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## THE INELIMINABILITY OF EPISTEMIC RATIONALITY<sup>1</sup>

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Many writers have recently urged that the epistemic rationality of beliefs can depend on broadly pragmatic (as opposed to truth-directed) factors. Taken to an extreme, this line of thought leads to a view on which there is no such thing as a distinctive epistemic form of rationality. A series of papers by Susanna Rinard develops the view that something like our traditional notion of pragmatic rationality is all that is needed to account for the rationality of beliefs. This approach has undeniable attractions. But examining different versions of the approach uncovers problems. The problems help reveal why epistemic rationality is an indispensable part of understanding rationality—not only of beliefs, but of actions. We may or may not end up wanting to make a place, in our theories of epistemic rationality, for factors such as the practical or moral consequences of having beliefs. But a purely pragmatic notion of rationality—one that's stripped of any component of distinctively epistemic evaluation—cannot do all the work that we need done.

Epistemologists have traditionally distinguished two notions of rationality or justification. Epistemic rationality or justification, which applies to belief, has been seen as in some sense aimed at truth, and the proper subject for epistemology. Pragmatic justification or rationality, which applies first and foremost to action, but also perhaps to belief (or perhaps just to getting oneself to believe), is seen as aimed at furthering the agent's goals, truth-related or not.<sup>2</sup> It has been seen as outside the purview of epistemology.

There have, however, also been voices urging that broadly pragmatic factors—ones unrelated to truth—can affect epistemic rationality. William James's "The Will to Believe" is a classic example. Robert Nozick offered a related proposal in 1993. And more recently, a number of different philosophers have pushed in this general direction, from a variety of starting points. Some support "pragmatic encroachment" views, on which belief (at least categorical belief, as opposed to degrees of confidence) is rationally constrained by the subject's practical situation—roughly, subjects are rational to believe that *p* only if the actions that would be (pragmatically) rational given *p* match those that would be rational full stop.<sup>3</sup> Some have argued that friendships place constraints on belief,

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<sup>2</sup> Different views of the relationship between pragmatic rationality and beliefs are possible. On one view, pragmatic rationality does not apply to beliefs at all, though it does apply to actions taken to get oneself to believe. On another, pragmatic rationality applies to beliefs themselves, but picks out a different property of beliefs than does epistemic rationality.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Fantl and McGrath (2002).

and suggested that this may make it epistemically rational to believe against the evidence.<sup>4</sup> Others have argued that believing against the evidence is required for proper promising, and that these counter-evidential beliefs are rational in the only sense of rationality that applies to beliefs.<sup>5</sup> And others have argued for “moral encroachment”: the view that moral considerations can partially determine what’s rational for an agent to believe.<sup>6</sup>

Taken to an extreme, this line of thought leads to a view on which truth-related considerations play no special role in epistemic rationality—or, on which there is no such thing as a distinctive epistemic form of rationality. And indeed, just such a position has been argued for in a series of papers by Susanna Rinard. This general approach can be developed in a number of ways. But the basic idea is that something like our traditional notion of pragmatic rationality is all that is needed to account for the rationality of beliefs.

Below, I’ll start with what is perhaps the simplest version of this approach, and argue that it cannot do the work we need a theory of rationality to do. I’ll then look at a version of the approach that might be thought to avoid problems with the simplest version, but without invoking a distinctively epistemic kind of rationality. I’ll argue that this view, too, faces serious difficulties. The difficulties faced by these views will, I think, help show why epistemic rationality is an indispensable part of understanding rationality: Not only can’t we eliminate epistemic rationality in favor of a more general practical concept of rationality—epistemic rationality turns out to be a foundational element in fully understanding the rationality of actions. Seeing this may throw some light on the question of whether to make a place, in our theories of epistemic rationality, for factors such as the practical or moral consequences of having beliefs.

## 1. The Belief-Relative Value account

The general approach under consideration—understanding the rationality of beliefs in purely pragmatic terms—has the signal virtue of simplicity. We avoid distinguishing at all between the factors which make actions (or intentions) rational and those which make beliefs rational. And we avoid saying that there are certain beliefs that are rational in one sense, but not in another. On this view, there’s one basic kind of rationality—pragmatic rationality—which applies equally to beliefs and actions. (I’m assuming here that pragmatic rationality can take account of, e.g., moral factors, as well as purely prudential ones.)

Of course, this leaves open the question of what pragmatic rationality itself amounts to. But whatever it amounts to, it seems clear that what’s rational to do can vary, according to one’s situation. Let us consider first the kind of view on which what is rational for a subject to do is the action that, *given her beliefs about the world*, would be best.<sup>7</sup> One version of this conception is given by

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<sup>4</sup> Sarah Stroud defends the view that friendships can require believing against the evidence. She then argues that we should at least take seriously the idea that this means epistemic rationality requires counter-evidential belief, though she does not commit to this view. See Stroud (2006, 522 ff.).

<sup>5</sup> See Marusic (2015).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Basu (2019) or Schroeder (2018).

<sup>7</sup> This way of characterizing pragmatic rationality mirrors Rinard’s (forthcoming) characterization of what an agent subjectively should believe, in the only guidance-giving sense of ‘should’; Rinard takes there to be a corresponding

standard decision theory: the rational action is the one that maximizes expected value, relative to the agent's credences. But the fine details will not, I think, be important here.<sup>8</sup>

Putting this conception of practical rationality together with the idea that practical rationality is the only kind that governs beliefs yields what we might call the Belief-Relative Value (BRV) account of rational belief. Here's an example of a principle along these lines:

BRV: It is rational for an agent to believe that P just in case believing P (as opposed to suspending belief about P or disbelieving P) would have the best expected consequences, given the agent's beliefs.

On this account, it is rational for me to believe, e.g., that *Amanita phalloides* mushrooms are poisonous, just in case my having that belief has highest expected value—that is, when, given my beliefs, believing that *A. phalloides* are poisonous has greater expected value than disbelieving it, or suspending judgment.<sup>9</sup> As Rinard emphasizes, a belief's having good consequences will often correlate with truth. If I use my beliefs to guide my actions, I'll in general do better when those beliefs are true (I'll avoid eating mushrooms that really are poisonous). But this is just a generalization that holds in typical cases. In some cases, truth and pragmatic value will come apart. So consider, e.g., the classic example of the mother who has excellent evidence that her beloved son has committed a terrible crime, yet who knows that if she believes him guilty, she will be destroyed emotionally. In such a case, it has been argued, it's pragmatically rational for her to believe him innocent, whether or not he actually is.<sup>10</sup> On the present approach, it will be rational for her to believe him innocent, in the only important sense of rationality that applies to beliefs.

One might consider the mother example a serious bullet that the pragmatist needs to bite. Or one might worry about the very idea of applying the theory of practical rationality to beliefs—which are not generally under our direct voluntary control. But there are pragmatist replies to these worries. A certain amount of bullet-biting may be justified by other considerations of theory choice—such as simplicity. And the mother example is, admittedly, a highly unusual case. And, as Rinard points out, we do seem to assess many things other than actions for rationality—e.g., we might say it's rational

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guidance-giving sense of “rational”, which she takes to be the only important kind that applies to beliefs. (She allows that one could come up with a sense of “should” that was governed by evidence. But like a sense of “should” that was governed by the rules of the jaywalking club, it should not be considered legitimate or important, at least for guiding deliberation.)

Rinard also considers a more objective ‘should,’ according to which what a subject should do is given by the objective reasons that obtain in the subject's situation—e.g., what action would *actually have* the best results. I take it that this objective ‘should’ does not yield a plausible conception of rationality. If I have a headache and buy a sealed bottle labeled ‘ibuprofen’ at Walgreen's, it's not irrational for me to take a couple of the pills inside—even if it turns out that, in fact, someone has (undetected) substituted poison for the ibuprofen.

<sup>8</sup> The arguments below should go through even on an account of practical rationality according to which what's rational to do depends, e.g., on which actions treat people as ends in themselves.

<sup>9</sup> More precise and careful versions might deal with credences instead of beliefs, and/or cover cases where more than one doxastic attitude was tied for best. But these subtleties should not be important in what follows.

<sup>10</sup> See Nozick (1993, 69-70) for a description of this case.

for me to be a member of the APA—even things that are only under our indirect control, as many beliefs may be.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, BRV makes room for a novel response to skepticism. Consider the typical ordinary propositions I believe: that I have hands; that my actions have consequences in the real world; that my family and other loved ones are real and not mere hallucinations; and so on. Now suppose we grant to the skeptic that I have no evidential or truth-directed reasons for thinking these claims are more likely to be true than the claims built into the skeptic's brain-in-vat scenario. Does that mean that my beliefs are therefore irrational? Rinard argues that it does not: if we assess the rationality of beliefs in pragmatic terms, and we do this in a way that's relative to my beliefs, we get the result that my ordinary-world beliefs are mostly rational, even if they're not supported by my evidence! For example, relative to my belief that my beloved is a real person who loves me, and to my beliefs about my own psychology, my believing in the reality of my beloved should be expected to make my life (and hers) much better than my believing that I'm just imagining her, or my suspending judgment on her existence. So BRV allows us to salvage the rationality of our ordinary beliefs—even if we concede to the skeptic that our evidence does support them.<sup>12</sup>

So the BRV account of belief-rationality has its attractions. Nevertheless, there are reasons to think that it turns out to be far too thin a notion to provide an adequate account. To see why, let us turn to some examples.

Consider good ol' Charlie, the eternal optimist, who has eaten soap many times. Each time he's eaten soap, it has tasted terrible. And each time, it has made him sick. On this basis, Charlie concludes (as he has many times in the past) that from now on, soap will taste delicious and be good for him. Lucy, as she has so many times in the past, offers Charlie a bar of soap to eat. Given what Charlie believes, eating the soap will have great consequences, so he happily eats it. Of course, it tastes terrible and makes him sick.

Intuitively, Charlie's action is a paradigm of irrationality.<sup>13</sup> Of course, there is still something to be said for it—it is the action that Charlie *believes* will lead to good results. So one might well hold that Charlie exhibits one important component of rationality, although his action is rationally defective because he fails to exhibit a different component of rationality—the one that relates beliefs to evidence. And the belief-relative theory of practical rationality, it might be thought, nicely captures the dimension along which Charlie does well.

This seems correct, as far as it goes. And it illustrates why it may even make sense to theorize about rationality in a way that teases apart these components. But what's important here is that this response is not available, on the view under discussion. First notice that, according to the belief-relative conception of practical rationality, Charlie's action of eating of the soap is perfectly rational,

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<sup>11</sup> See Rinard (2017) for detailed discussion of these points. But see also Arpaly (ms.) for an argument that talk of the rationality of non-belief states is really only shorthand for talk of the practical rationality of actions/inactions aimed at producing or sustaining such states, and that, speaking carefully, there are no pragmatic reasons for beliefs.

<sup>12</sup> This is just a brief sketch of the position—for detailed development, see Rinard (forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> In fact, Charlie's repeated soap-eatings perfectly exemplify the clichéd "definition of insanity" as doing the same thing over and over while expecting different results.

since it is the expectedly best action, given Charlie's beliefs. But what about Charlie's belief that the soap Lucy hands him will be delicious and good for him? According to BRV, whether that belief is rational depends on whether having that belief would be expected to lead to good outcomes, given what Charlie believes. But given Charlie's beliefs about the world, his believing in the deliciousness and healthfulness of the soap Lucy hands him will lead to him enjoying a delicious and nutritious snack. And given Charlie's beliefs, his belief that soap will be great in the future will have further beneficial effects—it will lead to many episodes of gustatory pleasure and physical flourishing. So not only does his *action* of soap-eating come out as rational, but on BRV, his *beliefs* about soap come out rational too. There is, on this picture, nothing at all irrational about Charlie's actions or beliefs!

Examples of this type multiply readily. Charlie's problem is excessive optimism and a certain disregard for induction. But consider William, who is smitten with a certain young woman—though she has consistently and firmly rebuffed his repeated advances. Through motivated thinking, William comes to believe that she is destined to love him, and is just acting coy. Given what he believes about the world, his belief that she's destined to love him is all for the best—it makes him happy, and allows him to persist in his advances, which will likely result in her admitting her love for him, and in their eventual union. “How many women's hearts are vanquished,” he muses, “by the mere sanguine insistence of some man that they *must* love him! He will not consent to the hypothesis that they cannot.”<sup>14</sup> So William's belief about the object of his desires, on the account we're considering, is perfectly rational.

BRV will offer similar verdicts in cases where oppressors (who don't like to think of themselves as bad people) come to believe that their victims are better off for their treatment. A quick internet search will reveal numerous writings defending slavery in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century America by claiming that the enslaved African-Americans were unfit for self-governance, or considerably better off than free laborers. No doubt some of these professions were insincere—but it would be silly to think that all of them were. And it would be equally silly to think that many of these beliefs did not fly in the face of ample evidence the writers had about capacities and conditions of the enslaved people—people whom they knew personally, whose living conditions they observed, and with whom they talked regularly. But still, *given these beliefs*, surely having the beliefs would be a good thing; after all, they would not only allow the believers to sleep well at night, but would also allow them to practice and advocate for policies that were generally beneficial—even benevolent! So the beliefs come out as perfectly rational, despite being the products of unfounded prejudice, disregard for evidence, and self-serving rationalization.

Less dramatic examples will pop up frequently in everyday contemporary life. Consider the gambler who believes that red will come up because there has been a run of 4 blacks in a row: *given her beliefs*, having her belief about red is advantageous, as it will allow her to bet heavily on the winning color, and get rich. Or consider the unemployed astrology fan who believes his horoscope in today's paper: *given what he believes*, his believing that today is not propitious for starting new ventures is a good thing, as it allows him to cancel today's job interview and avoid a lot of unhappiness down the road. Or consider the unfortunate person living with paranoid schizophrenia, who believes that she is

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<sup>14</sup> See James (1896, p. 24), which seems to approve both of the relevant belief and of the actions it leads to. Now James, in offering his advice to audiences of young college men, may only have meant to endorse this sort of belief in cases where the evidence is equivocal. But BRV has no resources for ruling out cases where the evidence speaks strongly and unequivocally against the woman's having the slightest interest in the believer.

being spied upon by the government and its agents: *given what she believes*, it's good that she has this belief, as it allows her to take the precaution of avoiding doctors and others who are likely government informants. I take it that these examples represent paradigm cases of irrational belief—they have exactly the features we pick out when we call beliefs irrational.

Now it is important to note that the proponent of BRV is not left completely without resources for criticizing the actions or beliefs of the agents we've been thinking about. Consider Charlie. The BRV-proponent may certainly see Charlie's actions as highly unfortunate or regrettable: after all, they end up making Charlie miserable. And she may certainly point out that Charlie's soap-beliefs are false.

It's also worth pointing out that if a BRV-proponent happened to be a caring friend or colleague of Charlie's, it would be perfectly reasonable for her to try to get Charlie to change his doxastic (and dietary) practices. Indeed, Rinard makes a parallel point about an agent she considers—the Overconfident Teacher, who believes in the face of bad evaluations that he's a great teacher, because that belief that makes him happy. Rinard points out that even if a BRV-proponent would have to call the teacher's belief rational, she might well have good reason to try to change the teacher's mind. She might want to give him a more accurate picture of his abilities, so that he might, e.g., work on improving his teaching. Similarly, BRV makes room not only for having critical thoughts about Charlie's actions and beliefs, but for taking actions to change them.<sup>15</sup>

So it seems absolutely right for the proponent of BRV to point out that Charlie's actions are unfortunate and that his soap-beliefs are false, and that if we were Charlie's friend or colleague, we would have good reason to try to change his beliefs and behavior. But these legitimate observations about Charlie's beliefs and actions, and the reasonability of trying to change them, do not to my mind fully address the worry for BRV posed by Charlie's case. Charlie's case is not like one where we can see that someone has been tricked—say, by cleverly planted misleading evidence—into believing some falsity, and who then acts on that belief in a way that turns out badly. In that sort of case, we of course see the belief and action as unfortunate and regrettable. And if we had the opportunity, we'd presumably have good reason to intervene, and try to change the agent's beliefs and actions. But despite this, we are not at all tempted to see some defect in the agent. In fact, it may be that it is precisely the agent's good cognitive functioning that gets her in trouble; that is in part why we would not be at all tempted to call the agent irrational. Charlie's case differs in that it seems to involve a serious cognitive malfunction on Charlie's part. This is the sort of malfunction we mean

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<sup>15</sup> Rinard's Overconfident Teacher case has one feature that's not built into that cases above: Overconfident Teacher actually believes that his belief about his teaching is not supported by his evidence—he thinks that teaching evaluations are generally reliable. So there is a certain kind of incoherence in his beliefs, which comes out in part when we notice that Overconfident Teacher has no good explanation of how he arrived at a true belief about his teaching abilities. Rinard rightly points out that her Pragmatic Skeptic (who believes she has hands for pragmatic reasons, but does not believe her evidence supports that belief) is not similarly incoherent. The Pragmatic Skeptic does have a perfectly good explanation of how she arrived at a true belief about her hands: she believes that hand-appearances are very reliable indicators of the presence of hands! Rinard points out that Overconfident Teacher's incoherence—while not at itself irrational on the BRV account—does offer other agents a lever they may be able to use to dislodge Overconfident Teacher's belief. Now there seem to be plenty of cases of intuitive irrationality—including the everyday ones described above—which do not involve agents forming beliefs in ways they themselves see as unreliable. But the fact that we lack an 'incoherence lever' that would make it easier to change the beliefs or actions of these agents does not diminish the point in the text: that we might have good reason, on BRV, to use whatever other levers were available to change their beliefs or behavior.

to indicate when we call Charlie's beliefs and actions irrational, and this criticism is not captured by noting that Charlie's beliefs and actions turn out badly for him, or noting that we have reason to try to change Charlie's mind.

The proponent of BRV perhaps has even a stronger point to make about the slave-holder considered above. There, we saw the beliefs in question (say, that being enslaved was good for the enslaved people) were motivated by racist prejudice. Nothing in BRV is in tension with seeing racist prejudice as a deep character flaw, and seeing beliefs that spring from this flaw as despicable. And of course the case for intervention (if it were possible) would be overwhelming. So of course we rightly see that there's something terribly objectionable about the slave-holder's beliefs and actions: they stem from a failure to give certain people the consideration and respect they deserve. But, the proponent of BRV might argue, we should not confuse these problems with irrationality.<sup>16</sup>

This moral criticism of the slave-holder's character and beliefs is surely apt. Nevertheless, I do not think that moral criticism fully captures the phenomenon at issue. The slave-holder's beliefs about enslaved people are warped by the influence of morally abhorrent motivations. But there is something in common between this sort of influence, and other cases where agents' motivations warp the way their beliefs respond to their evidence. My desires for a fun picnic tomorrow may produce (via wishful thinking) an excessively optimistic assessment of the likelihood of rain tomorrow. My love for my children may produce unrealistic assessments of the excellence of their accomplishments. This is the type of problem we typically mark as irrational, even when it's morally benign. And while irrationality is hardly the worst thing about the slave-holder's beliefs, the category that includes his belief along with my beliefs about rain and my kids seems a useful one in epistemology.

One final point about morally criticizing the slave-holder's belief deserves mention here. One of the main motivations for BRV is theoretical simplicity: we assess the rationality of beliefs and actions in exactly the same way. As Rinard develops the view, it is of a piece with the analogous view about what one *should* or *ought* to believe: what's rational to believe (or do) will match up with what one should believe (or do), where 'should' is taken in its guidance-giving, all-things-considered sense—a sense that includes moral considerations, and is also analyzed in belief-relative terms.<sup>17</sup>

With this in mind, it's worth pointing out that on the belief-relative view of the all-things-considered guidance-giving sense of 'should', it's going to turn out that the slave-holder is not only believing as he should believe, but he's also acting as he should act. Inasmuch as we are taking the guidance giving, all-things-considered 'should' to encompass morality, this seems quite a bad result.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Thanks to a referee for prompting me to deal with this response.

<sup>17</sup> See Rinard (forthcoming) for detailed development of this line.

<sup>18</sup> As noted above, one might distinguish between "objective" and "subjective" senses of 'should'. For example, suppose my child needs antibiotics, and all I can find in the kitchen is a bottle of pills labeled "Canine Dewormer: not for human use!" Subjectively, I should not to give them to my child—even if someone has undetectably switched the dog pills out for antibiotics. But objectively, I should. Clearly, it is the subjective should that correlates with what a morally decent person would do. So the fact that, even on BRV, there may be an objective sense in which the slave-holder shouldn't do as he does is not relevant to the present problem.

Of course, the proponent of BRV is still perfectly free to condemn the slave-holder's character in ways that are independent of judgments about whether he does what he should do. She can point out that he's cruel and callous, for example. She can point out the horrible effects of his actions. And if she happens to be so located in time and space that she has a chance of changing his beliefs, or blocking his actions, she can do these things without giving up BRV. But she cannot think of herself as preventing him from doing what he should do.

The examples we've been looking at cluster around a common complaint: BRV seems to count many beliefs and actions as rational when they are not. And the examples also help reveal why this happens: A huge number of propositions are such that, *given their truth*, one should expect believing them to be beneficial. And so, once a person believes a proposition, it very often becomes true that, *given their beliefs*, having that belief is expectedly beneficial.<sup>19</sup> So on BRV, it's actually somewhat difficult to come up with examples of beliefs that *don't* count as rational!

That is not to say that all beliefs are counted as automatically rational by BRV. Consider our mother who has clear evidence of her son's guilt. Suppose we vary the example so that she actually believes in accordance with her evidence, and believes that he is guilty. On BRV, this belief may actually be one of the ones that counts as *irrational*, since it would be undesirable for her to have even if it were true. Other examples might involve a person who sees himself as worthless, or as having other deeply-rooted negative traits; these beliefs may cause the person distress, and may not concern the sort of matters where someone's having an accurate view of herself could help her make positive changes. (Of course, beliefs about other negative traits may not be like this: if an agent believes that he's habitually late, or rude to people, that might cause him some distress, but he also might see having an accurate belief on the matter as being valuable overall, as it could enable him to rectify matters.) So the point isn't that BRV is empty. It's that there is a very wide range of matters about which an agent will want to have accurate beliefs, the better to navigate the world successfully. And because of that, there is a very strong tendency, on BRV, for beliefs to self-rationalize.

We can see the thinness of BRV from another angle by contrasting the cases of Charlie et. al. with the usual version of the mother example. The mother example is usually used to illustrate the distinction between epistemic and pragmatic rationality: The case is one where she has a belief—that her son is innocent—which seems clearly sensible in one way (given her evidence, it's likely to make her life go much better), but not in another (the mother's evidence doesn't speak in favor of the truth of the belief). BRV, motivated in large part by theoretical simplicity, insists that we make do with just one of these ways of evaluating beliefs. So proponents of the account might reply that it's not surprising that we're left with a bit of unintuitive residue, stemming from the other way of evaluating beliefs; it's a bullet that's worth biting.

This response may seem attractive when we think about the mother, because there does seem to be a sense in which her having her belief is an appropriate reaction to the world. Scruples about epistemic rationality aside, one might hold that the mother does respond to her situation in a reasonable way when she believes her son's innocence. We might bring this out by considering not the belief itself, but a related action. Suppose she could take a pill that would make her believe in her son's innocence. It seems entirely rational for her to take the pill—it is an appropriate response to the world she finds herself in.

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<sup>19</sup> At bottom, this is the feature Rinard relies on in her defense of ordinary beliefs in the face of skeptical challenges.

But this sort of response does not apply to the general run of beliefs canvassed above. Consider Charlie the soap-eater. There's no sense in which his soap beliefs are an appropriate reaction to the world. If we shift our attention from his beliefs to an action that would sustain those beliefs—say, we offer Charlie a pill that will ensure that he keeps believing that soap is delicious—it does not seem that taking the pill is a reasonable reaction to the world either. The same point applies, for example, to our gambler. Her belief that red will almost certainly come up next is in no way an appropriate response to the world she's experienced.

Now it is true that Charlie's belief that soap will taste delicious does “make sense” in one way: *given his beliefs*, his having this belief should be expected to be beneficial. And the same is true for our gambler. But this sort of “making sense” cannot be all there is to rationality. If, in theorizing normatively about beliefs, or actions, we require only that they make sense relative to beliefs—and we leave those beliefs unconstrained—the target beliefs' or actions' normative connection to the world has been severed. So the whole package of beliefs and actions cannot be understood as appropriate responses to the world.<sup>20</sup>

One might, of course, question whether it's a desideratum of a theory of rationality that it build into the notion the sort of appropriate responsiveness to the world that's missing in the beliefs and actions of the agents we've been thinking about. BRV certainly does describe a certain kind of coherence among an agent's beliefs and desires, and it might be suggested that that's all we should be interested in when we evaluate beliefs normatively. But it seems to me that even though this sort of evaluation would be simpler, it would be giving up too much. We have good reason to evaluate beliefs (and actions) for rationality in ways that are closely tied to world-responsiveness. Here are some examples: To the extent that I take someone to be a rational believer, I have more reason to take her testimony seriously in informing my own beliefs.<sup>21</sup> To the extent that I take someone to be a rational actor, I have more reason for confidence that he will avoid harming himself and others.

Of course, rational agents with misleading evidence may testify falsely, and malicious agents may lie or hurt others, even while their beliefs are supported by their evidence. So the rationality of an agent's beliefs is not all we care about. But it seems to me that the kind of appropriate responsiveness to the world that the believers we call ‘rational’ exhibit—this particular facet of being a well-functioning epistemic agent—is very important to us, practically and theoretically. In countless relations with friends and loved ones, colleagues, doctors, shop-clerks, and random passers-by, it matters a lot that their beliefs and actions are appropriate responses to the world, in just the way that's missing in Charlie, William, the slave-holder, the gambler, and the astrology-fan. Our notion of rationality, it seems to me, is in large part meant to capture this very aspect of

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<sup>20</sup> I would like to put aside for now one question that has been the subject of recent debate. It might be argued that we should theorize separately about two normatively important features of beliefs—support by the evidence, and coherence with other beliefs. (See Worsnip, (2018) for a clear recent defense of this proposal.) I won't get into the pros and cons of this approach, but will note that this is not in the spirit of BRV. Even if one chose to use the word “rationality” for the coherence notion, and “supported by reasons” for the evidential notion (as Worsnip prefers), one's overall normative account of belief would crucially involve the evidential component. Thus the approach embraces precisely the theoretical complexity that BRV is designed to avoid. I will come back to Worsnip's proposal below.

<sup>21</sup> For extended developments of this line of thought, see Dogramaci (2002), Dogramaci and Horowitz (2016), or Greco and Hedden (2016).

people's beliefs and actions. If something like this is right, a notion of rationality that prescind from requiring this sort of responsiveness is not just highly revisionary—it gives up on one of the central purposes that evaluations of rationality are meant to serve.<sup>22</sup>

Before moving on to consider responses to this problem, there is one more point worth noticing. The worry we've been examining is reminiscent of the old "coherent fairy tale" objection to pure coherence theories of justified belief. But it bears mentioning that there is one respect in which BRV will likely be a much weaker account of rational belief than even pure coherentism. For the kind of coherence involved in satisfying BRV looks itself to be incredibly thin. One more example—this one purely schematic—might help make this clear.

Suppose we randomly generate 1,000 propositions which could, metaphysically speaking, be believed at the same time. (So if we think that it's metaphysically impossible to believe both P and not-P simultaneously, our list of 1,000 will not include both.) Consider an agent Randi who has these random beliefs. Now add 1,000 corresponding meta-beliefs, each to the effect that its corresponding object-level belief will have the best consequences. It seems that BRV would entail that Randi is rational in believing all 1,000 object-level propositions. As in the standard "fairy tale" case, these 1,000 propositions may have nothing to do with anything Randi perceives or experiences. But in this case, the meta-level beliefs may have no support at all—evidential or pragmatic or coherence-derived (on BRV, they need not themselves be rational in order to render their correlated object-level beliefs rational). Moreover, the object-level beliefs may be entirely unrelated to one another. Or they may even be in sharp internal tension with one another (so Randi may believe (1) that a certain coin is fair, and (2) that it will come up heads the next 100 times it's tossed). No sort of explanatory coherence is required at all. So there's not only no world-directed requirement that rational beliefs fit with the agent's experience—there is also not even any substantial coherence requirement of the sort that coherence theorists of justification have posited.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. The Rational-Belief-Relative Value account

Given the problems engendered by the thinness of the BRV account, a natural thought is to impose some constraints on the beliefs relative to which the value of having the target belief is assessed. And a natural constraint to adopt is that these beliefs be rational themselves. That would at least prevent the mere having of a belief that "believing P will have the best consequences," no matter how arrived at, from rendering belief in P rational, as it did in Randi's case.

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<sup>22</sup> Of course, a defender of BRV might concede that there is something very important about beliefs and actions that are appropriately responsive to the agent's evidence, and about agents who believe and act in evidentially-responsive ways. But they might also deny that these important characteristics of beliefs, actions, and agents are any part of *rationality*. There is nothing inconsistent in this position. But it seems to me that if we acknowledge the central importance of evidence-responsiveness, and we notice that—as illustrated in the examples above—our rationality-attributions zero in on just this feature of actions, beliefs, and agents, then we have strong reason to think that appropriate responsiveness to evidence is indeed part of what rationality consists in.

<sup>23</sup> One might wonder if even small deductively inconsistent sets of beliefs such as  $\{\sim P, \sim Q, (P \vee Q)\}$  could be rational on BRV. On some ways of spelling out expected value relative to the agent's beliefs, the notion might be undefined if the agent's beliefs formed any sort of inconsistent set. But this would itself have unpalatable consequences, given that many people have at least Preface-style inconsistencies in their beliefs. In any case, it's clear that the sort of full-blooded coherence that lends traditional coherence theories of justified belief some attraction will not fall out of BRV.

However, if our project is to do without a distinct notion of epistemic rationality, and instead assess the rationality of beliefs by pragmatic standards, we will have to determine the rationality of all beliefs the same way. So, for example, if Charlie's soap belief is to be counted rational on the basis of its having expectedly good consequences relative to Charlie's *rational* beliefs, then *those* beliefs must count as rational by having expectedly good consequences relative to Charlie's rational beliefs.

Indeed, a view of this type is proposed by Rinard, as a response to worries that a simple belief-relative account is too subjective. Here is the specific principle she proposes; I'll call it the Rational-Belief-Relative Value (RBRV) account:

RBRV: [I]t is rational for an agent to believe P just in case it would be rational for that agent to believe that no alternative is a more effective means to their ends.<sup>24</sup>

In keeping with the motivations of fully pragmatizing epistemic rationality, both occurrences of 'rational' are intended to denote the same property. So the account is circular; and Rinard, of course, realizes this. Nevertheless, she points out, while some circular accounts are vacuous ("It's rational to believe P iff it's rational to believe P"), not all are. And RBRV, she argues, will rule some beliefs irrational—for example, combinations of beliefs with the following structure: {P, Not believing P would serve my ends better than believing P}. So consider the mother who believes her son guilty, though she also believes that not believing him guilty would better serve her ends. On RBRV, the argument goes, one of these beliefs must be irrational: if the second one is rational, the first one isn't.

RBRV might seem a real improvement over BRV in that it avoids having to call beliefs like Charlie's soap-belief rational. To see this, suppose that Charlie believes both

(1) Next time I eat soap, it will be delicious.

and

(2) No alternative to believing (1) is a more effective means to my ends.

The fact that Charlie happened to believe (2) is what made his believing (1) rational, according to BRV. But on RBRV, we'd have to establish that it was *rational* for Charlie to believe (2), in order to reach the counterintuitive result.

But isn't it rational for Charlie to believe (2), given that he thinks, as he does, that (1) is true? Not necessarily. On RBRV, the rationality of Charlie believing (2) could only be shown if we could show that it's rational for Charlie to believe that

(3) No alternative to believing (2) is a more effective means to my ends.

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<sup>24</sup> Rinard (2017, p. 133). This is the instantiation of a broader principle; the broader principle is intended to apply to the rationality of actions and non-belief states as well of beliefs. Note that RBRV is a different way a bit more sophisticated than BRV. It does not require that the agent actually *have* rational beliefs relative to which the target belief would be an effective means to the agent's ends. It just requires that it *would be rational* for the agent to have such beliefs. This avoids requiring too many actual beliefs.

And that, of course, remains to be shown. So it looks as though RBRV does succeed in avoiding the problem we found with BRV: it does not entail that Charlie's beliefs are rational (and the same goes for the intuitively irrational beliefs of the other agents we've considered).

On the other hand, it's not so clear that we've made progress overall. The basic reason that RBRV escapes having to call Charlie's belief rational is that it doesn't seem to offer any verdict at all. And a useful theory of rationality must—in at least many of the cases we're interested in—deliver verdicts on the rationality of beliefs (and of actions, if it's a unified account).

As we saw, Rinard argues that RBRV is not vacuous, because there are at least some combinations of beliefs such that RBRV guarantees that at least one of them is irrational, such as beliefs with this structure:

(4) P

(5) Not believing P is a more effective means to my ends than believing P.

It is first worth noting it is not fully clear that RBRV actually delivers this result. Suppose that, for our agent, believing (5) is rational. Then it is supposed to follow that believing (4) is not. Now according to RBRV, believing (4) is rational iff it is rational for the agent to believe:

(6) No alternative to believing P is a more effective means to my ends than believing P.

And (6) is straightforwardly inconsistent with (5). So *if* we assume that it's not rational to believe two blatantly contradictory propositions, we get the result that (4) and (5) can't be rationally believed simultaneously.

But is the proponent of RBRV entitled to this assumption? Not obviously. There may, after all, be cases where even believing a straightforward contradiction could best serve one's ends.<sup>25</sup> So it is not clear that RBRV actually even delivers the result that one can't have combinations of beliefs with the structure of (4) and (5). In fact, it's not clear that there's any combination of beliefs that could not be rational on RBRV. (Still, this is not to say that RBRV is completely vacuous: it prohibits situations where, e.g., it *is* rational for an agent to believe (4), but it's *not* rational for the agent to believe (6).)

But let us put that worry aside for the moment, and suppose that RBRV does prohibit combinations of beliefs with the structure {P, Not believing P is a more effective means to my ends than believing P}. Surely this by itself would not suffice for a non-trivial account of rationality. Similarly, an account that simply consisted in "don't believe both P and not-P" would also prohibit some combinations of beliefs. But it would be nothing like an adequate theory of rational belief—not because it's wrong, but because it's so minimal. So the question we need to examine is this: does RBRV's circularity allow it to say enough to give us an acceptably robust account of rational belief?

First, consider the way that RBRV promised to escape the problem that Charlie posed for BRV. By placing a constraint on the belief relative to which the rationality of the target belief is assessed, RBRV isn't forced to call Charlie's belief rational. (The same goes for William, the defenders of

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<sup>25</sup> Rinard acknowledges this point, remarking that "The idea that there is anything inherently wrong with believing contradictions is just a symptom of evidentialist thinking." (2017, p. 137)

slavery, the gambler, the astrology-fan, etc.). But does this really solve the problem? Our intuition isn't just that it's wrong to call Charlie's belief rational—it's that his belief is positively irrational. Any theory of rationality worth its salt should deliver this verdict about Charlie's belief—not just remain silent. And there seems to be nothing in RBRV to indicate that when we apply it to Charlie's case (or to the others), that the relevant beliefs will be deemed irrational. It does entail that *if* it's irrational for Charlie to have a certain meta-belief, *then* it's irrational for him to believe that soap will be delicious. But what reason do we have to think that it's irrational (on RBRV) for Charlie to have the meta-belief? It would only be irrational for him to have the meta-belief if it were irrational for him to have a certain meta-meta-belief. And so on. RBRV's circularity seems to hobble it—it seems incapable of calling irrational any of these paradigms of irrational belief.

A parallel point applies to verdicts of rationality. Consider some paradigmatically rational belief—say, my belief that I have hands. On RBRV, this belief is rational iff it's rational for me to believe that believing I have hands will better serve my ends than not believing it. This meta-belief is certainly intuitively rational. But there's nothing in RBRV that seems to validate this intuition—again, the question reduces to one about the rationality of a certain meta-meta-belief.

Here is a way to see the problem with RBRV at a more general level. Suppose that we sort object-level propositions into two groups, the ones that are rational for some particular agent to believe, and the ones that are not; and suppose we label them as such.

According to RBRV, for each object-level proposition P the agent is rational to believe, the meta-level proposition P\*: "No alternative to believing P is a more effective means to my ends than believing P" will also be rational to believe. And if P\* is rational to believe, so is the correlated meta-meta-level proposition P\*\*, and so on. Similarly, for any object-level proposition Q that's *not* rational for the agent to believe, it must be that it's not rational for them to believe the meta-level proposition Q\*: "No alternative to believing Q is a more effective means to my ends". And if Q\* is not rational to believe, the same must hold of Q\*\*, and so on.

Now, suppose we extend our labelling in a way that's consistent with RBRV: that is, for each proposition P we've labeled 'rational', we attach the 'rational' label to P\*, P\*\*, and so on. And for each proposition Q we've labeled 'not rational,' we attach the same label to Q\*, Q\*\*, and so on. So we now have labelled a great many propositions in a way that fits perfectly with RBRV—we've got an extensive set of RBRV-compliant rationality verdicts for the beliefs our agent may have.

But does this indicate that RBRV might, after all, yield a tolerably robust account of rationality? In fact, it seems to me that it indicates precisely the opposite. For suppose we switch all the 'rational' labels to 'not rational', and vice-versa. The new set of rationality-verdicts is also perfectly RBRV-compliant. In fact, it seems that we can do this with any set of RBRV-compliant rationality-verdicts. But if that's right, it looks as though RBRV can't distinguish propositions that are rational to believe from those which aren't. In fact, for any agent, RBRV looks to be obviously compatible with the view that all their beliefs are rational—or the view that none of them are. In short, it simply can't be an adequate theory of belief-rationality.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For a simplified structural parallel, suppose we are interested in which integers are special. Someone proposes the Special-Integer-Relative theory of specialness, which looks like this:

SIR: An integer  $n$  is special iff  $n + 3$  is special.

So: BRV failed because it entailed that beliefs were rational when they clearly weren't. RBRV escapes this problem; but it does so only by never entailing that any beliefs are rational. In fact, it seems to give almost no guidance at all as to the rationality of beliefs (and so extending the view to apply to actions would provide no guidance there, either). The move of replacing the agent's actual beliefs with those propositions it would be rational for the agent to believe does not save the purely pragmatic account of belief-rationality—instead, it eviscerates it.

### 3. An Evidentially-Supported-Belief-Relative View?

At this point, one might consider more directly engaging the fundamental problem with the pragmatic accounts we've looked at so far: that in giving no role to the agent's evidence, they yield accounts of rationality that fail to capture the way rationality requires agents to respond appropriately to the world they find themselves in. Perhaps, instead of requiring that the beliefs relative to which rationality is assessed be *rational* (where that is specified purely pragmatically), we might require that those beliefs be *evidentially supported*. So we might end up with a principle something like what we might call the Evidentially-Supported-Belief-Relative View:

ESBRV: It is rational for an agent to believe P just in case their evidence supports the belief that no alternative attitude toward P is a more effective means to their ends.

This sort of view would clearly avoid the problems we've been concerned with. Charlie's soap beliefs would be counted as irrational, as would the beliefs of William, the gambler, the astrology-fan, and so on. It would still count the mother's belief in her son's innocence rational—but this, as we saw, at least answers to one full-blooded conception of rationality.

Of course, this sort of view certainly won't allow us to answer the skeptic by maintaining the rationality of ordinary-world beliefs while conceding that none of our ordinary beliefs enjoy evidential support. But more importantly, it would go against fundamental motivations of avoiding reliance in our theorizing on a distinctive evidentially-based, non-pragmatic dimension of normativity. The rationality of a given belief, while not directly dependent on this evidential dimension of evaluation, would depend on it indirectly: the rationality of any belief would turn crucially on the purely evidential support for other beliefs.<sup>27</sup>

To see this point from a different angle, it is worth comparing ESBRV with one sort of traditional view, according to which beliefs can be assessed for both epistemic rationality and pragmatic rationality, where these pick out different properties. An evidentialist, for example, would presumably be perfectly happy with simply identifying epistemic rationality with evidential support. If that evidentialist also thought that beliefs could be assessed for pragmatic rationality, they'd

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This account is circular. It is not vacuous, as it prohibits, e.g., 6 being special while 9 is not. But it is also clear that SIR's circularity prevents it from giving an adequate account of specialness. It's compatible with, say, the view that {... 0, 3, 6, ...} are special, and {... 1, 4, 7, ...} aren't. But it's equally compatible with the exact opposite view. Or the view that all the integers are special. Or that none of them are.

<sup>27</sup> See Rinard (2017, 134) for a version of this point; though also see Rinard (2019, p. 1926) which remains neutral on allowing something like ESBRV to determine what one should believe.

recognize two different dimensions of rationality that could be applied to beliefs.<sup>28</sup> So we might ask: Is there some reason to embrace something along the lines of ESBRV, but to resist calling evidentially supported beliefs (epistemically) rational?

One reason might involve the desire to unify normative theorizing, under the label of “rationality,” in a way that makes it the case that exactly one set of factors counts in favor of the rationality of beliefs and actions: to have rationality in Rinard’s words, “speak in a single voice,” so that one could aspire to be guided by rationality, full stop. Rinard asks, in criticizing the view that distinct epistemic and pragmatic senses of rationality can apply to beliefs, “How could one coherently aspire to satisfy the demands of rationality, when doing so (in both if its senses) would be metaphysically impossible?”<sup>29</sup> In this spirit, one might identify rationality with the pragmatic sense of “should,” and then point out that epistemic rationality could not be so identified: the fact that, e.g., epistemically speaking, the mother is rational to believe her son guilty does not settle what the mother should pragmatically do or believe.

Now I take it that few epistemologists—even die-hard evidentialists—would take epistemic rationality as the be-all and end-all of value. If they thought that both epistemic and pragmatic rationality applied to beliefs, they would not say, for example, that it was pragmatically rational for the mother to believe her son guilty. If I could bring world peace by getting myself to believe that it will snow in August in Alabama, they would say that it would be pragmatically rational for me to have that belief, though that belief would still be epistemically irrational. So denying that epistemic rationality is pragmatically overriding is nothing that the envisioned defenders of epistemic rationality should object to.

Of course, recognizing two senses of rationality is more complex than only recognizing one. But it’s worth noting that there may be limits on the degree to which our normative theorizing can profitably be simplified. Rinard herself takes a generalization of her view to be compatible with, e.g. seeing *rationality* as connected with self-interest, and *moral permissibility* as a distinct normative notion; and in general, she allows for the possibility of different genuinely normative notions which may bear on beliefs in different ways. She just insists that, for each normative notion—rationality being one such—it applies to beliefs and other states in the same way.<sup>30</sup> And that leaves open the possibility that different norms may apply to beliefs in ways that are impossible to satisfy simultaneously.

But one may still wonder: if epistemic rationality is not of paramount pragmatic importance, does that mean that it’s not really important at all? The possibility that other normative notions (such as moral permissibility) might come apart from pragmatic rationality suggests that there may be room for normatively important notions that don’t line up with pragmatic rationality. But I think we can say more than that: the discussion of the cases above seems to me to illustrate why a notion of

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<sup>28</sup> See Feldman (2000, 2003 p. 41ff.) for a view in this vicinity. A different sort of evidentialist might deny that beliefs can even be assessed for pragmatic rationality—as noted, one might hold that pragmatic rationality strictly speaking only applied to actions. But for present purposes, I’ll grant the pragmatist that beliefs can be assessed for pragmatic rationality.

<sup>29</sup> See Rinard (2017, 128).

<sup>30</sup> This is Rinard’s notion of Equal Treatment; see her (2017, p. 124)

evidential support has considerable normative importance, as well as illustrating how our natural judgments of rationality are heavily dependent on some such notion.<sup>31</sup>

Now it is important to be clear that the role played by evidential support in ESBRV is not that of picking out evidentially supported beliefs as *rational*. Beliefs that would be supported by the agent's evidence do play an important normative role—they are the beliefs by which the pragmatic value (and hence the rationality) of any options (options for beliefs, options for actions, etc.) are determined. But ESBRV does not call a belief that's supported by the agent's evidence *epistemically rational*.

So the question ESBRV raises might be thought of in this way: On ESBRV, our normative theorizing makes heavy, central use of a certain notion—a notion of beliefs supported by the agent's evidence.<sup>32</sup> These are the beliefs that we commonly think of as rational. And cases where beliefs run strongly counter to the agent's evidence are ones we commonly think of as irrational. Given that we already use the language of rationality and irrationality to talk about beliefs in this way, and, more importantly, given that a notion of evidentially supported belief is foundational for our theorizing about rationality, why deny the existence of a theoretically important epistemic sense of rationality that applies to beliefs? The notion that's incorporated into ESBRV seems to be motivated by the need for the sort of world-responsiveness in our theorizing about beliefs and actions discussed above as missing from BRV and RBRV. And the notion seems to have everything many evidentialist epistemologists would want from a notion of epistemic rationality.

It is worth mentioning one other possible reason to resist calling evidentially-supported beliefs (epistemically) rational; this reason flows from the type of position mentioned above as defended by Worsnip. On this sort of view, rationality is purely structural, and works by forbidding certain combinations of beliefs. (For example, Worsnip holds that it's irrational to believe both "P" and "My evidence doesn't support believing P".) Rationality, on Worsnip's account, involves only a certain sort of coherence, and must be distinguished from evidential support. However, as Worsnip clearly points out, his notion of evidential support is a normative notion that applies to belief.<sup>33</sup> So this type of position does not help with simplifying our theorizing by paring it down to one normative notion that applies in the same way to beliefs and actions. In fact—terminological niceties aside—it depends crucially on a notion that does much of what epistemic rationality has traditionally been thought to do.

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<sup>31</sup> Points similar to the above would also apply if the defender of ESBRV identified pragmatic rationality with rationality "all-things-considered". The existence of such a notion is of course controversial (see Feldman (2000)). But if a defender of epistemic rationality recognized such a sense, and also thought that pragmatic rationality applied to beliefs, I think it would be natural for her to acknowledge that, e.g., while it was all-things-considered rational for me to believe it will snow in Alabama next August, it was still epistemically irrational. This would not mean that the notion of epistemic rationality was unimportant to our normative theorizing.

<sup>32</sup> I've stated ESBRV in terms of categorical belief, but one could use credences too. We might say that it is rational for an agent to have a certain credence in P just in case having that credence in P had at least as high an expected value as having any other credence in P, *relative to the credences that were supported by the agent's evidence*. On this view, the important role is played by the credences supported by the agent's evidence.

<sup>33</sup> See Worsnip (2015 p. 3). In fact, while Worsnip holds that both coherence rationality and evidence-responsiveness are broadly normative notions, he holds that there is a narrower sense (involving reasons) in which only *evidence-responsiveness* is normative.

In sum: If we end up, in our normative theorizing, depending heavily on a notion of evidential support for beliefs, we in effect acknowledge that a notion which answers pretty fully to what some epistemologists have wanted from a notion of epistemic rationality is playing a fundamental role. In fact, this role is not only crucial in our theorizing about beliefs. It is a necessary foundation for understanding rational actions. Of course, it may well make sense to see an important component of rational action as lying in the relationship between an agent's actions or intentions and the beliefs she actually has. But in order to account fully for the rationality of even actions, we will need to depend on what amounts to a notion of epistemic rationality of beliefs.

#### 4. Conclusion

Suppose, then, that we accept the need for a distinctive notion of epistemic rationality<sup>34</sup> in theorizing about belief. Even then, nothing in the above arguments constitutes a direct argument that *only* evidential factors—or, more broadly, only truth-directed factors—can play a role in determining epistemic rationality. And, as noted at the outset, there are a number of accounts of belief-rationality being defended today that, while heavily dependent on evidential factors, also allow clearly non-truth-directed factors to play a role in determining a belief's rationality (or justification). Clearly, none of those accounts faces the sorts of problems we encountered with the purely pragmatic accounts of belief rationality in sections 1 and 2.

That said, I do think that seeing where the purely pragmatic accounts fall short may throw some light on whether we should introduce non-accuracy-oriented factors into our epistemic theorizing. As we've seen, epistemically rational belief is an important determinant of pragmatically rational action: acting in the world needs to be sensitive to the way the world is, and our beliefs are our way of representing the world to ourselves. So there is a distinctively epistemic way in which beliefs are valuable, even from the perspective of pragmatic rationality.

Now, it's also true that our beliefs can have various effects over and above helping us tailor our actions to the way the world is. A mother's belief that her son committed a crime may have terrible psychological effects on her. Jim's belief that Jack doesn't love him may make it less likely that Jack does love him. A belief that I'm unlikely to be faithful to my partner may make it impossible for me to promise sincerely that I will be faithful. And some have argued that my holding certain beliefs about people may morally wrong them, even if those beliefs are evidentially supported.<sup>35</sup>

From a theoretical point of view, however, there may be something to be said for keeping the truth-directed aspects of believing separate from considerations involving these other, broadly pragmatic, features of beliefs. If we make room for the idea that, say, a certain belief may be epistemically rational, but likely to have bad effects—perhaps even very bad effects—we will then be in position to see what might be good, as well as what might be bad, about certain sorts of belief. Given this

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<sup>34</sup> I mean here to include here views which reserve the word 'rationality' for a different notion, but recognize the theoretical need for a fundamental truth-directed/evidentially-constrained evaluative notion that applies to beliefs.

<sup>35</sup> The issues here are complex, and I don't take a stand here on whether holding an evidentially-supported belief can wrong a person.

advantage, we might ask what theoretical purpose would be served by mixing pragmatic factors into our notion of epistemic rationality.<sup>36</sup>

Of course, there may be a good answer to that question, in which case it might make sense to see epistemic rationality as dependent in part on non-truth-directed factors. Settling that question will have to await another occasion. In the meantime, though, we should at least resist the idea that a *purely* pragmatic notion of rationality—one that's stripped of any component of distinctively epistemic evaluation—can do all the work that we need done.

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<sup>36</sup> A related issue is this: insofar as it may seem attractive to let certain pragmatic considerations help determine the epistemic rationality of beliefs, it may be hard to resist the move to degrees of pragmatism that some would find unattractive. Worsnip (forthcoming) examines a number of views of the sort mentioned at the outset here, on which epistemic rationality can be affected by broadly pragmatic factors, but which aim to stop short of what he calls 'hard pragmatism'—the view that it might be epistemically rational for you to believe against your clear evidence if, e.g., someone were to offer you a million dollars to do so. Worsnip argues that it's very difficult to allow pragmatic considerations a limited 'moderate' role in determining the rationality of beliefs, and he shows how several attempts to do this run into difficulties. (For example, he shows that Fantl and McGrath's (2002) pragmatic encroachment view, which might seem to avoid letting the direct pragmatic costs of having a certain belief play a role, ends up having to allow them in: in some versions of Pascal's Wager, the practical costs of atheistic beliefs can preclude them from being rational on Fantl and McGrath's account, even if they're strongly supported by the evidence.) Worsnip himself remains neutral on whether his argument speaks against allowing any pragmatic influence on epistemic rationality, or speaks for "hard pragmatism".

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