldn't commit burglary, if you do commit burglary, you should at least leave the sentimental items behind. However, suppose we express the conditional requirement as a narrow-scope requirement:

If you commit burglary, then you ought to steal only the non-sentimental items

Now, suppose you do commit burglary. By *modus ponens* it follows that you are morally required to steal only non-sentimental items from people's houses. But you are not (unconditionally) morally required to steal anything. Formulating the requirement as a wide-scope requirement gets us out of this kind of bootstrapping:

You ought to (if you commit burglary, then you steal only the non-sentimental items).

When the antecedent is satisfied, narrow-scope requirements trivially entail wide-scope requirements. For example, the narrow-scope requirement, if you commit burglary, then you ought to steal only the non-sentimental items, entails the embedded wide-scope requirement: If you commit burglary, then you ought to (if you drink beer, then you steal only the non-sentimental items). But wide-scope requirements do not entail narrow-scope requirements. We cannot derive a moral requirement to steal from this wide-scope requirement. The wide-scope requirement can be satisfied in two ways: Either by not doing the action specified in the antecedent or by doing the action specified in the antecedent and the action specified in the consequence.

The same applies to the desire-belief wide-scope conditionals. Wide-scope conditional requirements can be satisfied by giving up the desire or keeping the desire and giving up the belief. It is plausible, then, that

p. 136 belief is subject to wide-scope conditional  $\hookrightarrow$  moral requirements even if it is not in general governed by any unconditional moral requirements. Some examples (requiring the right kind of context):

- (1) You ought to (if you believe that women are less intelligent than men, you do not desire to act on this belief when serving on hiring committees).
- (2) You ought to (if you believe your ex-wife ought to die a slow and painful death because she found a new man, you do not desire to be an instigator of any action that could be a cause of her death).
- (3) You ought to (if you believe that your colleague's new summer coat looks like a lab coat, you do not desire to tell her this).

We cannot derive unconditional requirements from the conditional ones. For example, we cannot infer from the last of these conditional requirements that you have an unconditional moral obligation not to desire to tell your colleague that her new summer coat looks like a lab coat. The upshot is that while we do not have unconditional moral obligations with respect to beliefs, we have a lot of conditional ones.

It may be objected that my argument presupposes a deontological or consequentialist ethical framework as opposed to a virtue-theoretical approach. A virtue ethicist may insist that your beliefs can be morally wrong even if you don't act on them for the reason that they reflect your moral or intellectual character. This, however, is not quite right. A virtue ethics that does not provide action-guidance does not have anything to say about which actions are morally right or wrong. Such a theory would be a normative theory about people's psychological states rather than their actions and hence wouldn't be an ethical theory. For a virtue theory to be an ethical theory it must provide action-guidance, which is to say, it must give us a way of deciding which actions are right and wrong. Virtue-theoretical approaches do exactly that. Though virtue theorists may disagree about which character traits are virtuous, they all morally prohibit actions that are not grounded in virtue.

Another objection to my argument turns on the tight connection between belief and action. It may be that we are psychologically unable to believe something without it eventually tainting our actions. This claim is a rather strong one but also one the truth of which is not completely unimaginable. For example, if I believe that men are better philosophers than women, this belief may eventually show up in my actions on hiring committees, editorial boards, or when making decisions about who to invite to the conferences I organize. If, however, all our beliefs eventually end up staining our actions, then perhaps there is a class of beliefs we ought to steer clear of. Beliefs in this class would be those that are likely to be accompanied by hidden desires, for example, racist or sexist beliefs. Tests like the Harvard Implicit Association Tests show that the vast majority of us have racist and sexist beliefs and that we are motivated to act on them.

p. 137 However, I do not think this objection succeeds. It is no doubt true that most of us have racist and sexist beliefs and that we are motivated to act on them but for the motivation to act on these beliefs to have any effect on action, it must derive from an  $\hookrightarrow$  overruling desire or drive. Suppose a white woman chooses to take the stairs once she sees that a black man is waiting for the elevator. It's not her racist beliefs alone that are motivating her actions but her racist beliefs together with an overruling desire (at that moment) not to be in close proximity of the black man. The point here is that beliefs alone are not enough to motivate us to act. When beliefs motivate us to, or make us, act, they are associated with overruling desires. So, it doesn't follow that we ought to steer clear of certain types of belief. What does follow, though, is that we ought to either avoid holding these beliefs or forsake any overruling desires to act on them.

There has been a long-standing concern about using deontological language in relation to belief.<sup>6</sup> The concern is that there is no interesting sense in which we can control our beliefs. For example, if you see that I am holding a loaded gun in my hand, it would be exceedingly difficult, if not psychologically impossible,

for you to give up the belief that I am holding a loaded gun in my hand. If “ought” implies “can,” then it makes no sense to ever say that we *ought* to reject or revise our beliefs.<sup>7</sup> Or so the argument goes.

One way of replying to this concern is to deny that “ought” implies “can.” Richard Feldman (2000), for example, argues that we can have obligations in virtue of taking on a certain job or playing a certain role. For example, we have obligations as parents, regardless of whether we can fulfill them. He thinks that we have epistemic obligations vis-à-vis belief in virtue of our role as believers. I will return to our epistemic objections below. What matters here is that if Feldman is right about role obligations, then it is plausible that we can have obligations qua intelligent beings that act in the world, and that those obligations are obligations not to both desire and believe certain things.

Ultimately I don’t want to deny that “ought” implies “can.” Judging that a person ought to have fulfilled her role obligations seems to imply that she could have done it (perhaps by taking some really difficult steps). The “ought” and the “can” need not apply simultaneously. You can have an obligation to do A and be unable to do A as long as there was a time at which you could have ensured that you could now do A. For example, Kurt may have an obligation to be a provider for his children even after he has gambled away home and money and has no way of providing for his children. Though he no longer can provide for his children, he could have taken steps to ensure that he could now provide for his children.

p. 138 Granting this much does not affect my argument, however. I agree that there are many cases in which we cannot control our beliefs. But I think that most of us can control our desires over time. So if we have an obligation to give up a belief or not desire something, we can fulfill, or could have fulfilled, our obligation. In many cases we can also control belief, for instance, beliefs we dogmatically have as a result of our upbringing or culture. In this regard, holding a belief is different from being a certain height, ↵ to use Thomas Kelly’s example (Kelly 2002).<sup>8</sup> Because our height is almost entirely outside of our control, it makes no sense to say that we ought to be a certain height.<sup>9</sup> Had it been something we could change over time by, say, taking certain vitamins, it might have made sense to say things like “If you want to be a supermodel, you really ought to be a few inches taller.” Holding a belief may, in some cases, be on a par with having a certain weight. It makes perfect sense to say to an obese person that they ought not be as heavy as they are. They cannot fulfill this prudential obligation instantaneously but they may be able to do it over time.

It may now be objected, however, that if there are cases in which there is only one way to satisfy our wide-scope conditional requirements, then these requirements are lacking in some way.<sup>10</sup> As we have just seen, there are many cases in which we cannot control our beliefs. In those cases, we can satisfy a wide-scope conditional requirement only by putting an end to our desire. In other cases our ultimate moral obligations will require us to choose one way of proceeding rather than another. Consider the wide-scope conditional requirement mentioned above:

You ought to (if you believe that women are less intelligent than men, you do not desire to act on this belief when serving on hiring committees).

Suppose you do believe that women are less intelligent than men and that you desire to act on this belief when serving on hiring committees. In this case, you can, in principle, satisfy your wide-scope moral obligation in two different ways: You can give up your belief that women are less intelligent than men or you can refrain from desiring to act on this belief when serving on hiring committees. But suppose someone threatens to torture your friend mercilessly unless you stop desiring to act on your belief. In this case it would seem that you should do whatever you can to rid your mind of the desire to act on your belief. Wide-scope conditional requirements do not specify these types of asymmetries; they merely specify that you cannot hold two specific attitudes without violating a moral requirement. Some people find that problematic.<sup>11</sup>

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However, as John Brunero (2012) has pointed out in a slightly different context, this observation does nothing to undermine the truth of the wide-scope requirements. The wide-scope requirements tell you that there are two ways of proceeding as far as your moral requirements go. They do not specify what you ought to do all things considered. ↪ So it may be that one of the two ways of proceeding is necessary in light of your total moral requirements or abilities but it is nonetheless still true that you are required to take one of the two routes.

To recap: We are not morally required to hold or not hold any beliefs (regardless of the evidence we have or lack). However, there are wide-scope moral requirements governing bad-belief/desire pairs. We cannot always decide what to believe but even when we cannot make these kinds of decisions, we may still be able to satisfy the wide-scope requirements by deciding what to desire.

## 7.3 Epistemic Requirements and Beliefs

It may be thought that even if we are not morally obliged to believe only on sufficient evidence, at least we are epistemically required to believe only on sufficient evidence. The fundamental epistemic norm is often taken to be some variation of the following norm:

### The Truth Norm

You ought to maximize your true beliefs and minimize your false beliefs.<sup>12</sup>

In the majority of cases we cannot determine whether a belief is true or false without evidence. So we can satisfy the Truth Norm only by believing on sufficient evidence. It follows that if the Truth Norm, or some close variant, is the fundamental epistemic norm, then we are epistemically required to believe only on sufficient evidence.

In previous work I argued that the Truth Norm, construed as a fundamental epistemic norm, fails because it does not always aim at what is intellectually valuable. Consider the following case (Brogaard forthcoming):<sup>13</sup>

### Brain Damage

A has a brain condition that causes him to intend to keep track of truths about leaves. He believes that he can achieve this only if he intends to count the leaves on the trees in his garden every day.

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If A does what he believes is necessary for him to intend to keep track of truths about leaves, and he is a good counter, his intention is likely to maximize true belief and minimize false ones. If he didn't intend to count leaves, he would go about his everyday business forming a lot more false beliefs than he does if he is just counting leaves all day. But intuitively, he should not intend to stay in his garden counting leaves all day. Intellectual flourishing requires having a wide range of different kinds of true beliefs. So, despite the fact that A's intention maximizes true beliefs and minimizes false ones, ↪ A ought to not have that intention. As the Truth Norm can be overruled, it is not the fundamental epistemic norm.

A more plausible candidate to be the fundamental epistemic norm is what I have called "intellectual flourishing" (Brogaard forthcoming). Intellectual flourishing is a continuous process of living a good intellectual life. It is the epistemic equivalent of Aristotle's *eudaimonia* (well-being, flourishing, happiness). For Aristotle, the ultimate aim of our lives is virtuous activity. But your ability to engage in virtuous activity will be diminished if you lack in certain ways, for instance, if you are not loved or you have no close friends. So *eudaimonia* requires not only having a virtuous character, and acting on it, it also requires possessing certain goods and being in certain relationships with other people. Although "*eudaimonia*" is sometimes

translated as happiness, *eudaimonia* is not a purely subjective state. Nor is it a disposition to feel a certain way. You can feel a certain way or be disposed to feel a certain way without ever achieving *eudaimonia* (Kraut 1979; Haybron 2008). For example, you may feel extremely happy alone and avoid forming friendships for this reason but without close friends you cannot act virtuously in the fullest sense (Kraut 2012). So you are not flourishing.

If we extend this idea of *eudaimonia* to the intellectual realm, then intellectual flourishing might involve such things as avoiding intellectual bigotry, seeking to expand on one's knowledge, making wise intellectual choices, being respected and admired intellectually, and having good intellectual cohorts. Just as we cannot flourish, in Aristotle's sense, in solitude, so we cannot flourish intellectually outside of an intellectual community. Intellectual flourishing differs in this respect from knowledge acquisition. While a brain in a vat that is not properly connected to an intellectual community could, in principle, acquire knowledge as well as you and me, it cannot flourish intellectually.

While virtuous character traits and well-functioning cognitive faculties and abilities can lead to a good intellectual life, there are many cases in which true belief flows from virtuous character traits or well-functioning cognitive faculties and abilities but in which the agent is not on the right track intellectually speaking.<sup>14</sup> Each individual is unique and thus possesses a particular set of personality traits and mental abilities and is situated in her own social and historical context. Needs, mental acumen and circumstances affect an individual's *eudaimonia*. An activity that can contribute to one individual's *eudaimonia* may not be relevant to another's. For example, it's intellectually admirable if a person with a spinal cord injury that leaves her paralyzed from the waist down decides to undergo extensive locomotor training because this kind of training involves a kind of motivation, tenacity, and patience that outruns our expectations for people with spinal cord injury. But walking on a treadmill in the gym every day does not in normal circumstances contribute to the intellectual flourishing of an able man or woman, regardless of how intellectually virtuous he or she is and regardless of how well his or her cognitive faculties and abilities function.

p. 141 Being intellectually virtuous may also be insufficient for intellectual flourishing if intellectual achievements that flow from the virtues are not admirable by public measures. Consider the following case:<sup>15</sup>

### Rich Uncle

You are an ambitious philosopher with generally well-functioning cognitive faculties and abilities and many good personality traits. You invest a great deal in writing articles and books. You have what seems to be a perfectly successful career. Your articles and books regularly win prizes and public praise. In fact, however, unbeknownst to you, all your papers and books are published and assessed by people hired by your rich uncle who took pity on you because you are such a bad philosopher.

Needless to say, in this case you do not flourish intellectually despite believing that you do, as your intellectual achievements fail to meet public measures of greatness.

Being intellectually virtuous in the conventional sense may preclude flourishing intellectually. Suppose A hears of a new proof that God does not exist. A knows that if he sees the proof and the proof is correct, he will become terribly depressed and will spend the rest of his life in isolation from intellectual cohorts. To ensure that he flourishes intellectually, A must refrain from looking at the proof, even if this move does not involve the exercise of intellectual virtue.

We can, of course, correctly say of an agent who flourishes intellectually that he or she is "intellectually virtuous," he or she just isn't virtuous in the classical sense. There is no one set of character traits that an agent who flourishes intellectually must have. What can be a positive trait in one situation or for one person may be a bad trait in a different situation or for a different person. For example, you should not be

intellectually honest while carrying out an experiment that involves deceit (e.g., Milgram's experiment). Truth-telling in this situation would ruin the experiment. Even intellectual justice can counteract *eudaimonia*. To be unjust in the intellectual domain is to do something that could potentially hinder the intellectual flourishing of others. Destroying other people's intellectual property, preventing others from developing their mental abilities, rewarding unworthy rather than worthy intellectual achievements, obstructing intellectual amity and camaraderie, disrespecting the intellectual work of others on irrelevant grounds, such as gender or skin color, are all *prima facie* intellectually unjust activities. The very possibility of *eudaimonia* presupposes justice. However, what counts as unjust in one situation may count as just in another. In general, it is unjust to prevent people from posting their thoughts on their personal website. However, it may be just to prevent people from posting bigoted content on their personal website.

p. 142 At the end of his essay Clifford states that "it is wrong in all cases to believe on insufficient evidence; and where it is presumption to doubt and to investigate, there it is worse than presumption to believe" (1877: 309). This is problematic even if "wrong" is read as "epistemically wrong." If intellectual flourishing is the fundamental epistemic norm, which seems very plausible, then we are not epistemically required to believe on sufficient evidence in every single case. Consider the following case:

### Good Intellectual Cohort

You have evidence for believing that one of your intellectual cohorts is cheating on his wife. You are a strong opponent of any form of adultery. You realize that your belief that your intellectual cohort is cheating on his wife is negatively affecting your collaborations on a book project. So you decide to use whatever techniques are available to suppress the belief. You succeed in suppressing the belief. In the process you form the belief that your intellectual cohort is a morally good person by your standards. The two of you finish the book, which turns out to become extremely influential in your area.

In this case, you believe that your intellectual cohort is a morally good person by your standards on insufficient evidence. If not having this belief would seriously damage your book project, you are *epistemically* required to believe something on insufficient evidence. So not only are you not epistemically required to refrain from believing something on insufficient evidence, you are epistemically required to believe something on insufficient evidence. So, even if we change Clifford's thesis to be about our epistemic obligations rather than our moral obligations, the thesis fails. There are many cases in which we are not epistemically required to refrain from believing something despite lacking evidence. As this is a denial of an implication of evidentialism, evidentialism is false.

Some have argued that practical considerations can never rationalize belief (see, e.g., Kelly 2002). The idea is that the only thing that can rationalize belief is a reason upon which the belief is based. The basing relation is supposed to be one that makes a difference to whether or not you continue to hold the belief in the presence of counterevidence. Suppose you believe that it is raining based on the reason that everyone is entering the hallway dripping wet. If you are told that the botanical garden has installed a big water hose outside that makes everyone wet, you will no longer believe that it's raining. If, on the other hand, you believe that your colleague is a good man on the basis of successful attempts to forget the counterevidence, and you are told convincingly that you have never made any attempts to forget any counterevidence, you are still going to believe your colleague is a good man.

The problem with this sort of argument, if taken to be a refutation of my view, is that it presupposes that rational, or "epistemically good," belief is belief *based on evidence*. But that is exactly the position I have offered reasons against. You can, in special circumstances, have a rational or "epistemically good" belief that is not based on evidence. The reason for this is simple: Belief based on evidence isn't always

intellectually valuable. Belief based on evidence is not intellectually valuable when holding the belief can have harmful *intellectual* consequences.

p. 143 The mistake committed here, I believe, is that of assuming that practical considerations can only contribute to prudential and moral rationality. The problem is presumably that of thinking in terms of “practical considerations.” “Practical considerations,” as the phrase is normally used, is an umbrella term for moral and prudential considerations. But moral and prudential considerations aim at very different goals. The aim of thinking about the consequences of pulling the trigger of a gun while pointing it at someone is that of avoiding moral harm, whereas the aim of thinking about the consequences of procrastinating before an upcoming exam is that of avoiding prudential harm. But analogously, the aim of weighing the epistemic consequences of holding certain beliefs is that of avoiding epistemic harm. All of these considerations are “practical.” Yet their aims are very different. This suggests that epistemic goodness (of belief) can be related to practical considerations and hence can be unrelated to evidence. So (pace Kelly) practical considerations can make beliefs rational.

It should be granted, of course, that while we do not have a moral or an epistemic requirement to believe on sufficient evidence in every single case, there are many cases in which we are epistemically required to withhold belief if we lack evidence. But those are the cases in which not believing on sufficient evidence hinders intellectual flourishing.

In sum: Clifford was wrong in thinking that we are unconditionally morally required to believe on sufficient evidence. Belief by itself is not subject to moral assessment. However, while we do not have an unconditional moral requirement to believe only on sufficient evidence, we do have wide-scope conditional requirements to either stop holding “bad” beliefs or stop desiring to act on them. Turning to our epistemic requirements: The epistemic consequences of belief can affect the belief’s epistemic standing. So we don’t have an epistemic requirement to believe only on sufficient evidence. However, we do have an epistemic requirement not to prevent intellectual flourishing.<sup>16</sup>

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## Notes

- 1 If the analogy needs strengthening, we can envisage that the scientist suppresses his belief to make money.
- 2 For more on this distinction, see Shafer-Landau (1997).
- 3 Anti-Humeans hold that motivating reasons explain action (see, e.g., Korsgaard 1986). But I suppose no one would hold that belief by itself is sufficient for an action to occur (Smith 2010).
- 4 It's very plausible that more than belief and desire is needed to motivate action (e.g., intention). Here I shall assume that

belief and desire suffice for motivation. Nothing of consequence hinges on that assumption.

5 For recent defenses of this claim, see Broome (2000, 2001, 2002), Dancy (2000), and Wallace (2001). For earlier defenses, see Hill (1973), Greenspan (1975), and Darwall (1983).

6 For instance, see Alston (1988) and Plantinga (1993) for arguments against; and Montmarquet (1986), Steup (2000), Ryan (2003), and Nottelmann (2006) for arguments for.

7 The “can” here is the “can” of practical ability.

8 Here is Kelly: “It’s plausible to suppose that the reason why the expected consequences of my being a certain height make no difference to whether it is rational for me to be that height derives from my utter lack of control over my height. (Perhaps if I could control my height, then it would be more rational for me to be some heights rather than others)” (2002: 168).

9 I say “almost entirely” because we could change our height by getting surgery. Likewise, I could give you the book I borrowed from you on the day I promised even if you are on an island that is only accessible via helicopter. In both cases completing the action is extremely difficult and would have serious consequences. So, where “can” is the “can” of practical ability, we cannot do it.

10 This objection is a variation on objections raised against Broome by Schoeder (2004) and Bedke (2009).

11 For example, see Schoeder (2004) and Bedke (2009).

12 See David (2001), Wedgwood (2002), Burge (2003), Peacocke (2004: 15), and Shah and Velleman (2005).

13 Jason Rogers and Jonathan Matheson (2011) offer another compelling case (though in a different context) in which an intelligent believer adds double negation to mathematical truths over and over.

14 For defenses of virtue epistemology in the more traditional sense, see, e.g., Montmarquet (1987), Axtell (1997), Greco (2000, 2003), Zagzebski (2003), Sosa (2007), and Greco and Turri (2011).

15 This example is adapted from Brogaard and Smith (2005).

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