**Great Expectations: Belief and the Case for Pragmatic Encroachment [[1]](#endnote-1)**

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*Then I saw her face, now I'm a believer  
Not a trace of doubt in my mind…  
I'm a believer, I couldn't leave her if I tried.*

*−The Monkees*

According to the thesis of *pragmatic encroachment*, the pragmatic “encroaches” on the epistemic: practical considerations such as the potential costs of acting on *p* if *p* is false or benefits of acting on *p* if *p* is true can make a difference when it comes to whether or not an agent’s belief that *p* is epistemically rational, epistemically justified, or involves her knowing that *p*. Two subjects in different practical circumstances can differ with respect to whether they are epistemically justified in believing that *p* even though they are the same with respect to all truth-relevant, intellectual factors, such as the quantity and quality of their evidence for and against *p*, the reliability of the methods they rely on in forming their attitudes towards *p* etc. Sometimes more evidence is needed to know or to be epistemically justified in believing as the stakes get higher and the odds longer.

Many of the recent criticisms of the case for pragmatic encroachment raise objections to the conclusion itself (how can knowledge come and go with sudden inheritance, new-found indifference, etc. [[2]](#endnote-2)), or take issue with some of the principles connecting knowledge and practical reason that are crucial premises in the central arguments in its favor.[[3]](#endnote-3) Whatever the outcome of such attacks, they leave open the possibility that pragmatic encroachment could still be, surprisingly, true of other significant epistemic relations, as well as the possibility that there are other routes to pragmatic encroachment which don’t begin with the principles in question. Perhaps reflection on what it takes for someone’s degree of confidence, expectation or trust to be accompanied by or to give rise to outright belief could help enhance our understanding of the source and scope of pragmatic encroachment.[[4]](#endnote-4)

One convenient way to execute this strategy would be by way of a threshold model of the relationship between *degree of belief* that *p* and the categorical attitudes of *belief* that *p*, *suspension* of belief with respect to *p*, and belief that *p* is false (*disbelief*). It is rather tempting to think that when expectations become great enough, they somehow tip the scales towards belief; when low enough, towards disbelief. It can certainly appear this way sometimes. One may be inclined at such moments to think that belief is essentially high enough confidence, disbelief low enough, and suspension middling confidence−where the boundaries of these ranges are somewhat vague and variable with circumstance. Say our strength of confidence with respect to *p* can range anywhere from absolute certainty that *p* is false (degree of belief or subjective probability = 0) to maximal certainty that it is true (degree of belief or subjective probability = 1). Perhaps there are potentially contextually variant thresholds which set how close to 1 our degree of belief *has to be and is sufficient for it* to serve as belief, or how close to 0 it *has to be and is sufficient for it* to serve as disbelief. We’ll call such an account

*The* *Reductive Threshold View of belief*: degree of belief, or subjective probability, above a potentially contextually variant threshold is necessary and sufficient for belief.

Such an account reducesbelief, suspension, and disbelief to degree of belief within certain contextually relevant spectrums of confidence levels. This sort of a view seems to be what’s on the table in Hájek (2000).

I assume here and elsewhere that talk of beliefs and talk of sufficiently high subjective probabilities are intertranslatable. (Hájek (2000), p.200)

Here is a good rule of thumb, I suggest: we should generally associate agnosticism with ‘middling’ probability assignments, belief with ‘high’ probability assignments, and disbelief with ‘low’ probability assignments. (Hájek (2000), p.204)

…X is agnostic about A iff x gives a probability assignment to A that is not close to a sharp 0 or 1−the standards for ‘closeness’ being determined by context. That includes all sharp assignments that are not ‘close’ (according to the operative standards) to 0 or 1; and indeed all sets of assignments that include values that are not ‘close’ (according the operative standards) to 0 or 1. (Hájek (2000), p.205)

Such a view accords well with the thesis of pragmatic encroachment. Suppose that practical factors are relevant to fixing the placement of the threshold−extreme risk situations with respect to acting on *p* potentially raising the bar; low risk situations potentially lowering the bar. If we think that it’s in the nature of outright belief to be subject to this sort of variance with changes in practical setting, we should expect that the normative epistemic assessment of outright belief will be as well. We can well imagine two individuals who have the same evidence and level of epistemically justified credence for *p*, but who differ in the peril of their circumstances. For the person in the more demanding setting, say this level of credence falls below the threshold for belief; for the person in the less demanding setting, let’s suppose this level of credence is well above the threshold. The second person can, from the standpoint of epistemic evaluation, appropriately believe *p*; the first cannot and should be agnostic about *p*. Such a view can nicely be combined with a conception of outright belief as akin to the engagement of heuristics−something that involves fast, energy sparing, and at times inaccurate shortcuts, allowing us to bypass costly calculations with subjective probabilities until the situation demands greater attentiveness to our actual degrees of confidence.

Despite its initial appeal, a simple, Reductive Threshold account of the relationship between categorical belief and degree of belief is not viable, for reasons−some familiar, some unfamiliar−I will present below. Rather than give up on the threshold picture entirely, however, I suggest that we retain part of it, and combine it with a dispositionalist account of belief along the lines of what Ryle envisioned (minus the behaviorism, as Eric Schwitzgebel[[5]](#endnote-5) would say). As Ryle observes in *The Concept of Mind*, belief involves a wide spectrum of proclivities and dispositions−some automatic and some deliberate−involving reasoning, reflecting, asserting, imagining, acting, reacting, and feeling.

Belief might be said to be like knowledge, and unlike trust in persons, zeal for causes, or addiction to smoking, in that it is ‘propositional’; but this, though not far wrong, is too narrow. Certainly to believe that the ice is dangerously thin is to be unhesitant in telling oneself and others that it is thin, in acquiescing to other people’s assertion to that effect, in objecting to statements to the contrary, in drawing consequences from the original proposition, and so forth. But it is also to be prone to skate warily, to shudder, to dwell in imagination on possible disasters and to warn other skaters. It is also a propensity not only to make certain theoretical moves but also to have certain feelings. (Ryle (1949), p.92)

Suspension of belief involves its own spectrum, and the deactivation of these propensities and the engagement of those typical of belief does not *all* come down to a transition from middling to high enough degrees of confidence or expectation. While I won’t attempt a full defense of the threshold-dispositionalist hybrid I call *Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatism* here, I at least hope to show that such a hybrid can avert some of the main problems that face the Reductive Threshold View on its own, and yet still provide us with a satisfying sketch of the relationship between belief and degree of belief that can complement and bolster the case for pragmatic encroachment.

1. **Interesting and Robust Relations between Degrees of Confidence/Expectation and the Categorical Attitudes**

Even if normative and non-normative facts involving belief, suspension of belief, and disbelief don’t supervene on facts involving degrees of belief and degree of belief thresholds, we still have good reason to suppose that there are some kinds of interesting and robust relations between the two realms. Consider our old, reliable belief-desire folk psychology which has served us so well throughout the ages. Countless successful explanations (though not all) work just as well when we substitute “believes that” with “is highly confident that”, or “disbelieves” with “has very low confidence that.”

1. Snow White does not give up hope because she believes that someday her prince will come.
2. Snow White does not give up hope because she is highly confident that someday her prince will come.
3. Grumpy is crying because he does not believe/disbelieves that Snow White will ever wake from her slumber.
4. Grumpy is crying because he has very low confidence that Snow White will ever wake from her slumber.

For explanations appealing to belief suspension, the transition is a bit bumpier, but expressions in terms of degrees of confidence seem equally effective and informative (if not more so).

1. Snow White failed to appreciate the danger of her situation because even after due consideration she remained agnostic/suspended judgment about the existence of witches and evil magic.
2. Snow White failed to appreciate the danger of her situation because even after due consideration she remained no more confident that witches and evil magic exist than that witches and evil magic do not exist.

Furthermore, some folk-psychological explanations explicitly invoke the notion that opinions are held with varying relative degrees of strength. We are entirely at ease in speaking in comparative terms.

1. The Queen wasn’t absolutely sure, but she strongly believed that one dose of poison would be enough to kill Snow White. Since she believed even more strongly that two doses would be sufficient, and so ardently wished for Snow White’s demise, she sprang for the expense of an extra dose.

On occasion we are aware that we are transitioning from disbelief to suspension of belief to belief as evidence steadily accumulates, while at the same time we sense a gradual change in our level of confidence. Our expectation is at first very low and grows stronger and stronger still until we finally reach a point where we have reversed our former state of opinion. I had such an experience on the night of the 2016 Presidential Election. I began the evening with little expectation that Hilary Clinton would lose the election, only to see my disbelief that she would lose abandoned and eventually replaced with outright belief that she would lose when all was said and done. Here’s another (more fanciful) example, inspired by the case studies in Pinillos (2012).

1. An unconfident typist, Doc very quickly types out the lyrics to *Heigh-Ho*. At first he disbelieves that the typed document has no typographical errors, i.e. he believes that it is false that it has no typos. He has each dwarf check it over for errors in order from the dwarf least likely to find a mistake (Dopey), and to the one who is the most meticulous (himself), and then carefully checks it two more times. Throughout the process, Doc’s confidence that the document contains no typographical errors gradually increases; by the end, his disbelief has been replaced with belief.

When we encounter belief and degree of confidence moving in tandem in this fashion as evidence steadily streams in, it is hard to resist the thought that they relate to one another in a significant way. So what’s the problem with the Reductive Threshold picture?

1. **Interesting and Robust Relations, but not Reduction**

I shall now present a number of objections to the Reductive Threshold View.

1. Familiar strike: Lotteries

A major and familiar strike against a simple threshold picture is that lottery considerations speak against it. If someone purchases a ticket for a fair lottery with *n* tickets (where *n* is very large), that person can have a very high degree of credence *(n-1)/n* for *my ticket is a losing ticket*, yet suspend judgment with respect to, and fail to believe *my ticket is a losing ticket* until the winner is announced and the ticket is tossed into the garbage. It may be reasonable for her to do so, and it is at the very least possible for her to do so. We can image bigger and bigger lotteries, accompanied by ever higher credence levels which fail to ensure belief and exclude suspension. No credence level short of 1 seems to do the job, and that is not a very helpful observation. What’s more, before the announcement, the lottery ticket owner can have many other outright beliefs which are accompanied by degrees of confidence much lower than *(n-1)/n.* Outright belief cannot then simply be a matter of a level of credence tipping over a threshold and falling into a range which is necessary and sufficient for belief: what’s good enough for these outright beliefs apparently isn’t good enough for *my ticket is a losing ticket*.

1. Cases where suspension of judgment with respect to conjunctions and disjunctions of propositions one suspends judgments about is possible and rationally permissible

Another consideration strongly telling against the simple threshold picture concerns the alleged boundaries of the credence range for suspension of belief or agnosticism with respect to *p*. (What I raise here is a simplification of a central idea developed and defended with greater sophistication by Jane Friedman (2013).) Such boundaries would, if they exist, hover somewhere around the middling section of the 0 to 1 credence spectrum. On the Reductive Threshold View, to suspend belief with respect to *p* is *essentially* a matter of having a degree of belief which falls into this middling range: too far from 0 to count as disbelief, and too far from 1 to count as belief. Imagine someone is confronted with a series of *n* independent claims which she understands but is powerless to adjudicate given her lack of relevant background knowledge. (In Friedman’s example, a woman is given a series of different images of snowflakes, and is asked to consider of each image whether or not she thinks it will exactly match a given concealed image of a snowflake.) She suspends belief with respect to each claim. She also suspends belief with respect to both the disjunction, and the conjunction of the *n* claims. Such a set of attitudes seems possible, as well as reasonable. A person who suspends judgment with respect to each of a set of claims should also be entitled to suspend judgment about their conjunction or disjunction. But the simple threshold view cannot sanction this set of attitudes. For any genuinely middling span (short of 0 to 1), there’s an *n* such that the agent’s credence for the disjunction must (on pain of incoherence) fall into the belief span, and for the conjunction, fall into the disbelief span.

1. An epistemically appropriate transition to outright belief even though epistemic probability goes down

Sometimes a factor that from the standpoint of epistemic rationality appropriately tips an agent into genuine, robust outright belief with respect to a claim is a factor that lowers the epistemic probability of the claim. In such a case, the transition to outright belief on the part of this rational agent cannot be a matter of her degree of belief finally becoming high enough to cross a belief-demarcating threshold. (We’ll take it for granted here that being able to and inclined to rely on *p* in relevant practical and theoretical reasoning is a significant aspect of outright believing it; for the rational believer, in turn, such reliance will be entirely appropriate.) Imagine Sherlock−an excellent detective who is, as Spock would say, very *logical*. Suppose Sherlock has already determined that a single individual committed a murder, and has narrowed down the suspect list to 10,000 individuals in the ballroom on the cruise ship. All but two, a chef and Joe the plumber, are lawyers. The evidence Sherlock has so far is indifferent between all these suspects: his degree of credence that any given suspect committed the crime is 1/10,000, and hence for *Either Joe or some Lawyer did it* ( *Jp ˅ L1 ˅ L2 … L9,998*) it is 9,999/10,000. Later, he uncovers evidence E that strongly implicates the plumber when he comes across a box of plumbing tools stained with the victim’s blood, hidden in a sewage chamber only plumbers (in all but the rarest of cases) have access to. His evidence justifies him in believing *Jp* (say to degree 999/1000). Let’s suppose as well that Sherlock recognizes that the chef has very difficult, but still far better access to the chamber than any of the lawyers. While Sherlock regards it as exceedingly unlikely that the chef is the guilty party, he figures that given his evidence E concerning the location of the murder weapon, strictly speaking it is nine times as likely that the chef did it than that some lawyer or other did it. In light of E, say Sherlock’s credence for

*Jp* goes up from .0001 to .999

*The chef did it* goes up from .0001 to .0009

*Some Lawyer did it* goes down from .9998 to .0001

*Either Joe or some Lawyer did it* goes down from .9999 to .9991 (= .999 + .0001).

Now that Sherlock is justified in believing *Jp,* he is entitled to believe other things he competently deduces from it, such as  *Jp ˅ L1 ˅ L2 … L9,998* , which in turn he can now rely on to conclude the chef is innocent and should be allowed to go home. The evidence which provides him with epistemic reason to believe that *Jp* is also a newly gained epistemic reason he has to believe that *Jp ˅ L1 ˅ L2 … L9,998*, even though the evidence ultimately has a downward impact on his rational degree of credence in this case. Before the evidence in question came along, and despite his very high level of credence, Sherlock couldn’t outright believe *Either Joe or some lawyer did it* and legitimately rely on it in reasoning―to conclude, say, that the chef is innocent and should be allowed to go home. After all, a similar line of reasoning could then be used to conclude, of each and every suspect, that the suspect is innocent and should be allowed to go home (i.e. infer *S1 is innocent* from *S2 or S3 or …S10,000 did it*, etc.). But after the bloody plumbing tools are found, then it is acceptable for Sherlock to rely on *Either Joe or some Lawyer did it* to conclude that the chef should be allowed to go home.

Indeed, there is a telling, more direct route to the belief that the chef is innocent and should be allowed to go home. In light of E, Sherlock’s credence for

*The chef did it* goes up from .0001 to .0009 (a slightly higher, but still negligible chance of guilt)

*The chef didn’t do it* goes down from .9999 to .9991.

E gives Sherlock strong reason to believe *Joe did it*, which in turn he can rely on to conclude that *The chef didn’t do it*. This more direct path also illustrates how acquiring an epistemic reason to believe a claim can end up lowering the epistemic probability of the claim. At the end of the day, Sherlock appropriately outright believes that the chef is innocent and lets him go home. Whatever the transition to this state of outright belief amounts to, it cannot be simply a matter of Sherlock’s credence now becoming high enough to finally cross the lower bound of a *close-to-1* belief-demarcating threshold.

1. The beliefs that constitute the acceptance of the terms of decision matrices are not reducible to credences

Another case against a simple, reductive threshold view is derived from what seem to be basic presuppositions of the Decision Theoretic framework for practical rationality itself. Degrees of belief are indispensable to such a framework. But it turns out some kind of category of outright belief−irreducible to credences−is as well. Robert Nozick stresses this point in *The Nature of Rationality* as he explains why a radical Bayesianism which simply makes do with credences will not do.

Despite these apparent strengths, it is unclear that this position of radical Bayesianism can be formulated coherently. Probabilities of statements (rather than simply beliefs in them) are to be applied in choice situations, but a choice situation is one a person believes he is facing, that is one where he believes that he can perform various alternative actions A1,…A*n*, believes that A1 can have various possible outcomes O*i* (perhaps depending on which state of the world S*j* obtains), and so on. To be sure, the person then acts upon probabilities, prob(O*i*/A1) or prob(S*j*/A1), but these occur *within* a structure of beliefs about the situation of choice… The very setup of theories of personal probability and utility, or the background commentary they require, involves the existence or attributions of beliefs to the person whose choices are taken to indicate preference or probabilistic judgments. Without those beliefs about the situation he was in, his choices would not indicate these particular preferences or probabilistic judgments. The theoretical definition of these latter notions presupposes attributing certain beliefs to the person. (Nozick (1993), p.95)

Any decision matrix which is taken as realistically representing or approximating how an agent is or should be reasoning through a practical decision problem cannot take too many epistemically possible but highly unlikely states of the world into account. An agent who thinks through the potential effects of a choice of action given too many remote possible happenings in the world, or takes into account too many remote possible outcomes for a given action and state of the world will get bogged down in pointless, costly calculation. A choice of action might be indefinitely postponed as a seemingly endless array of possible states and outcomes enter into consideration. At some point, the terms or partitions of a decision matrix have to be accepted. The agent has to be seen as having beliefs about what choice situation she is in. To identify such beliefs with credences (short of 1) is to invite the pursuit of ever more finely divided decision matrices. To identify such beliefs with maximal degree of confidence is equally problematic. You are not certain that the possibilities you are not taking into account are false, nor should you be. The beliefs that constitute the acceptance of the terms of the decision matrices are not reducible to credences.

1. Psychological attitudes which are most plausibly taken as attitudes towards *p* itself, rather than *p is likely*.

Some of the emotional states that can accompany/are caused by coming to believe that *p* (crossing the Rubicon to now outright believing that *p)* are in certain circumstances more plausibly regarded psychologically as attitudes towards *p* itself, rather than *p is likely*

(especially when preceded by belief that –*p*): surprised that*,* dismayed that, disappointed that, relieved that, dejected that, overjoyed that, ecstatic that, outraged that, indignant that, frustrated that, shocked that *p*… The Munchkins in *The Wizard of Oz*, for example, are overjoyed that the wicked witch is dead, not that it is likely that the wicked witch is dead. My daughter was thrilled that she was accepted at Hamilton College, not that it is likely that she was accepted at Hamilton College. My husband Todd was disappointed that the Browns lost the football game, not that it is likely that the Browns lost the football game. These states of mind are simply best explained by appeal to B*p*, *not* B(*p is likely*). If outright belief were just a matter of a high enough credence (often short of 1), the difference in explanatory value between B*p* and B(*p is likely*) in these cases would be puzzling.

One has come to have these feelings in these sorts of cases because one has now come to outright believe that *p*. It would be absurd to suggest that since outright believing *p* really amounts to a high degree of credence that *p* (accompanied by a small degree of credence that –*p*), strictly speaking one is relieved, surprised etc. to a large degree that *p,* and devastated, not surprised etc. to a small degree that –*p.* Sometimes one can be ecstatic or profoundly relieved that *p is likely* (e.g. when finding out after a scan that it is likely that the cancer has not yet spread to other organs), but such circumstances seem to be the exception rather than the norm. If we take the propensity to have these feelings as among the dispositions relevant to or typical of categorical belief, that is another reason to resist the idea that categorical belief is simply high enough credence.

1. **Distinctive Epistemic Norms for the Categorical Attitudes**

There is a further, significant reason why the Reductive Threshold View fails. Norms involving B*p,* S*p,* and D*p* (the doxastic attitudes of belief, suspension, and disbelief with respect to *p*) are not readily reducible to those involving degrees of confidence in the way that would be expected if the simple threshold view were correct.[[6]](#endnote-6) I shall argue that, from the standpoint of epistemic rationality, we are sometimes required to B*p* (vs. S*p* or D*p*), permitted to B*p*, permitted to S*p*, and these requirements are not simply reducible to requirements governing degrees of confidence.

Here are a few potential requirements from the standpoint of epistemic rationality concerning a proposition under consideration. The requirements and permissions at issue concern the tripartite attitude choice of belief, suspension of belief, and disbelief with respect to *p*, not the choice to believe that *p* vs. available alternatives incompatible with p.

1. If you have considerably more reason to B*p* than to S*p* or to D*p*, then Ought(B*p*) (you ought to believe that *p*) and OughtNot(S*p*) (you ought not to suspend belief with respect to *p*).
2. If you have considerably more reason to S*p* than to B*p* or to D*p*, then Ought(S*p*) and OughtNot(B*p*).
3. If you have at least as much reason to B*p* as to S*p* or to D*p*, then Perm(B*p*) (it’s permissible for you to believe that *p*); if you have at least as much reason to S*p* as to B*p* or to D*p*, then Perm(S*p*).

Constraint (c) does not entail that belief is permitted when you have at least as much or slightly more evidence for *p* than counterevidence against *p*. When you have no evidence either way, or the evidence for and against *p* is equally or very nearly balanced, that can itself be an overriding reason to favor S*p*. Under what conditions could both B*p* and S*p* be permitted but not required options? Perhaps some situation where B*p* is allowed, but so is B(*p is likely*) combined with S*p*. *My lottery ticket is a losing ticket* may sometimes fall into this category. Another example that comes to mind is when my radiologist said to me “this looks like cancer” before biopsy results confirmed the diagnosis. You are not permitted to B*p* when you have more evidence for some alternative which is incompatible with *p* than you do for *p*.

1. If K*p* (you know that *p*), then Ought(B*p*) and OughtNot(S*p*).[[7]](#endnote-7)
2. If J*p* (you are justified in believing that *p*), then Perm(B*p*).

We can also acknowledge an obligating vs. permitting notion of *being justified in believing*, in which case

1. If Jo*p*, then Ought(B*p*) and OughtNot(S*p*).

If the Reductive Threshold View of belief were correct, epistemic obligations and permissions involving B*p*, S*p*, and D*p* would boil down to what spectrum (high, middling, low) in the 0 to 1 range our confidence for *p* ought to or is permitted to fall. Ought(B*p*) would be a matter of (from the standpoint of epistemic rationality) being obligated to have a credence sufficiently high to constitute belief, and of having more reason to have a degree of confidence in the belief-spectrum than either the suspension-spectrum or the disbelief-spectrum. Perm(B*p*) would be a matter of being permitted to have a credence sufficiently high to constitute belief, and of having at least as much reason to have a degree of confidence in the belief-spectrum as in the suspension-spectrum or in the disbelief-spectrum. But when would that happen? This last condition is especially hard to picture.

I take it this condition sounds forced and strange because the only kinds of reasons to which our degree of credence states are appropriately responsive (epistemically speaking) are evidential. The only kind of considerations which, from the standpoint of epistemic rationality, ought to move what part of the spectrum your degree of confidence for *p* falls into over a period of time is the strength, quality, and quantity of the evidence for and counterevidence against *p* that you acquire. The reasons to which our BSD doxastic attitudes are appropriately responsive include, but are not limited to, evidential considerations. Among such reasons are: that conclusive test results are expected very soon, that opportunities for low cost double-checking await, that there is little to gain and much to lose by a rush to judgment, that only action animated by decisive conviction will allow for continued inquiry, that continued inquiry would be very costly and unlikely to yield relevant new information, that treating *p* as true and acting on *p* if *p* is false would be devastating, that not treating as *p* as true and not acting on *p* if *p* is true would involve missing out on some major goods… As William James famously observes in “The Will to Believe”:

Whenever the option between losing truth and gaining it is not momentous, we can throw the chance of *gaining truth* away, and at any rate save ourselves from any chance of *believing falsehood*, by not making up our minds at all till objective evidence has come. In scientific questions, this is almost always the case; and even in human affairs in general, the need of acting is seldom so urgent that a false belief to act on is better than no belief at all. (James (1948), p.101)

All of these candidates are potential reasons which have a bearing on which of the doxastic attitudes (B*p*, S*p*, or D*p*)we ought to or are permitted to adopt−even when we take pains to stress that we are making our evaluations from the standpoint of epistemic rationality.

Consider these different kinds of cases which all concern *very high credence*, but involve different permissions and obligations with respect to B*p*, S*p*, and D*p*:

(1) For a wide range of cases involving very high levels of credence for *p,* S*p* can be successfully and permissibly combined with the high credence and an attitude of B(*p is likely*). In such cases an agent might say “while I believe *p is likely*, I’m still going to keep the matter open and continue investigating; I’m still going to suspend judgment with respect to *p,*” or “while I believe *p is likely*, conclusive evidence is coming soon to settle the matter, so I won’t fully make up my mind about *p* until then.” Lottery cases seem to show that there’s no threshold short of 1 which in principle excludes or disallows combining that high a credence for *p* with S*p* and B(*p is likely*).

(2) Sometimes a very high credence for *p* can appropriately be accompanied by B*p* **or** by S*p* and B(*p is likely*) as a reasonable alternative (as in my cancer diagnosis example, before the biopsy results come in). If having the attitude of B*p* is essentially just a matter of having a credence for *p* which falls within the (contextually determined) B part of the spectrum, and having the attitude of S*p* is essentially just a matter of having a credence for *p* which falls within the (contextually determined) S part of the spectrum, it is hard to see how an agent with a given degree of confidence in a given circumstance could genuinely have these two options, B*p* or S*p* and B(*p* *is likely*).

(3) If we assume fallibilism, sometimes a very high credence for *p* can only appropriately be accompanied by B*p*, and not by S*p* and B(*p is likely*)−namely when K*p*. [Recall: If K*p*, then Ought(B*p*), and OughtNot(S*p*).] The reasons which are playing a role in settling which of B*p*, S*p*, or D*p* is permitted or required go beyond the reasons relevant to settling in which part of the 0 to 1 spectrum a credence is permitted or required to fall.

Two factors over and above a justified level confidence which could potentially have a bearing on which categorical attitude a subject will or ought to adopt with respect to a proposition include the kind of proposition in question, as well as the kind of evidence that comes along. For example, for an anti-realist such as Bas van Fraassen, if a well confirmed scientific claim concerns unobservable theoretical entities, he thinks we ought to be agnostic about it, and accept it only as empirically adequate. That the claim is of that type is (for him, given various philosophical arguments he finds compelling) a general reason to be agnostic about it. He will also deny that we have knowledge of the existence of unobservables.[[8]](#endnote-8) According to van Fraassen, when it comes to such claims, we Ought(S*p*) and –K*p*.

When something of great importance to a person’s well-being is at issue (such as whether or not the person has a particular form of cancer), more confidence might be required for outright belief than for something of lesser significance. Furthermore, certain kinds of evidence and counterevidence might be particularly impactful (such as hearing your radiologist say that all the biopsies are positive for cancer) when it comes to adopting or changing a categorical attitude.

Sometimes you find yourself in a situation where now in light of particularly decisive evidence you should/ought to believe *p* itself, and not simply *p is likely*. At times like these when now you know, you get the kind of evidence that seems to make you now know *p*, not just *p is likely* (which you already knew before).

So it looks like there is no answer to the question *how much confidence is enough to constitute or serve as belief?* Whether or not your degree of confidence that *p* involves or is accompanied by B*p* is not fully a matter of your confidence crossing the lower bound of a fixed or contextually variable sufficiency threshold for belief.

1. **Pragmatic Credal Constraints on Outright Belief**

Perhaps these further, non-evidential reasons which apply to the B*p*, S*p*, or D*p* attitude choice could potentially be regarded as relevant at least to fixing the location of credence *requirements−*how high or how low a level of confidence for *p* is required (but not sufficient) for B*p* or D*p*. Some settings might involve more or less demanding requirements concerning how close to 1 a degree of belief *has to be* in order to be accompanied by belief. (Now we are talking simply about necessary constraints: how confident we have to be to have belief. When there’s much to gain or lose with a choice of action depending on whether *p* is true or false, it makes sense to suppose that a higher degree of confidence in *p* is required for *p* to serve as a principle of action−motivating and justifying our choice.) There are potentially some constitutive or normative links between our degree of confidence and our BSD doxastic attitudes. Here is one plausible candidate.

1. B*p* requires that you are more confident in *p* than any alternatives you know to be incompatible with *p*.

Let’s also consider what necessary requirements or links to credences are plausible if we adopt a broad, dispositionalist understanding of belief of the sort Ryle (1949) and Schwitzgebel (2002) propose. (If you prefer to privilege a particular class of dispositions involving assertion or practical and theoretical reasoning, feel free to make the appropriate substitutions in what follows.) We’ll call the position *Hybrid* *Doxastic Pragmatism*, because it is a form of doxastic pragmatism that combines dispositionalism about belief with aspects of a threshold view. According to this view, to believe *the ice is dangerously thin* is to be to prone (under the right circumstances) to act, react, reason, and feel in certain sorts of ways, to engage in various sorts of activities and reflections−some automatic, instinctive, and habitual, others more reflective and deliberate… but all on the basis of *the ice is dangerously thin*, with *the ice is dangerously thin* as one’s motivating reason. Furthermore, this hybrid view involves the claim that without *some* measure of trust, confidence, and expectation that *the ice is dangerously thin* on our part*, the ice is dangerously thin* cannot serve this psychological role as motivating reason for us−enabling us to have the relevant sets of dispositions typical of *the ice is dangerously thin* categorical belief. Equipped with this hybrid form of doxastic pragmatism, we can still draw some kind of essential link between credences and categorical belief, even if a simple reductive threshold account isn’t viable.

So suppose you are in a situation where you are faced with the issue of which doxastic attitude to adopt: B*p*, S*p*, or D*p*. You are at the pond with your ice skates, and you will ultimately come to believe, suspend judgment with respect to, or disbelieve that *the ice is dangerously thin*.

*Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatism*: B*p* requires that you are confident enough that *p*

−for you to be able to have the spectrum of dispositions typical for outright belief that *p* under these conditions

−for *p* to be able to serve as a motivating reason for you to have or engage in the relevant sorts of activities, actions, reactions, feelings, habits typical for belief that *p* here.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Whatever minimum confidence that *p* is required for you to able and willing to act, etc. on the basis of *p* (in the current situation, and perhaps also for at least a wide range of typical or ordinary circumstances when *p* is relevant[[10]](#endnote-10)), B*p* presupposes that you have that level.

Maybe we can go for something somewhat stronger:

*Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatism*\*: B*p* requires that you are confident enough that *p*

−for you to be able to have the spectrum of dispositions typical for outright belief that *p* under these conditions

−for *p* itself (rather than something more hedged like *p is likely*) to be able

to serve as a motivating reason for you to have or engage in the relevant sorts of activities, actions, reactions, feelings, habits typical for belief that *p* here.

If you don’t meet this condition, you may be more accurately described as B(*p is likely*), and not really as B*p*.

While Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatism supposes that there is an essential link between categorical belief and degree of belief, it does not equate B*p*, S*p*, and D*p* with having a degree of belief for *p* within a (contextually variant) spectrum. Unlike the Reductive Threshold View of belief, it does not reduce outright belief to degree of belief above a lower-bound threshold, or identify a change from S*p* to B*p* with a change from a middling to a high enough degree of belief that *p*. As a result, Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatism is able to avoid the main problems that we examined for the Reductive Threshold View. With Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatism, we can well allow that our *acquiring certain kinds of compelling evidence*, or *no longer needing to rely solely on considerations of indifference* could mark the point where we transition to outright belief (in a way that is epistemically appropriate). We can also acknowledge the crucial role that the acquisition of various sorts of dispositions in reasoning, acting, and feeling can play in marking the transition to belief.

To showcase this advantage, let’s return to the Lottery. The following interpretation of the transition to outright belief is available to Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatism, but not to the Reductive Threshold View. When we’re newly confronted with a wide range of exhaustive, mutually exclusive possibilities, and we have no evidence yet which could potentially weigh them differently, we’re often not inclined to *outright believe* rather than *suspend/withhold* with respect to the claim that a particular possibility does not obtain―even though our credence for such a claim is very high. If all we have to go on are considerations of indifference, *withholding belief* about the possibility not obtaining will often strike us as just as appealing or reasonable an option as *believing* that the possibility doesn’t obtain―all the more so when we expect some evidence to come along to end our state of complete ignorance. When we have nothing but considerations of indifference to go on, the chance of falsehood can remain relevant and active for our reasoning, even when it’s small. We won’t yet have the relevant reasoning dispositions to count as outright *believing* that the possibility does not obtain. Given a lottery of 10,000 tickets for a million dollar prize, for instance, it seems perfectly fine for the ticket holder to outright believe, and to be disposed to rely on *my ticket is* ***most likely*** *a loser* in practical and theoretical reasoning. The same cannot be said for *my ticket* ***is*** *a loser*. (Would you have her sell it for a penny then? Or dispose of it before the winner is announced? Can’t she quite reasonably say “Most likely the ticket is a loser, but I won’t take the matter to be fully settled until the winner is announced”?) Once the winner―ticket X― is announced, there’s some evidence to discriminate between all those possibilities. Now our ticket holder should and will take it as true that ticket X is the winner, and reason that, since her ticket is not ticket X, her ticket is not the winner. Now she has reason to outright believe *my ticket is a loser*, and to throw it in the trash. To continue withholding on *my ticket is a loser* at this point is no longer reasonable.

A similar story could be told for Sherlock and Joe the Plumber. At the outset, despite his very high level of credence, Sherlock doesn’t have the right reasoning dispositions to count as outright believing that *Either Joe or some lawyer did it*. He *isn’t* inclined to rely on the claim in reasoning to conclude that the chef is innocent and should be allowed to go home. After all, a similar line of reasoning could then be used to conclude, of each and every suspect, that the suspect is innocent and should be allowed to go home ( i.e. infer *S1 is innocent* from *S2 or S3 or …S10,000 did it,* etc.). But after the bloody plumbing tools are found, Sherlock *is* inclined to rely on *Either Joe or some lawyer did it* to conclude that the chef should be allowed to go home. Now he counts as a believer.

1. **Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatism and the Case for Pragmatic Encroachment**

We shall now explore some potential ways the Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatist framework can enhance the case for pragmatic encroachment. Recall:

(d) If K*p*, then Ought(B*p*) and OughtNot(S*p*).

According to Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatism\*, if B*p* is true of you, then you have sufficient confidence in *p* for *p* to be able to serve as a motivating reason for you for the relevant sorts of actions, reactions, feelings, etc.[[11]](#endnote-11) Since K*p* entails Ought(B*p*) and OughtNot(S*p),* your knowing that *p* entails that you ought to have sufficient confidence that *p* for *p* itself (and not just *p is likely*) to be able to serve (in the current situation) as a motivating reason for you for the relevant sorts of actions, reactions, feelings, etc. If you tend to require atypically low confidence to have sufficient confidence for *p* to serve as a motivating reason for you (because you are somewhat foolhardy and devil-may-care) it will be easier to fulfill this condition. If you tend to require atypically high confidence to have sufficient confidence for *p* to serve as a motivating reason (because you are very cautious and a bit of a worry wart) it will be harder to fulfill this condition.

We generally are aware that many of the things we outright believe in principle could be false, so once we’re given reason to move to S*p,* it’s pretty easy to fall back to B(*p is likely*) and take the possibility that *p* is false into account in our activities, reactions, and deliberations about what to do. If a subject who outright believes that *p* encounters a situation where she recognizes that there is now, surprisingly, an extremely high cost for acting on the basis of *p*/treating *p* as true in your choice of what to do if it is false−that *could* sometimes be a newly introduced reason for her to S*p* and go with B(*p is likely*). In such a case, unless she is foolhardy, she no longer satisfies the necessary constraint on B*p* articulated by Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatism. Because S*p* is permitted in this case, and hence –Ought(B*p)*, here we conclude that –K*p* is true of the subject*.* If we suppose that she could have previously been in generally low-risk-with-respect-to-acting-on-*p* environments where she did satisfy the credal pragmatist constraint on B*p*, as well as the further conditions for K*p,* we have an example of pragmatic encroachment. If it’s in the nature of outright belief to be subject to variance with changes in practical setting, we should expect that the normative epistemic assessment of outright belief will be as well. Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatism accords well with the thesis of pragmatic encroachment.

In their signature work in defense of pragmatic encroachment, Fantl and McGrath (2009) argue in favor of a pragmatic necessarycondition on knowledge:

(KJ) If you know that *p*, then *p* is warranted enough to justify you in both belief and action.

If you know that *p*, then no insufficiency of warrant stands in the way of *p* justifying you in further beliefs and actions suggested by *p* in your circumstances. You can put what you know to work as a reason for belief and action.

Quite a few weighty objections to KJ have been raised in the literature.[[12]](#endnote-12) Fantl and McGrath (2009) introduce various possible responses, and Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatism may be able to add to these resources. We shall explore this possibility by considering one particularly well-known objection to KJ.

Brown (2008) argues that, contrary to KJ in light of fallibilism, knowing that *p* does not always ensure that a subject has sufficient warrant to rely on *p* in practical reasoning. In an extremely risky situation, knowledge may not be good enough; only something closer to absolute certainty will do. She illustrates this point with the example of a surgeon who knows a patient’s left kidney is diseased, but nonetheless takes the trouble to double-check the patient’s records just before surgery.

I take it that Brown’s (2008) surgeon example is supposed to be one where *Kp,* and hence Ought(B*p*) and B*p* is true of the subject. The surgeon knows and hence does and ought to outright believe *p* (*the left kidney is the one to be operated on)*, but double-checks the patient’s chart anyway in order to be even more sure since so much is on the line.

The Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatist can argue that in these circumstances the surgeon *lacks* sufficient confidence (the minimum required) to be able to have the full spectrum of dispositions associated with belief here, and lacks sufficient confidence to be able to be motivated/willing to act on the basis of *p*, to have *p* itself as a motivating reason in her choice of what to do. But having such a minimum is required for outright belief that *p*. In these circumstances, the surgeon is more accurately described as outright believing *p is likely* and suspending with respect to *p* until she completes the check. Furthermore, it doesn’t seem right say that, from the standpoint of epistemic evaluation, Ought(B*p*) is true of her. Perm(S*p*) and B(*p* *is likely*) is true of her. So a Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatist will be inclined to say that –K(*p*) is true of the surgeon, an outcome favorable to the defenders of pragmatic encroachment.

Note that some cases of acting as if you don’t know/acting as if the matter isn’t closed when the matter really should be considered closed can bear non-trivial costs. Obsessively checking and re-checking and then checking again (when you’re *sure* the paper has no typos) can take valuable time and energy that would be better spent on other pursuits. Being in a position to know that a build-a-bear is not dangerous and does not contain explosives because you saw it being put together, but nonetheless tearing it apart to make extra sure it is safe, is a serious problem. Here it seems that you may have enough confidence that *p* to be able to have some of the propensities and dispositions typically associated with categorical belief that *p* under the circumstances, but crucially in some respects you exhibit behaviors and reactions more characteristic of someone who does not yet fully believe, someone who has not yet fully resolved the matter to their satisfaction and made up their mind that *p*. These cases perhaps constitute instances of what Schwitzgabel (2001) calls “in-between believing.” If you are an in-between believer with respect to *p*, you are not knower and are not categorical believer of *p*. The double-checking doctor could potentially be handled in the same way too.

1. **Don’t Leave Great Expectations out of a Dispositionalist Account of Outright Belief**

The credence-level constraint (necessary condition) on outright belief of Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatism is similar to a constraint on outright belief I suggest in Ganson (2008).

C: believing that *p* to a degree which is high enough to ensure that one is willing to act as if *p* is true, where one’s being willing to act as if *p* means that what one is in fact willing to do is the same as what one would be willing to do, given *p*. (Ganson (2008), p.451)

C as a necessary constraint on outright believing: In order to count as outright believing that *p* in the circumstances, an agent must believe that *p* to a high enough degree such that she is willing to act as if *p* in the circumstances. (Ganson (2008), p. 453)

It accords well with the kind of modest pragmatism about belief that Fantl and McGrath (2009) take to be required by the pragmatic epistemic principles they defend.

These kinds of pragmatic credal constraints on belief have been (I think perhaps uncharitably) construed as a form of credal reductivism about belief (e.g. Ross and Schroeder (2014)), so it’s important to keep in mind that some members of this family of views can be seen as predominantly concerned with necessary constraints on belief (or, to be more specific, credence-related necessary conditions on pragmatic necessary conditions for belief), not necessary and sufficient credal conditions for outright belief. A biconditional version of credal pragmatism is potentially a variant of the Reductive Threshold View, and is subject to a similar set of objections. At times Fantl and McGrath (2009) do discuss a biconditional version,[[13]](#endnote-13) but in other passages it’s clear that a conditional reading (presenting a necessary, but not sufficient pragmatic condition on belief) is what’s at issue.[[14]](#endnote-14)

The truth of JJ, we have seen, does not require that belief be strong pragmatic belief. But does it require that belief be at least weakly pragmatic, where by this we will mean that the believing requires that there be some *ϕ* such that one’s credence in *p* is high enough for *p* to move one to *ϕ*? (Fantl and McGrath (2009), p.140)

Consider the view that belief doesn’t require credal sufficiency to move you to any *ϕ,* especially wildly unrelated *ϕ*s, but does require credal sufficiency to move you to any relevant or connected or perhaps salient *ϕ.* (Fantl and McGrath (2009), p. 143)

Bayesians will naturally want some motivation for thinking that there are important doxastic states other than credences… Roughly the importance might be as follows: if belief doesn’t amount to credence 1, then belief marks a movable yet important confidence threshold in relation to relevant sets of actions, intentions, feelings, etc.: if you believe that *p*, your credence is high enough so that it doesn’t stand in the way of the proposition being your basis for the actions, intentions, feelings, etc. relevant in your situation. (Fantl and McGrath (2009), p.155)

Here’s the *Knowledge Action Principle* to be potentially accommodated by an account of belief, according to Ross and Schroeder (2014):

*Knowledge Action Principle* For any agent *S* and proposition *p*, if *S* is in a choice situation in which *S* could not rationally act as if *p*, then *S* does not know that *p* (where to act as if *p* is to act in the manner that would be rationally optimal on the supposition that *p* is true). (Ross and Schroeder (2014), p.262)

Ross and Schroeder (2014) provide the following gloss on the relevant family of views they call “pragmatic credal reductivism”:

To a first approximation, they all maintain that what it is to believe that *p* is to have sufficiently high credence in *p* to rationalize acting as if *p* when choosing among relevant actions under relevant circumstances−where the relevant circumstances and actions include, but may not be limited to, the agent’s actual circumstances and the actions available therein. (Ross and Schroeder (2014), p.263)

…to believe that *p* is to have sufficiently high credence in p to rationalize acting as if *p* in the relevant choice situations (i.e. when choosing among the relevant actions under the relevant circumstances). (Ross and Schroder (2014), p. 264)

There are a couple uncharitable things about this gloss (at least as a gloss on the sort of pragmatist view of belief at issue in Ganson (2008), and Fantl and McGrath (2009)). First is the emphasis placed on *credence high enough* *to rationalize acting as if* *p*−a normative quality, not a strictly psychological feature. Consider hesitant Worry-Wart. She has sufficiently high justified credence to make what’s best/rationally optimal for her to do the same as what’s best for her to do, conditional on *p* in the relevant choice situations. Nonetheless, she fails to be inclined, willing, or motivated to reason and to act on the basis of *p* and do what’s best. Why? Because she psychologically requires a super, abnormally high confidence in *p* before she is moved to or willing to act etc. on the basis of *p* itself. Consider foolhardy Devil-May-Care. He does not have sufficiently high justified credence to make what’s best for him to do the same as what’s best for him to do, conditional *p*. But he is inclined, willing, or motivated to reason, act, and react on the basis of *p* itself anyway. He psychologically requires only an abnormally low confidence in *p* in order to be moved to or willing to act etc. on the basis of *p* itself. We don’t want a view linking outright beliefs and confidence that forces us to say that Worry Wart counts as believing that *p* and Devil-May-Care does not. If anything, Devil-May-Care is the believer, and Worry Wart is not. What seems most relevant to whether or not they outright believe that *p* is whether or not they indeed are motivated, inclined or willing to reason, act and react on the basis of *p*, not whether they would be reasonable/rational to do so. It’s plausible that K*p* requires that the subject have sufficiently high credence (i.e. high enough to be able) to be rational to act as if *p*, but not B*p*.

The bi-conditional form of the gloss is the second uncharitable thing. When you have to settle on B*p*, S*p*, or D*p*, then B*p* involves your having sufficiently high confidence in *p* (i.e. high enough to meet the minimal level required by you…) for you to be able to be motivated by *p* itself, to be able to base your activities, reasoning, emotions and reactions on *p* itself. But having that sufficiently high credence is not itself sufficient for you to be indeed motivated by *p* itself, to base your activities and emotions and reactions on *p* itself. It’s not all a matter of your confidence level reaching a point where it is big enough to hit some sort of trigger/release a valve to all the belief-relevant propensities of the sort Ryle mentions. Still, you aren’t able to have these propensities unless you have at least a certain amount of confidence that *p*.

Now we shall look at why *high confidence in* p,[[15]](#endnote-15) while not the whole story about outright belief, shouldn’t be left out of the picture either.

Ross and Schroeder (2014) favor an account of outright belief that emphasizes *the defeasible, automatic disposition to treat a proposition as true* *in reasoning*. To *treat p as true* in practical reasoning is to evaluate your options and determine what choice is best in the same way that you would if you were evaluating your options conditional on *p*. When you are *treating a proposition as true* in this sense, you are ignoring the possibility that it is false. You are not taking *p’*s possible falsity into account as you engage in practical and theoretical reasoning that pertains to or involves *p*. To avoid regress problems (whereby any proposition we are using in reasoning would first have to be subject to our reasoning about whether we ought to treat that proposition as true in reasoning), Ross and Schroeder stress that the disposition in question is automatic. To capture the stability of belief, Ross and Schroeder stress that the disposition *to treat p as true in reasoning* involved in outright belief that *p* is defeasible. It may be overridden, for instance, when the costs of mistakenly acting as if *p* is true (so acting when *p* is false) are particularly salient and great.

But if we concede that we have such defeasible dispositions to treat particular propositions as true in our reasoning, then a hypothesis naturally arises, namely that beliefs consist in or involve such dispositions. More precisely, at least part of the functional role of belief is that believing that *p* defeasibly disposes the believer to treat *p* as true in her reasoning. Let us call this hypothesis the *reasoning disposition account* of belief. (Ross and Schroeder (2014), p. 267)

[I will not address the argument they provide in order to show how the Reasoning Disposition Account of belief accounts for KAP, and hence, for pragmatic encroachment.]

In their view, belief is a kind of heuristic device which serves two primary ends: to enable the believer to arrive at good conclusions (the end of reasoning), and to prevent cognitive overload (e.g. the cognitive overload that would result from always taking degrees of credence into account). This aspect of their account may very well be on the right track. When construed as a potentially reductive account of belief, however, the Reasoning Disposition Account is not so appealing. Consider attitudes of acceptance that fall short of belief, such as acceptance as empirically adequate, acceptance as useful for certain purposes, etc. Acceptance can involve our *treating* certain propositions we know to be false *as true in reasoning* (e.g. when idealizing assumptions are made to simplify calculations in physics), and also potentially in a way which is automatic, given the proper background and training. So just as there’s more to belief than the confidence required to engage the variety of dispositions typically associated with belief, there’s more to belief than one (granted, highly significant) subclass of these dispositions. First, there are other sorts of dispositions important to belief−such as those involving emotions, and other activities besides reasoning. Second, we need the confidence required to set all these dispositions into motion. What makes *belief that p* fundamentally different from *acceptance that p*? At least part of the answer seems to be that belief requires us to have a fairly high level of confidence, trust, and expectation that the *p* is true. The advocates of the Reasoning Disposition Account might retort that they never intended their view to be taken in a reductive way, as spelling out both necessary *and* sufficient conditions for belief. (Other doxastic pragmatists like me could reply in kind.)

A further potential worry is raised by Tang (2015), who takes issue with the Reasoning Disposition Account’s ability to successfully accommodate the fact we often do have *beliefs* that reflect our lack of epistemic certainty about things we believe : we believe that *p*, and also believe that there’s some small/non-zero chance that –*p.* The Reasoning Disposition Account saddles us, then, with two competing automatic, defeasible dispositions: the automatic disposition to treat *p* as true in reasoning, and the automatic disposition to treat *there’s a small chance that –p* as true in reasoning. Being disposed to treat *p* as true in reasoning involves being inclined to ignore or set aside the possibility that –*p* in reasoning; being disposed to treat *there’s a small chance that* –*p* as true in reasoning involves being inclined not to ignore such a possibility in reasoning. The decision matrices apt for modeling the exercise of the first (which look the same as the decision matrices for reasoning about what’s best conditional on *p*) will be very different from the ones apt for the second (which do not). It’s difficult to make sense of the idea that we are automatically inclined both to ignore and to not ignore something when engaged in a particular sort of activity. So it looks like being automatically, defeasibly disposed to treat a proposition as true in reasoning is not necessary for believing it.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Hybrid Doxastic Pragmatism is not subject to this objection. If you B(*there is a small chance that –p*), then you have enough confidence that *there is a small chance that –p* for you to be able to have *there is a small chance that –p* as a motivating reason for your activities, actions, emotional states, reactions, etc. in the relevant circumstances. Such circumstances could include: when the small chance of falsehood becomes salient or relevant, such as a lottery situation (for *my ticket is a losing ticket*), or when you become aware that now acting on *p* if *p* is false has suddenly become very costly. Or suppose someone asks: “Do you think there’s a small chance that *–p*?” You can have this level of confidence that *there is a small chance that –p* (implicitly) while at the same time, when faced with a Bp, Sp or D*p* situation, you have enough confidence in *p* (the minimum required) to be able to have *p* itself as a motivating reason for your activities, actions, emotional states, reactions, etc.

Maybe there are some easy modifications or refinements to the Reasoning Disposition Account which help it to avert Tang’s objection. I’ll remain agnostic about the matter for now. Also, don’t get me wrong. I do think that the disposition to engage in practical and theoretical reasoning on the basis of *p* itself (when *p* is relevant) is one among a wide array of dispositions that we typically associate with the attitude of B*p,* and it does contribute to making B*p* a different sort of attitude than S*p*. But when construed as a potentially reductive account of belief, the Reasoning Disposition Account ultimately fares no better than the Reductive Threshold View. Furthermore, when it comes to our beliefs, we may not wish to focus so exclusively on what we are inclined to base our *reasoning* on. Our beliefs bestow us with motivating reasons for many kinds of activities and emotional states. My cats and daughters when they were babies seemed to have something akin to belief, or at least something on its way to belief−something like a level of trust, confidence, expectation that can lead to hesitation, surprise, delight…, confidence informed by the past, and subject to upward and downward revision as expectations are thwarted or met.[[17]](#endnote-17)

We are far from understanding exactly how levels of confidence and categorical doxastic attitudes relate to one another, but it seems likely from our current vantage point that progress in our understanding will help to make, rather than break, the case for pragmatic encroachment. We can well allow that non-evidential, practical factors do not legitimately enter into the normative assessment of degree of belief. But how close to 1 our degree of belief *has* to be in order to be accompanied by belief, or how close to 0 it *ha*s to be to accompany disbelief, is potentially subject to change as our practical circumstances change. Whether we have enough confidence in *p* for us to be able to have the propensities of the sort Ryle takes to be constitutive of belief and whether we have enough confidence in *p* for *p* (and not simply *p is likely*) to be able to be a motivating reason for us−such things are sensitive to practical circumstances. We have reason, then, to think we will find such sensitivity to practical circumstances reflected in the epistemic norms governing outright belief itself.

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2. Russell and Doris (2008), and Gerken (2017) pursue this sort of criticism. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See Brown (2008) and Anderson (2015), for example. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Accounts of the relationship between degree of belief and outright belief are sometimes used to frame a critique of the thesis of pragmatic encroachment, as in Weatherson (2005). My project is not of this sort. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Schwitzgebel (2001) and (2002). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. We’ll go a bit beyond the usual points that are made to highlight the *prima facie* case for thinking that the norms that apply to categorical beliefs are different from those that apply to credences: logical coherence norm for belief vs. probabilistic coherence norm for credences; norm of *correct if true, incorrect if false* for belief, not for credences. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. For a nice discussion of why knowing is in normative conflict with suspending judgment and inquiring attitudes (IAs) quite generally, see Friedman(2017). Here are some telling quotes from that work.

   So, I think we should say that there is a sort of incompatibility between knowing *Q* and having an IA towards *Q* but that incompatibility is not incompossibility but normative incompatibility. There is something epistemically inappropriate about having that sort of combinations of attitudes… If one knows the answer to some question at some time then one ought not be investigating the question, or inquiring into it further or wondering about it, or curious about it, and so on, at that time. (Friedman (2017), p.310)

   Knowing *Q* and suspension about *Q* are conflicting sorts of attitudes or orientations towards *Q*. And so the reason that one ought not to inquire into *Q*, or have any IA towards *Q*, when one knows *Q* is that inquiring into *Q* always involves suspension of judgment about *Q*. (Friedman (2017), p. 311)

   By a startling coincidence, around the time I first read this piece by Friedman, my youngest daughter was watching an old re-run of the TV show *Drake and Josh* in which the brothers are at work on some concoction and have the following exchange.

   Josh: I wonder why it’s bubbling?

   Drake: Do you know why it’s bubbling?

   Josh: If I knew why it was bubbling, would I be wondering why it’s bubbling? [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Van Fraassen (1989). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. I use the awkward locutions “to be able to have” and “to be able to serve” in order to try to stress that passing a confidence threshold is necessary but not on its own sufficient to bring it about that you have the relevant dispositions and motivating reason. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. I leave aside the tricky issue of just how broad a scope is appropriate here. At the very least, a constraint concerning credences is imposed in the current situation where you are faced with the issue of which categorical attitude to adopt. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. You have sufficient confidence in the current situation and perhaps also in a wide range of typical or ordinary circumstances when *p* is relevant. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. See, for example, Neta (2007), Brown (2008), and Anderson (2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Fantl and McGrath (2009), p.137, p. 139, p.143, p.143, p.158, and p.160. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Fantl and McGrath (2009), p. 137, p.140, p.143, and p. 155. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. By “high confidence in *p*” I mean confidence enough for you to be able to have the relevant dispositions, and confidence enough for *p* to be able to serve as a motivating reason for you to have or engage in the relevant sorts of activities, actions, reactions, feelings, habits, etc. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Tang offers an alternative account of the heuristic relevant to reducing our risk of credence-related cognitive overload:

    More precisely, the proposal says that when our credence is close enough to 1 (or 0), we’re disposed to reason as if it equals 1 (or 0); furthermore, if its content has the form ‘The chance of *p* is *x*’, where *x* is sufficiently high (or sufficiently low), we’re disposed to round up *x* to 1 (or round it down to 0). (Tang (2015), p. 257)

    I don’t think anything I’ve committed myself to here is at odds with the notion that we do employ this heuristic, which Tang calls “the Cournotian Heuristic.” [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Railton (2014) develops an account of the origin of belief along these lines. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)