Defending the Enkratic Requirement

Martin Grajner and Eva Schmidt

Abstract

One influential response to apparent higher-order dilemmas implies that agents can rationally both believe p on the basis of their evidence and simultaneously believe that their evidence does not support believing p. This possibility of rational epistemic akrasia seems to call into question the Enkratic Requirement, which prohibits believing a proposition p according to one's lower-level evidence, while believing that one's lower-level evidence does not support believing p. In this chapter, we explore two ways to defend the Enkratic Requirement. First, evidentialists about epistemic justification are committed to holding that an ex post (or doxastically) justified belief, as part and parcel of being ex post justified, is accompanied by a corresponding higher-order belief that the first-order belief is supported by the evidence. In a dilemma case, this higher-order belief comes into direct rational conflict with the subject's other higher-order belief, that her evidence does not support the belief – so the subject has contradictory beliefs. In this way, the so-called 'level-splitting' strategy for the claim that being akratic is not per se irrational is called into question.
Our second argument for the Enkratic Requirement presupposes normativism about belief and appeals to the conditions of having epistemically permissible beliefs. We sketch an argument starting from an influential view about the normativity of belief: that irrational beliefs are impermissible beliefs. From this claim, together with some widely held assumptions about the notion of rationality, we show that agents who display akratic combinations of attitudes hold impermissible beliefs.

Several influential responses to apparent dilemmic cases in epistemology imply that agents can

rationally both believe p on the basis of their evidence and simultaneously believe that their evi-

dence does not support believing p (see, for instance, Lasonen-Aarnio 2014, 2020; Williamson

forth., Christensen 2024). This possibility of rational epistemic akrasia seems to call into question

the Enkratic Requirement, which prohibits believing a proposition p according to one's lower-

level evidence, while believing that one's lower-level evidence does not support believing p.

In this chapter, we explore two ways to defend the Enkratic Requirement. We consider first whether this requirement can be supported by taking a closer look at the preconditions of believing something on the basis of evidence. We will argue that evidentialists about epistemic justification are committed to holding that justified first-order beliefs are accompanied by (dispositional) higher-order belief about their supporting evidence; because of this, subjects who display akratic combinations of attitudes do have contradictory beliefs about what their evidence supports, and are irrational. Our second argument for the Enkratic Requirement presupposes normativism about belief and appeals to the conditions of having epistemically permissible beliefs. We will sketch an argument starting from an influential view about the normativity of belief: that irrational beliefs are impermissible beliefs. From this claim, together with some widely held assumptions about the notion of rationality, we show that agents who display akratic combinations of attitudes hold impermissible beliefs. The strategies show that, given the plausible assumptions of evidentialism and normativism about belief, the Enkratic Requirement holds. Rejecting the requirement forces us to jettison at least two independently compelling epistemic views or principles. Therefore, solutions to epistemic dilemmas should respect the Enkratic Requirement.

Our plan for this chapter is as follows. In the first section, we provide the relevant background. In the second section, we present our first argument: Akratic agents hold an inconsistent and thus irrational combination of beliefs, as can be seen by focusing on the preconditions for believing on the basis of evidence. In the third section, we outline our second argument, according to which agents who display akratic combinations of attitudes hold impermissible beliefs. We conclude the paper by applying our arguments to two further cases of epistemic akrasia.

1. Epistemic Dilemmas and Epistemic Akrasia

This section briefly introduces epistemic dilemmas, explains the principle of Epistemic Enkrasia, and the kind of incoherence it prohibits.

Epistemic dilemmas are cases in which any possible doxastic response of an agent violates an epistemic requirement. The cases that have attracted most attention in the recent debate are dilemmas that involve higher-order evidence, i.e. evidence regarding an agent's first-order evidence. Consider the following case (see e.g. Lasonen-Aarnio 2014; Christensen 2010):

(Hypoxia)

Bianca and Carlotta have achieved a difficult ascent in the Himalayas. Now they are in the midst of an equally difficult descent—they are abseiling down a long pitch. Bianca has checked multiple times whether her abseiling preparation was safe. Therefore, she believes that she made no mistake in her preparations. All of a sudden, Carlotta tells Bianca that she is showing some signs of confusion, probably due to hypoxia caused by high altitude, and that she might have made a mistake in her abseiling preparations without noticing. Bianca realizes—comes to believe—that it may well be that her perceptual evidence does not support her belief that she made no mistake in her preparations.

Here, Bianca acquires higher-order evidence which suggests that her perceptual evidence does not support her first-order belief. This higher-order evidence (we can assume) is ultimately misleading, but it nonetheless calls into question the accuracy of her first-level evidence. The question emerges: What should agents such as Bianca do in light of such conflicting recommendations of their total evidence? They can either stick to their first-order beliefs or abandon them. But

either option will violate an epistemic norm or requirement. Bianca might, on the one hand, continue to believe that she made no mistake in her preparations, and thus respect her first-order evidence. But she will then not abide by the norm to respect her higher-order evidence, which after all indicates that her first-order belief is not rational. On the other hand, in case Bianca abandons her belief that she made no mistake in her preparations, she will fail to comply with the demand to take her first-order evidence at face value—though in this case she respects the higher-order evidence she has acquired, which indicates that belief would not be supported by the evidence. So, no matter which option Bianca chooses, she will end up violating an epistemic standard.[1]

More succinctly, the type of case in which we are interested involves a subject for whom both of the following beliefs are supported by evidence and thus justified (or rational, or required):

Cases of misleading higher-order evidence

(B_S) p

(HOB_S) Belief that p is not supported by sufficient evidence. (Or: I ought not to believe that

p. / My belief that p is not rational.)

Apparently, a dilemma arises in such cases, given that the subject ought to believe that p, and also ought to believe that she ought not to believe that p, where she then ought to comply with this higher-order belief. If so, all of her options—believing p as well as not believing p—conflict with an epistemic requirement, and there is no permissible option available to her.

---

[1] As this description of the case indicates, we focus on higher-order conflicts (see Hughes, this volume, 6) and not on a different type of conflicts that arises in such situations between substantial and structural norms of rationality.

The present chapter focuses on solutions to epistemic dilemmas which claim that it can be rational for an agent to believe according to her lower-level evidence, but at the same time believe that her evidence does not support that belief. Maria Lasonen-Aarnio (2014: 342) maintains

> that in some cases a state can be perfectly epistemically rational even if one has what would seem like strong evidence for thinking that it is not. In particular, in so far as there is such a thing as a correct inductive policy or epistemic system, it can be rational to follow the recommendations of that policy or system even if one possesses evidence that in doing so one has committed a rational error.

Lasonen-Aarnio concedes that there is a widespread intuition that subjects who display akratic combinations of attitudes ought to revise their doxastic states in the light of the defeating evidence they possess, and that they should be criticized for not incorporating their defeating evidence into their attitudes. Contrary to this intuition, she claims, being akratic in this way should not be considered to be irrational. The agents instead display a different kind of failure: They are "unreasonable by failing to take into account evidence about their own cognitive imperfections, thereby manifesting dispositions that are bad from the perspective of acquiring knowledge or true belief" (Lasonen-Aarnio 2014: ibid). Relatedly, in her (2020), she argues that the problem of akratic agents is that they manifest a disposition to disregard conspicuous and conclusive reasons, which are represented by the subject's higher-order beliefs (esp. 626-7).[2]

The position just sketched rejects the following principle:

---

[2] A similar approach is pursued by Williamson (2011, 2014, this volume). Similarly, see Field (2021, this volume). For arguable examples of rational akrasia, see also Christensen (2024) and Hawthorne, Isaacs, & Lasonen-Aarnio (2021).

Enkratic Requirement: You ought not to: believe that p on the basis of evidence e and believe that your evidence e does not support p.[3]

Proponents of rational akrasia hold that akratic agents do not, by virtue of being akratic, make a rational mistake—being akratic is not as such irrational, and we should therefore not accept the Enkratic Requirement. In other words, they think that there is no Enkratic Requirement, or at least that such a principle does not have normative bite.

Our aim is to present a defense of the Enkratic Requirement as a genuine normative requirement—and correspondingly, of the claim that being akratic is *per se* irrational.[4] Before turning to our first argument, let us provide some context by highlighting two arguments for the requirement that have been presented in the literature and point out their limitations. First, philosophers have pointed to the more or less Moore-paradoxical quality of akratic beliefs. Propositions like 'p, but I do not believe that p' are Moore-paradoxical, and asserting (or believing) them seems absurd. Beliefs like, 'p, but believing that p is not supported by sufficient evidence' seem similarly off (Feldman 2005, Smithies 2012, Horowitz 2014). However, the belief that p and the higher-order belief that believing that p is not supported by one's evidence do not contradict

---

[3] Note that we focus on cases of *outright belief* and leave to one side cases involving credences, although epistemic akrasia is sometimes discussed in terms of credences. But for the sake of simplicity, and to better match discussions of epistemic dilemmas, we stick with outright doxastic states.

[4] For full transparency, one of us has previously put her view on these matters in a somewhat weaker way. The claim in Schmidt (2023) is that the fact that the subject's doxastic states are incoherent is a normative reason to suspend. To relate that claim to what we argue here, Schmidt's considered view is that to be incoherent is as such irrational, a failure to live up to the standards of theoretical reasoning, and thus a *pro tanto* reason to suspend on the relevant propositions. This does not quite come down to the claim that there is an (all things considered) Enkratic Requirement. That such a position is available indicates that there is logical space between the claim of irrationality as such and the Enkratic Requirement. Alas, we do not have the space here to dive into this issue.

one another (Field 2021, 20). Contrast this with believing that p and believing that not-p. In this case, both beliefs cannot be true simultaneously. Correspondingly, believing a transparent contraction such as 'p and not p' seems clearly worse than being akratic, which raises the question what the Moore-paradoxical quality of the beliefs of the akratic subject really shows, or how exactly her beliefs conflict anyway.

Second, some have pointed out that akratic agents are hard to make sense of, and worse, cannot make sense of themselves under conditions of full transparency (e.g. Worsnip 2018b, Littlejohn 2018; for critical discussion, see Christensen 2024). According to Worsnip (2018b: 188), a

> set of attitudinal mental states is jointly incoherent iff it is (partially) constitutive of the mental states in question that, for any agent that holds these attitudes, the agent is disposed, when conditions of full transparency are met, to give up at least one of the attitudes. That is, human agents are disposed such that they are (at least normally) not able to (or at least find it difficult to) sustain such combinations of attitudes under conditions of full transparency.[5]

Worsnip (2018b: 192–3) develops the example of a person who both believes himself to be extremely attractive to members of the opposite sex and believes that his evidence indicates that he is not very attractive to members of the opposite sex. Intuitively, there is something odd about a person who is stably and transparently in such a combined state. Although Worsnip remains neutral about whether coherence requirements are normative, he suggests that the fact that agents who violate coherence requirements under conditions of full transparency are hard to make sense of shows that such agents are irrational (Worsnip 2018b, 203).

---

[5] See also the more recent discussion in Worsnip (2021).

We think there is something to Worsnip's characterization of what is amiss with akratic agents. However, it is not clear to us whether this problem about akratic subjects can establish that being akratic is *per se* making a normative mistake. The worry can be put like this: Sure, akratic subjects are unintelligible and this is bad, but does this really show that they ought to be enkratic? It seems there is more work to do to argue that there is a genuinely normative Enkratic Requirement.[6] The purpose of this chapter is to do some of the needed work.

Let us now turn to the first of our arguments.

2. Epistemic Akrasia and Believing Something on the Basis of Evidence

Our aim in this section is to defend the Enkratic Requirement against views that assume that we can deal with epistemic dilemmas by allowing that rational agents can have misaligned first-order beliefs and second-order beliefs about what their evidence supports—an approach that Sophie Horowitz (2014, 718) has labeled "Level-Splitting". We argue that evidentialists about epistemic justification are committed to holding that justified first-order belief is accompanied by its own (dispositional) higher-order belief about its supporting evidence, and so comes into direct rational conflict with the subject's other higher-order belief. So the subject has contradictory beliefs. In this way, attempts to split levels and thereby to argue that being akratic is not *per se* irrational are called into question.

Our starting point is evidentialism and reasons views of epistemic justification, which trace the epistemic status of doxastic attitudes back to the subject's evidence or reasons. That a sub-ject's belief that p is justified, or that she ought to believe that p, is due to the fact that she has

---

[6] Similarly, Sophie Horowitz's (2014) argument that epistemic akrasia gives rise to irrational actions seems to be a normative problem not of the akratic states themselves, but of their practical downstream consequences.

sufficient evidence or reasons in support of p. Such views are widespread (e.g. Williamson 2000; Conee and Feldman 2004, 2008; Kelly 2008; Schroeder 2011; Kiesewetter 2017; Lord 2018; Schmidt 2018; Schroeder 2021; Silva 2021; Beddor 2024). We take it that epistemic reasons to believe consist in evidence. For simplicity's sake, we will phrase the argument in terms of evidentialism and evidence from here on, unless specific points are better stated in terms of reasons.

Evidentialism is initially about propositional, or *ex ante*, justification, that is, the justification that a subject has for a doxastic attitude in virtue of the evidence she has, irrespective of whether she actually has adopted the attitude, or has adopted it on the basis of her evidence. By contrast, let's focus on evidentialism's claims about doxastic, or *ex post*, justification, i.e., the epistemic status that a doxastic attitude has just in case it is properly based on the evidence which supports it:[7]

(1) To believe that p on the basis of possessed sufficient evidence e is not to believe that p randomly or blindly, but to believe that p in a way that manifests one's appreciation of the justifying force of her evidence e.[8]

That is to say, when the subject believes a proposition *for* the evidence or reason that sufficiently supports it, she has to have the right kind of connection to this evidence or reason, which has to be the consideration in light of which she adopts the belief, her motivating reason for forming the

---

[7] Does our argument then not apply to subjects who haven't yet adopted the incoherent pair of beliefs, but who have the evidence that sufficiently supports both beliefs *ex ante*? We follow Paul Silva's (2017) treatment of these cases. He argues that standard motivations for the Enkratic Requirement presuppose that the subject has already formed the incoherent attitudes. Other motivations undermine the possibility of misleading higher-order evidence, so that the alleged cases of epistemic akrasia don't get off the ground.

[8] We focus on the justification of belief for the sake of simplicity here. The same thought can be developed for suspension and disbelief.

belief (Dancy 2000, Mantel 2018)—evidence or reasons that she takes to favor her belief (Alvarez 2017).[9] She has to, in some sense, recognize the evidence and its rational force, and be prompted by this recognition to adopt the belief that is supported by her evidence. This claim is motivated by the need to distinguish situations in which the subject merely happens to believe in accordance with the relevant evidence from those in which she has ex post justification, i.e., in which she believes on the basis of her evidence. Not only is it essential to distinguish merely having reasons from giving a response for these reasons (Davidson 1963). It is also important to distinguish re-acting to one's evidence by giving the correct response, but in a deviant way, from acquiring gen-uinely ex post justified belief. Here's a revealing case from Turri (2010, 317): A and B both believe (p) that the Spurs will win if they play the Pistons and (q) that the Spurs will play the Pistons. They both infer (r) that the Spurs will win. But only A uses the correct inference rule (*modus ponens*)—B randomly infers whatever proposition from any two propositions she already believes (Turri's "*modus profusus*"). B fails to achieve *ex post* justification because she fails (first) to appreciate the justifying force of her evidence and (second) to form the belief appropriate to this justifying force in light of this appreciation.

This and similar cases show that, to account for *ex post* justification, evidentialism needs to include a requirement along the lines of Boghossian's (2014, 5) "taking condition" for infer-ence: "Inferring necessarily involves the thinker *taking* his premises to support his conclusion and drawing his conclusion *because* of that fact." The taking condition can be spelled out in more or less demanding ways, as exemplified by Leite (2008), Mantel (2018), Lord (2018), Neta (2019),

---

[9] The phenomenon of giving a response *for* a reason is unified across practical and epistemic domains (see e.g. Mirac-chi Titus and Carter 2024, Neta 2019).

Lord and Sylvan (2019), or Miracchi Titus and Carter (2024). Some of these accounts require explicit belief that the subject's evidence or reasons support the conclusion belief (Leite 2008); others require a (possibly nonconceptual or unconscious) representation of the relation between e and belief that p under the category *justifying* (Neta 2019); others require that the belief is formed in a way that manifests the subject's appreciation of the sufficiency of her reasons for justifying her conclusion belief (Miracchi Titus and Carter 2024). What we draw even from the less demanding accounts is that *ex post* justification involves the subject's appreciation of the justificatory bearing of her evidence e with respect to belief that p.

We submit that by being appreciative in this way, the subject also has the dispositional belief that p is supported by sufficient evidence e. (We call this the *positive* higher-order belief in the following.)

(2) For any subject S, if S believes that p in a way that manifests her appreciation of the justifying force of evidence e, then she has the (dispositional) belief that her belief that p is supported by evidence e.

Let us explain and qualify this claim. Having the dispositional belief means that the subject has the belief *not* in the sense that she has the occurrent belief that her belief that p is supported by sufficient evidence at the forefront of her mind. Rather, she is such that, if certain triggering conditions were to occur, under normal circumstances, the positive higher-order belief *would be* at the forefront of her mind (Schwitzgebel 2024). Take my dispositional belief that the root of 256 is 16. This belief will come to the forefront of my mind if I am asked what the root of 256 is, for

instance. Having a belief dispositionally is not the same as being disposed to form the belief. Imagine that my son is currently (merely) disposed to form the belief that the root of 256 is 16, since he is working out some math problem for which he first has to figure this out. If he is asked what the root of 256 is, this will not trigger in him the occurrent belief that it is 16. He doesn't have this belief right now, not even dispositionally.

So, our claim is that S, who appreciates the justificatory force of her evidence, has a genuine, albeit dispositional positive higher-order belief. She has a dispositional belief, rather than being disposed to believe, because she isn't merely *ex ante* justified to hold the first-order belief, but *ex post* justified. S isn't merely in a position to believe that her evidence is sufficient for belief (Lord 2018, chapter 4), but she actually does believe (albeit dispositionally), such that the belief plays a role in properly basing her first-order belief.

But is our claim warranted even by the less demanding variants of the taking condition, as we maintain above? Relatedly, isn't the claim itself just too demanding and doesn't it overintellectualize *ex post* justification? Let us address these worries in one go, as we think that our claim is sufficiently undemanding both to be supported by all the mentioned variants of the taking condition and to avoid problems of overintellectualization. To begin with, our claim should be read as limited to mature adults who have reflective abilities sufficient to get them into akratic cases in the first place. For instance, they have to be able to form higher-order beliefs about whether their evidence supports their first-order beliefs. Our claim does not apply to young children, for instance, who may not yet have the conceptual repertoire to form beliefs about whether they have sufficient evidence. So we can, in principle, remain noncommittal on how young children can have *ex post* justified belief. However, to show that we can avoid the implausible implication that young children lack *ex post* justified belief, we will now sketch a proposal according to which

ex post justification for them can work without sophisticated intellectual abilities, even though it does involve such abilities for adults.

We propose that those who lack the conceptual sophistication to grasp the justificatory force of their evidence may nonetheless appreciate this justificatory force by virtue of nonconceptually or implicitly representing their evidence as supporting the relevant belief, where this representation doesn't take the form of a dispositional belief (cf. Neta 2019, 204). Consider the similar case of the normal development of false belief understanding in humans: It is well established that children acquire an explicit understanding that people sometimes act from false beliefs only at the age of four to five (Wimmer and Perner 1983). However, more recent non-verbal studies suggest that even 10-14 months old infants have an implicit understanding of false belief (Onishi and Baillargeon 2005); and children younger than four explicitly and successfully explain the actions of non-deceived agents, on the basis of ascribing true belief or knowledge to them. Now consider an adult who explains an action, say, that Maxi opens the fridge because he believes that the juice is in the fridge. Assume the adult has the normal sophisticated concept of belief and its relevance for action, which includes a grasp of false belief and of how it can lead to action. In explaining Maxi's action, she will then unavoidably draw on this sophisticated conceptual understanding, and will use it in forming a belief that involves her rich concept of belief. By contrast, although a three year old child can also correctly explain why Maxi opens the fridge by appeal to Maxi's belief, she doesn't yet pass the false belief test, and lacks a sophisticated concept of belief. Nonetheless, we should allow that the child understands Maxi's action as well.

Similarly, we claim for *ex post* justification that adults with the conceptual repertoire to grasp the justificatory force of their evidence, in appreciating this justificatory force, will unavoidably draw on their conceptual capacities, and will have the corresponding dispositional higher-

order belief. Young children who lack such conceptual capacities may be able to nonconceptually or implicitly appreciate the justificatory force of their evidence, and thereby acquire *ex post* justified belief without having a positive higher-order belief.[10]

Moreover, our claim is not that the subject's dispositional positive higher-order belief is justified, or that it amounts to knowledge.[11] We merely insist that a subject who forms an *ex post* justified belief, that is, forms a belief in light of what her evidence rationally supports, plausibly cannot do so without also—dispositionally—believing that her evidence supports the belief in question. Finally, we are not thereby committed to the view that this belief is directly (e.g. causally) involved in the basing process. Leite's (2008) account of the relevance of the background against which the basing of belief takes place shows that there is logical space for this positive higher-order belief to be relevant without being directly involved in the transition to the conclusion belief.[12]

We take it that, given these qualifications, (2) is highly plausible. The core idea is simply that, for the kind of subjects who are sufficiently sophisticated to get into akratic situations involving higher-order evidence, having an *ex post* justified first-order belief presupposes that they appreciate the justificatory force of the evidential grounds of that belief, and that this appreciation takes the shape of a dispositional higher-order belief that their evidence is sufficient for belief.

---

[10] For a kindred claim concerning animal knowledge and reflective knowledge (that subjects with reflective capacities cannot have mere animal knowledge), see Goldberg and Matheson (2020).

[11] See Neta (2019, 204), who holds that this would be overly demanding. We thereby also side-step a potentially problematic luminosity claim (see Williamson 2000). And we avoid a problematic regress of justification, since we are not forced to account for the justification of the positive higher-order belief by appealing to a further belief that there is sufficient evidence for the positive higher-order belief, and so on.

[12] As may be apparent to the attentive reader, we are happy to endorse such a weak reading of (2) because the weak claim is nonetheless sufficient to generate the pair of contradictory beliefs which are essential to our argument against the possibility of level-splitting.

Now consider subjects who display akratic combinations of attitudes.

(3) For any subject S, if S is akratic, then S has *ex post* justified belief that p and S believes that p is not supported by sufficient evidence.[13]

By (1), (2), and (3), we get:

(4) So, for any S, if S is akratic, then she has the (dispositional) belief that her belief that p is supported by sufficient evidence e and S has the belief that p is not supported by sufficient evidence.

From (4), the following claims follow:

(5) So, for any S, if S is akratic, then she has inconsistent beliefs.

(6) So, for any S, if S is akratic, then she is irrational.

This is our case for the claim that akratic subjects are irrational and that the Enkratic Requirement holds. The attempt to portray epistemic akrasia as not in and of itself irrational is problematic, for it is hard to deny that a subject who has contradictory beliefs (about what her evidence supports) is irrational. Between two contradictory propositions, there is a direct and clearly visible conflict;

---

[13] Call the latter belief the subject's *negative* higher-order belief.

further, it is necessarily false that p and that not-p. That it's necessarily false is an excellent reason against having the combination of beliefs.[14] So the akratic subject fails not just on the grounds of structural rationality, but also on the grounds of substantive rationality.

Connecting this back to attempts to defend the possibility of rational akrasia by level-splitting, i.e., by trying to keep higher-order doxastic attitudes separate from first order doxastic attitudes, at least those of us who accept evidentialism cannot concur. For we are committed to the claim that *ex post* justified doxastic attitudes, as part and parcel of being *ex post* justified, are accompanied by a corresponding positive higher-order belief. As we might say, *ex post* justified doxastic attitudes automatically bridge the gap between levels via their accompanying positive higher-order belief, and thus render attempts at level-splitting futile. What makes our argument especially compelling, to our minds, is that beliefs, whether at the first or at the higher level, typically do not stand in isolation. It would be very surprising if lower-level beliefs and higher-order beliefs about what one's evidence supports could be neatly separated.

Nonetheless, several objections can be pressed against our argument, which we address now. The *first* problem is: How does the subject conceptualize the consideration that her evidence sufficiently supports her first-order belief? For instance, she might believe: e is sufficient evidence that p; q is a decisive reason to believe that p; q justifies the belief that p. The same variations are possible for the negative higher-order belief. As Neta (2019, 205) points out, depending on the exact content of the two higher-order beliefs, we may or may not get an outright contradiction between them. For instance, the subject's belief that her belief that p is supported by *sufficient*

---

[14] We assume here that dialetheism is false. We address the issue of what follows for subjects who endorse false theories about truth or rationality below.

*evidence e d*oes not explicitly contradict her belief that her belief that p is not held for *good rea-sons*. To be precise, it may be that these beliefs cannot both be true, given sufficient evidence here is the same as good epistemic reasons; but even so, if the subject is not aware of the identity between the two terms, it seems that she is not criticizable for, and so also not irrational in virtue of holding both beliefs.

We can imagine two relevantly different scenarios here. On the one hand, assume that the subject conceptualizes the relevant point (that her evidence sufficiently supports/does not support her first-order belief) in two distinct ways in the two beliefs, but grasps the involved concepts sufficiently well to understand that sufficient evidence for p just comes down to good reason to believe that p. Then she is just one inferential step away from having two directly contra-dictory beliefs—as Neta (2019, 205) puts it, there is a "rational conflict" between her higher-order beliefs. This seems bad enough to make the allegation of irrationality stick. On the other hand, we can consider a subject who does not have the necessary command of concepts such as *evi-dence* or *epistemic reason*, or genuinely holds to a mistaken theory about evidence, reasons, or rationality and therefore fails to correctly grasp the conceptual connections. We address this problem under the head of the second objection.

The *second* objection is that our argument commits us to a problematic transparency claim about belief. We have briefly addressed a related worry above, where we have pointed out that our argument does not commit us to Williamsonian (2000) luminosity – we do not hold that the subject who has *ex post* justified belief is thereby in a position to *know* that her evidence sufficiently supports her belief. Nonetheless, doesn't the case of the subject who fails to concep-tually connect her two higher-order beliefs show that we—unrealistically—expect a subject's

mind to be transparent to her? Why can't there be subjects who have the two higher-order beliefs: *that belief that p is supported by sufficient evidence* and *that belief that p is not supported by good reasons*, but who are not thereby irrational, simply because they fail to connect the beliefs?

We concede this point. Recall Worsnip on transparency in relation to incoherence: Conflicts between attitudes are puzzling specifically under conditions of full transparency, and it is exactly under these conditions that there is pressure not to attribute incoherence to subjects (Worsnip 2021, 132). He conceives of conditions of full transparency as "conditions under which the agent knows, explicitly and consciously, that she has the state in question, without, say, self-deception, mental fragmentation, or any failure of self-knowledge" (Worsnip 2018b, 188). Conditions of full transparency are in many cases not met. Worsnip does not claim that combinations of attitudes are incoherent only when they are held under conditions of full transparency, but that attitudes should be considered to be incoherent in case the agent "is disposed such that, *were conditions of full transparency to be met*, she would at least find it difficult to sustain the attitudes together."

Correspondingly, we think that subjects who are compartmentalized, inattentive, self-deceived, conceptually confused or the like, may not be in a position to bring the beliefs in question in touch with each other.[15] Because of their mental conditions, we may not want to criticize them or deem them irrational. However, the central example cases of epistemic akrasia are not concerned with subjects of this kind, but with clear-sighted subjects who are currently attentive to

---

[15]This is our response to counterexamples from mistaken theories of epistemic reasons, rationality, truth etc. (e.g. Hawthorne et al. 2021, Christensen 2024), to the extent that these false theories result in conceptual confusion. We discuss cases in which false theories lead only to factual mistakes about rationality in section 4.

and puzzled about what they should believe given their total evidence. Take Hypoxia. Bianca has an *ex post* justified belief that she has made no mistake in her preparations and so dispositionally believes that she has sufficient perceptual evidence for this belief; at the same time, she has an *ex post* justified belief that it may well be that her perceptual evidence does not support her belief that she made no mistake in her preparations. What's puzzling about the case is that Bianca can be fully aware of the direct rational conflict between her beliefs, but there is no way for her to dissolve it. Only this makes her situation truly dilemmic. For subjects like Bianca, we insist that they have the two contradictory higher-order beliefs, and that they are irrational in virtue of being akratic. Notice at any rate that we are now concerned not with the issue of whether interlevel incoherence is in and of itself irrational, but whether there are conditions under which two conflicting beliefs *at the same, higher level* can be had in a rational way. This is distinct from the point from which we started, and that we can frame the issue in this way undermines the level-splitting strategy.

Here's a *third* objection: We claim that, to get our argument off the ground, it suffices that the subject believes that e is sufficient evidence that p. It can be objected that the allegation of irrationality requires a conflict between two *justified* beliefs. If the positive higher-order belief is not itself justified, the subject is rationally required to abandon that belief in the face of her justified higher-order belief that p is not supported by sufficient evidence. So, we have failed to show that the subject is irrational by virtue of being akratic.

There are two replies available to us. First, if abandoning the positive higher-order belief is indeed the correct way for the subject to respond, rational incoherence is precluded anyway. Silva (2017) argues that in akrasia cases, the *ex post* justification of the subject's first-order belief is defeated by her negative higher-order belief. So there is no rational conflict. To translate this

to our picture, let's grant that the subject is rationally required to give up her positive higher-order belief. If so, her ability to properly base her belief that p on evidence e is undermined, since she cannot now move to believe that p in light of her appreciation that e sufficiently supports belief that p. For appreciation cannot play the needed role in *ex post* justification if it involves a belief that the subject ought to abandon. So the subject's belief that p is not justified. Secondly, however, we are not convinced that the subject ought to give up her positive higher-order belief. We do think that there are cases where subjects have *ex post* justified first-order beliefs in direct response to the evidence. It is a necessary condition on having *ex post* justification that the subject has the dispositional, positive higher-order belief that embodies her appreciation of the justifying force of her reasons (Leite 2008, 432). These beliefs involved in proper basing are perfectly legitimate for the subject to have. Clearly, more needs to be said about how they can have this positive status, although this would lead us too far afield here. Instead, let us gesture at some possibilities available to us. One is to endorse Leite's (2008) account and to allow that these beliefs are justified even though they are not themselves results of an explicit reasoning process; another, related possibility is to point out that the positive higher-order beliefs are always at least *ex ante* justified, and this is good enough to ensure their epistemic status as legitimate. A third is to appeal to a kind of entitlement that is distinct from justification and that ensures that the subject is not required to abandon the belief.[16]

To conclude this section, we have argued that—at least given evidentialism or reasons views of epistemic normativity—the first-order and the higher-order levels cannot be neatly split,

---

[16] Again, these possibilities avoid a commitment to a regress of justification, as they allow for the positive higher-order belief to have a positive epistemic status without the need for another higher-order belief that the subject has sufficient evidence for this belief, and so on.

since *ex post* justification of first-order beliefs presupposes higher-order beliefs which are directly inconsistent with the higher-order beliefs that give rise to the subject's akratic state. This calls into question the claim that to be akratic is not *per se* irrational.

3. Epistemic Enkrasia and Permissible Beliefs

Many philosophers accept normativism, the view that beliefs are subject to norms that determine which beliefs are held permissibly by an agent, and which fail to be held permissibly.[17] As normativism is standardly understood, the view claims that it belongs to the essence of the state of belief to be governed by norms or standards. Beliefs that fail to satisfy the norm in question are considered to be defective, beliefs that comply with the norm are considered to be normatively correct. There is considerable disagreement in the literature about which norms govern the state of belief, and how to state normativism properly.[18] What is more, there is an ongoing debate about whether normativism about belief is correct.[19] In this section, we will assume that normativism is correct. Based on this presupposition, we will sketch an argument for the Enkratic Requirement that assumes that rationality constrains which beliefs are normatively correct and hence permissible.[20] If we further take on board some widely held assumptions about the notion of rationality, we have the tools in hand to construct an argument that shows that agents who display akratic combinations of attitudes hold impermissible beliefs. Here is our argument:

---

[17] See, e.g., Williamson 2000; Shah 2003; Shah and Velleman 2005; Boghossian 2008; Lynch 2009; Whiting 2010; Wedgwood 2013; Hughes 2019b.

[18] See McHugh and Whiting (2014) for an overview.

[19] See Papineau (2013) for opposition, and McHugh and Whiting (2014) for arguments supporting normativism.

[20] We state the belief norm in terms of permissibility (see Whiting 2010 or Hughes 2019b). For this reason, we will assume that for believing to be normatively correct just is for it to be permissible. Alternative formulations of the norm, in particular those in terms of ought, are fraught with difficulties. For example, formulations of the truth-norm in terms of ought seem to demand that one should believe all the truths, which is impossible, or that one should also believe trivial truths, which is implausible.

(1) Belief is subject to norms—for S, believing p is permissible and therefore normatively correct iff S satisfies norm N. (Normativism)

(2) Epistemic rationality constrains which beliefs are permissible: If S believes p irrationally, S's belief is impermissible.

(3) Epistemically rational beliefs need to satisfy both dimensions of rationality—that is, S's beliefs need to be based on evidence and they need to satisfy coherence requirements.

(4) Akratic agents believe p on the basis of their evidence, but fail to satisfy coherence requirements.

(5) Therefore, Akratic agents believe p irrationally. (From 3 and 4.)

(6) Therefore, akratic agents believe p impermissibly and, therefore believe p in a normatively incorrect way. (From 1, 2, and 5.)

Let us comment on the premises of the argument.

Starting with (1), this premise claims that belief is subject to norms. The thesis that one or more norms are constitutive of or essential to belief most plausibly concerns which beliefs are *permissible* for a subject. On a generic version of this view, a subject S is permitted to believe p in case norm N is satisfied. Several candidates for norm N have been proposed—among them truth, knowledge, or rationality. Here, we remain neutral about which norm N governs belief.

Coming to premise (2), we maintain that epistemic rationality constrains which beliefs are permissible for an agent. This is to say that beliefs that are held irrationally violate norm N, and so are impermissible for an agent. On the face of it, this claim enjoys strong intuitive support. Think about cases in which you happen to have strong evidence for p and no evidence against p,

but you go on to believe non-p, and so believe irrationally. The widespread intuitive reaction to such cases is that you are not permitted to adhere to this attitude, as you fail to respect your evidence. Some claim that there is a stronger connection between normatively correct beliefs and rationality: that rationality is sufficient for normatively correct beliefs.[21] By contrast, we here endorse a weaker claim—that irrational beliefs are impermissible beliefs, or that rationality is necessary for permissible belief.

Premise (2) is supported by more than intuition. Here is an argument that is due to Hughes (2019b). According to Hughes, there are many clear-cut cases in which it is rational for an agent to take at most one doxastic attitude toward a proposition p. Think about cases in which an agent's evidence uniquely settles what to believe. Take Hughes's mug case (Hughes 2019b: 62): Suppose a subject S appears to see her favorite mug sitting in front of her at the kitchen table. S remembers having left it on the kitchen table last night, lighting conditions are normal, and the environment is not manipulated. In this case, the *rational* doxastic attitude for S is belief that her favorite mug is right in front of her at the kitchen table. To take any other attitude toward the same proposition (e.g. to suspend or disbelieve) appears irrational. We take for granted that these judgments of (ir)rationality are common as well as correct.

In clear-cut cases, we further intuitively judge that it is normatively *incorrect,* or epistemically wrong, for a subject to adopt any attitude other than belief. As Hughes (2019b: 63) puts it, "[I]t doesn't seem enough to say that it is merely suberogatory, inadvisable, or non-ideal [to adopt another attitude than belief]. Such descriptions fail to capture the kind and weight of epistemic wrongdoing that comes with failing to live up to the standards of rationality." We agree with

---

[21] See, for instance, Hughes (2019b).

Hughes—it appears absurd to claim that any other option than belief might be permissible in the present context. But what explains why our intuitive judgments concerning normative (in)correctness track our judgments concerning (ir)rationality? Hughes argues that our judgments result from a general principle connecting irrationality and impermissibility. This principle claims that if it is irrational for a subject S to adopt an attitude, then it is impermissible for S to adopt that attitude. This is just premise (2). We can articulate this as an inference to the best explanation: we can explain why we intuitively judge that it would be epistemically wrong of you to withhold or disbelieve that your favorite mug is sitting right in front of you in the mug case only if we take premise (2) to be true, and analogously for clear-cut cases generally. So, whether a subject's belief is permissible is constrained by whether it is rational for her to believe the relevant proposition. As Hughes further argues, there are reasons to assume that this view generalizes to "non-clear-cut cases"—that is, cases in which an agent's evidence appears to favor more than one doxastic response. Overall, the principle captured by premise (2) offers "a simple and unified account of the relationship between rationality and permissibility." (Hughes 2019b: 70)

However, proponents of the knowledge-norm of belief such as Williamson (forth.) will object to (2). They treat the cases that speak in favor of (2) in an alternative way, claiming that being criticizable is compatible with not violating a fundamental norm, and that this explains the feeling that the subject in the mug case makes an epistemic mistake. Williamson distinguishes between fundamental and derivative norms for beliefs. Knowledge is the fundamental, basic, or "primary" norm of belief (N). On his view, from the fundamental norm N there flow derivative norms. One such "secondary" norm demands to have a general disposition to comply with knowledge norm

N–Williamson calls this type of norm DN. Williamson introduces another kind of norm, viz. a "tertiary" norm derived from DN, called ODK.[22] According to ODK, agents have an obligation to follow DN in one particular situation. In case they fail to comply with DN—that is, if they fail to adopt the doxastic attitude that an agent with knowledge-conducive dispositions would adopt in the situation—they are subject to criticism. On Williamson's suggestion, being subject to criticism is distinct from doing something impermissible: an agent who is subject to criticism does not commit the normative mistake of violating a fundamental norm. Rather, she just breaches a derivative norm like ODK, which possesses a weaker normative status than a fundamental norm.

Williamson suggests that although we tend to consider irrational attitudes as defective/criticizable, there are cases where they are permissible or even obligatory in light of the knowledge-norm. Regarding the mug case, if proposition p (S's favorite mug is right in front of her on the kitchen table) is *false*, S should disbelieve p rather than believe p, even though it would be irrational for her to adopt this attitude. As Williamson's proposal is plausibly interpreted, if S irrationally disbelieves p in this scenario, S merely violates ODK. She is then subject to criticism for disbelieving p. This is because she would believe out of a non-knowledge-conducive disposition, on whose basis she would normally fail to acquire knowledge. Still, since it is not the case that p, by the knowledge norm S has an obligation to disbelieve p and is therefore permitted to do so. If we buy into Williamson's proposal, a proponent of (2) would therefore conflate impermissibility with criticizability: the subject's behavior is still permissible but merely violates a derivative norm such as ODK.

---

[22] "O" in "ODK" stands for "occurrent". If S follows ODK, then she does what someone who exercises her knowledge-conducive dispositions would do in the same situation (Williamson forth, 9) .

What can be said in defense of (2) in light of Williamson's proposal? Williamson's strategy to explain violations of apparent basic norms in terms of violations of derivative norms or by appeal to excuses is discussed widely in recent literature.[23] We think that Williamson's strategy on its own is not sufficient to rule out that cases of criticizable behavior can simultaneously be instances of violations of more basic norms or of constraints regarding those norms.[24] In particular, an agent might be subject to criticism for not exercising a particular disposition, deriving from a norm N1, though this agent can at the same time violate another norm N2 or a necessary condition for satisfying norm N2, where N2 is a norm distinct from N1. In order for Williamson's proposal to call into question premise (2), Williamson needs to demonstrate that cases of irrationality can only constitute violations of ODK but not *simultaneously* of some other norm (which could then ensure they are also cases of impermissibility). Since Williamson's argument falls short of establishing this claim, we conclude that his criticism of (2) is unsuccessful.

To see how our response works, consider the following case. Suppose that during a basketball game one player intentionally shoves another player from the opposing team and thereby commits a flagrant foul. (A foul is called "flagrant" when the officials believe that is not a legitimate attempt to directly play the ball within the rules.) The player who committed the foul might on the one hand be criticized for failing to exercise his disposition to act sportsmanlike, as he intentionally shoves another player from the opposing team and thereby violates a derivative norm to be disposed to act sportsmanlike. On the other hand, this player can also be considered

---

[23] See, for example, Ballarini (2022), Cohen and Comesaña (forth.), Comesaña (2020), and Gerken (2011).

[24] See Hughes (2019: 64–65), who argues in a similar way. Hughes claims that agents might be criticizable for exercising bad dispositions but need not thereby violate *any* norms. On Hughes's view, Williamson's argument fails to rule out this possibility and therefore fails. Our argument does not differ substantially from Hughes', as we try to make the case that violations of dispositions might as well be violations of fundamental norms.

to violate a norm of the game of basketball, as shoving an opposing player is against the rules of basketball. What the present case shows is that an action may constitute a violation of two different types of norms. To describe the case such that it only involves a player who manifests a bad disposition is clearly incomplete, as the player in addition violates a norm of the game of basketball. Regarding this case, it is implausible to suppose that we are prone to confuse violations of the rules of basketball with violations of an athlete's disposition to behave sportsmanlike—though both norms are very closely connected.

Cases of apparently permissible irrational beliefs can be understood along the same lines: an agent who believes against her evidence and holds irrational beliefs can simultaneously violate the norm to exercise her knowledge-conducive dispositions and the norm not to believe irrationally. Again, to describe cases of irrationality such that they only involve agents who manifest a bad disposition is clearly incomplete, as the agents might also violate a norm governing which beliefs are impermissible. Merely appealing to violations of derivative norms is not sufficient to discard the idea that rationality constrains which beliefs are permissible. It further does not establish the rival view, on which knowledge is the fundamental norm of belief. Williamson's strategy simply doesn't show that (2) is false, and that we should reject the idea that irrational beliefs are impermissible. So, Williamson's take on this case—that we confuse failures of rationality with violations of the norm to exercise knowledge-conducive dispositions—is not sufficient to undermine premise (2).

What about premise (3) of our argument? This premise states that epistemic rationality comprises two dimensions. It's a widely accepted idea that we should distinguish between substantive and structural requirements of rationality. Substantive requirements of rationality govern how an agent should respond to her evidence or normative reasons. Assuming evidentialism,

epistemic reasons for belief consist in evidence (see section 2). Consequently, substantive rationality in epistemology demands that an agent proportions her beliefs to the evidence available to her.

The other dimension of rationality is structural rationality. This dimension of rationality prescribes how an agent's attitudes should fit together. Two requirements are salient for present purposes. First, an agent's beliefs should be coherent, they should be logically consistent, closed under logical consequence, and should perhaps stand in explanatory and probabilistic relations to one another. Second, an agent's beliefs should satisfy a criterion of "meta-coherence"—an agent's first-order beliefs should at least be coherent with her second-order beliefs about which beliefs she should hold (Smithies, this volume).

It's natural to assume that both substantive and structural requirements are essential components of epistemic rationality. If an agent's attitudes are either incoherent, or not based on evidence, there is something amiss with this agent, and she cannot be considered to be epistemically rational. The Enkratic Requirement connects both dimensions of rationality, as it demands from an agent to hold higher-order attitudes regarding what her evidence supports that match her lower-level attitudes. However, it has been suggested that we should keep the two dimensions of rationality clearly separate. If we bifurcate rationality into a substantive and a structural dimension, where both dimensions are *sui generis*, then there is no unified concept of rationality—in particular, no unified concept of *epistemic* rationality.

What reasons are there to reject the idea that epistemic rationality necessarily incorporates both dimensions? Worsnip (2018a, 2021) argues that evidence and coherence can come into conflict with one another. For your evidence can be misleading about itself and can issue logically inconsistent requirements. The cases Worsnip has in mind are epistemic dilemmas that

are generated by higher-order evidence, along the lines introduced in section 1. On Worsnip's view, we can deal with epistemic dilemmas like Hypoxia by rejecting the idea that there is a single notion of epistemic rationality involving both dimensions. An agent's beliefs are governed by two distinct and fundamentally different kinds of normative requirements. Of these, only the substantive ones are genuinely epistemic, whereas structural requirements transcend the epistemic domain; this can be seen by considering practical coherence norms such as the norm to have enkratic intention-belief combinations, which, though not epistemic, appear to be a matter of the same structural rationality. If this is right, no dilemma ensues *within* epistemic rationality.

Worsnip's strategy softens the blow of (allegedly) epistemic dilemmas. But it also conflicts with our premise (3), the claim that epistemically rational beliefs need to satisfy both the substantive *and* the structural dimension of rationality. Considerations from Smithies (this volume) can be used to defend premise (3) and in particular its inherent claim that we need to conceive structural rationality as a dimension of epistemic rationality:

> Perhaps the deepest problem is that we lose the attractive idea that there is any unified virtue of epistemic rationality that requires both coherence and respecting your evidence. (…) Moreover, we cannot reconstruct a unified virtue of epistemic rationality by simply conjoining these requirements. (Smithies, this volume, 10)

To make this more concrete, we build on the argument from Schmidt (2023, section 5). Structural rationality and substantive rationality pertain to the same target, viz. doxastic attitudes. Regarding this target, structural and substantive norms can compete with each other, and together determine which attitude is epistemically rational for the subject to adopt. Finally, subjects are able to doxastically respond to structural norms as much as to substantive norms of

rationality, for instance, by abandoning a belief that conflicts with their other doxastic states. All this indicates that structural and substantive dimensions are both integrative parts of one epistemic rationality.

According to premise (4), agents who display akratic combinations of attitudes will fail to qualify as rational. Akratic agents are paradigm examples of subjects that don't satisfy both dimensions of rationality. The reason is that they believe p on the basis of their evidence but fail to satisfy a criterion of meta-coherence, as they believe that their evidence does not provide support for p. And from (4) we might deduce (5)—that akratic agents believe p irrationally.

However, Lasonen-Aarnio (2020) objects to conceiving of akratic subjects as irrational. She first argues that an agent's evidence can issue conflicting recommendations about what this agent should believe and, therefore, can require an agent to be in akratic states. But if evidentialism is true and an akratic agent is responsive to her evidence, Lasonen-Aarnio claims, this agent can hardly be considered irrational.[25] However, if we reject the idea that being responsive to one's evidence is the sole dimension of rationality, we need a more sustained defense of the claim that akratic agents are not irrational. Lasonen-Aarnio (2020) presents a second argument, which appeals to non-virtuous dispositions that the akratic agent manifests. Lasonen-Aarnio (2020) suggests that the kind of epistemic shortcoming akratic subjects exhibit is that they do not manifest certain dispositions—they fail to be responsive to conspicuous or conclusive reasons. We consider the failure to exercise such dispositions to be a bad thing because in a range of counterfactual

---

[25] As Lasonen-Aarnio (2020, 60) explains, "If the beliefs of our akratic subject concerning what she is forbidden or required to believe were themselves irrational, we might simply require her to give up her higher-level beliefs. But these beliefs, it was assumed, were themselves arrived at by believing in accordance with her evidence. If evidence can be radically misleading regarding what the evidence supports, and evidentialism is true, then it looks like subjects will sometimes be permitted (if not required) to violate the enkratic requirements."

cases where a subject's higher-order evidence is not misleading and thus constitutes a conspicu-

ous or genuine reason, such agents fail to incorporate their higher-order beliefs regarding what

their evidence supports into their first-order attitudes. As Lasonen-Aarnio (2020: 625) puts it,

> Consider the akratic subject with mismatched evidence: her evidence makes p likely, but also makes it
>
> likely that it does not make p likely. (…) But now consider the disposition she manifests by being thus
>
> unresponsive to the contents of her beliefs. She manifests at least a local disposition to believe p, despite
>
> believing that it is irrational for her to believe p. How does this disposition fare across counterfactual cases
>
> in which it manifests itself? Well, it doesn't fare very well across those counterfactual cases in which the
>
> contents of the subject's beliefs in fact constitute genuine reasons. (…) In cases in which one has the con-
>
> spicuous reason in question, manifesting a disposition to be unresponsive to the content of the relevant
>
> belief amounts to unresponsiveness to a genuine conclusive and conspicuous reason one has.

But should we accept her proposal that akratic subjects merely exercise epistemically vi-

cious dispositions without being irrational? If we can reject Lasonen-Aarnio's explanation of what

shortcoming akratic subjects exhibit, this would shift the burden of proof to Lasonen-Aarnio to

convince us that akratic agents are not irrational after all. Recall the objection we presented

against Williamson's strategy to treat cases of apparent irrationality as violations of knowledge-

conducive dispositions. It might well be true that an agent is subject to criticism for not exercising

a particular disposition, deriving from a norm N1, though this agent can at the same time violate

another norm N2 (or a necessary condition for satisfying norm N2), where N2 is a norm distinct

from N1. As we argued above, Williamson's strategy does not rule out that an agent might fail to

manifest a certain disposition and violate a norm unrelated to that disposition simultaneously.

For this reason, his strategy does not undermine the idea that irrational agents breach a norm constitutive of belief.

The same criticism applies to Lasonen-Arnio's suggestion. In order for Lasonen-Aarnio's proposal to call into question premise (4), she needs to argue that the *only* way to make sense of akratic agents is to conceive of them as manifesting epistemically bad dispositions. But as with Williamson's proposal, since Lasonen-Aarnio's dispositional account on its own fails to show that akratic agents both have bad dispositions and are not irrational, her suggestion is not sufficient to undermine premise (4) of our argument. It is perfectly consistent with her proposal that akratic agents are irrational, as they fail to satisfy a coherence requirement constitutive of epistemic rationality.

From premise (5) together with premises (1) and (2), we infer (6) that akratic agents believe p impermissibly, and, therefore, commit a normative mistake. Note that we do not assume that failures of rationality are *per se* normative failures. Rather, our idea is that akratic agents fail to live up to a normative standard because they breach a condition for normatively correct beliefs: they believe p irrationally.

Summing up, the contentious premises of our argument are premises (2) and (3). Premise (2) relies on the highly intuitive idea that irrationality is incompatible with epistemic permissibility. We defended this claim against the objection that irrational beliefs can be permissible. We supported premise (3) by considering Worsnip's bifurcationist view of structural and substantive rationality, which calls (3) into question. We argued for the claim that structural rationality is genuinely a dimension of epistemic rationality. We suggest that the argument provides additional support for the claim that epistemic akrasia is irrational and that we should accept the Enkratic Requirement.

4. Outlook

Our ambition in this chapter has been to argue that—given the widely accepted view of evidentialism and normativism about belief—to be in epistemically akratic states is to commit a normative mistake, and that the Enkratic Principle, understood as a genuine normative principle, holds. In section 2, we argued from the assumption of evidentialism to the claim that the first-order belief in standard example cases of akrasia, in virtue of being *ex post* justified, is accompanied by a higher-order belief about the sufficiency of its supporting evidence. The latter is directly inconsistent with the higher-order belief that there is no sufficient evidence for the first order-belief. In section 3, we presented an argument—starting from normativism—that showed that akratic agents hold impermissible and, therefore, normatively defective first-order beliefs, since they hold irrational combinations of attitudes. The first argument locates the irrationality directly in the two incoherent justified beliefs (or at least in what is necessarily involved in their being justified), while the second argument attempts to show that akratic agents breach a constitutive norm for belief. Since both arguments point to normative defects in the akratic states, they motivate the normative force of the Enkratic Requirement.

However, our arguments can be successful only to the extent that they apply to examples of epistemically akratic agents beyond the type of higher-order cases that has been our focus here. We lack the space to thoroughly discuss all the cases that have been put forth in the debate. Instead, let us close the paper by applying our arguments to two more cases, (1) an example of cases of false theories of rationality (e.g. Christensen 2024, Feldman 2005, Hawthorne at al. 2021) and (2) the widely discussed dartboard case (Horowitz 2014, 736/737; see Williamson 2014). That

our arguments successfully address these cases is cause for optimism that they apply to akratic cases across the board.

(1) An undergraduate student believes, on the basis of her philosophy professor's testimony, that inductive evidence fails to justify beliefs. At lunch, when she is about to take the first bite from her sandwich, she forms the belief that, since she only has inductive evidence, she does not have sufficient evidence for the belief that the bread will nourish her. At the same time, she believes that the bread will nourish her. She believes the latter on the basis of induction, and her belief is justified because induction does justify, and she correctly responds to its justifying force at the first order, despite her mistaken higher-order belief about these matters.[26]

In response to the first and second objections in section 2, we touched on cases of false theories of rationality etc., understood as cases of conceptual confusions. However, if we conceive of this type of case as involving a subject who is *not* conceptually confused, but merely factually mistaken, our argument from section 2 applies as follows: The undergraduate, who properly bases her belief that the bread will nourish her on her inductive evidence, appreciates the justificatory force of her inductive evidence in doing so. So, she has the dispositional higher-order belief that she has sufficient evidence for the belief that the bread will nourish her. This belief is inconsistent with her negative higher-order belief, that she does not have sufficient evidence for the belief that the bread will nourish her. So, she has directly contradictory beliefs and is irrational.

Here is how our argument from section 3 applies. The undergraduate impermissibly believes that the bread will nourish her, for she holds the higher-order belief that is she does not

---

[26] Christensen (2024) spells this out in terms of the accuracy of induction—we don't think this makes a difference to the core point of the example.

have sufficient evidence for that belief. As we argued above, a subject who holds combinations of attitudes such as the undergraduate is irrational. For this reason, her first-order belief is normatively incorrect, and she, therefore, commits a normative mistake.

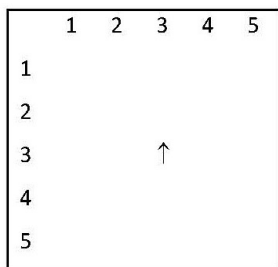(2) In the dartboard case, the subject faces an unmarked dartboard:

Figure 1: The dartboard. Adapted from Horowitz 2014.

Assume the dart lands on location <3,3>. The subject can narrow down the position of the dart to the approximate area where it has landed and so can be certain that it landed in the circle of locations <3,2>, <2,3>, <3,3>, <4,3>, or <3,4>. For each of those five points, she should have 0.2 credence that the dart landed at that point. Now consider the proposition "Ring" (Horowitz 2014, 737), that the dart landed on <3,2>, <2,3>, <4,3>, or <3,4>. The agent's credence in Ring should be 0.8.

However, this credence level is rational only given that the dart has indeed landed on <3,3>. Had the dart landed on any of <3,2>, <2,3>, <4,3>, or <3,4>, the subject should have only credence 0.2 in Ring—for then only the point on which the dart landed would be covered by Ring. Suppose the subject knows all this. Given that the dart lands at <3,3>, she should then have 0.8

credence in Ring, but also have 0.8 credence that her credence regarding Ring should be 0.2 (because she cannot exclude that the dart has landed on one of the adjacent points). Translating this into the language of justified belief and assuming that evidence providing 0.8 probability for a proposition p suffices for justified outright belief that p, but evidence providing only 0.2 probability for p does not suffice for justified outright belief that p, we get: The subject facing the dartboard has justified belief in Ring, but also justified belief that she does not have sufficient evidence to justify belief in Ring—she is akratic.

Again, the argument from section 2 applies. When the subject properly bases her first-order belief in Ring on her probabilistic evidence—i.e., on her insight that the dart is 0.8 likely to have landed on one of <3,2>, <2,3>, <4,3>, or <3,4>—she does so while appreciating the justificatory force of her evidence. That is to say, she believes, albeit dispositionally, that she has sufficient evidence to justify belief in Ring. But at the same time, she believes that she does not have sufficient evidence to justify belief in Ring. Her higher-order beliefs are inconsistent, and she is irrational. The argument that we presented in section 3 applies as well. As we argued above, in order for an agent to be epistemically rational, this agent needs to satisfy both dimensions of rationality. As the subject who believes Ring, but believes that her evidence does not support Ring fails to satisfy both dimensions of rationality, she holds an impermissible belief in Ring. Therefore, she holds a belief that is normatively incorrect.

References

Alvarez, Maria (2017). "Reasons for Action: Justification, Motivation, Explanation", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.),   URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/reasons-just-vs-expl/>.

Ballarini, Cristina (2022). Epistemic Blame and the New Evil Demon Problem. Philosophical Studies 179 (8): 2475-2505.

Beddor, Bob (2019). Prospects for Evidentialism. In Maria Lasonen-Aarnio & Clayton Littlejohn (eds.), The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Evidence. Routledge.

Boghossian, Paul (2008). Content and Justification. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Boghossian, Paul (2014). What is inference? Philosophical Studies 169 (1):1-18.

Broome, John (2013). Rationality Through Reasoning. Wiley-Blackwell.

Christensen, David (2010). Higher-Order Evidence. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research: 81(1): 185–215.

Christensen, David (2021). Embracing Epistemic Dilemmas. In K. McCain, S. Stapleford, & M. Steup (eds.). Epistemic Dilemmas: New Arguments, New Angles. Routledge.

Christensen, David (2024). Epistemic Akrasia: No Apology Required. Noûs 58 (1):54-76.

Cohen, Stewart and Comesaña, Juan (forth.). Rationality and Truth. In J. Dutant & F. Dorsch (eds.), The New Evil Demon. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Comesaña, Juan (2020). A Plea for Falsehoods. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 100 (2):247-276

Conee, Earl Brink & Feldman, Richard (2004). Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. Edited by Richard Feldman.

Conee, Earl & Feldman, Richard (2008). Evidence. In Quentin Smith (ed.), Epistemology: new essays. New York : Oxford University Press,: Oxford University Press.

Dancy, Jonathan (2000). Practical Reality. Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press.

Davidson, Donald (1963). Actions, Reasons, and Causes. Journal of Philosophy 60 (23):685.

Feldman, Richard (2005). Respecting the Evidence. Philosophical Perspectives 19: 95-119.

Gerken, Mikkel (2011). Warrant and Action. Synthese 178(3): 529–547.

Goldberg, Sandford & Matheson, Jonathan (2020). The Impossibility of Mere Animal Knowledge for Reflective Subjects. Erkenntnis 85, 829–840.

Goldman, Alvin (1986). Epistemology and Cognition. Harvard University Press.

Greco, Daniel (2014). A Puzzle about Epistemic Akrasia. Philosophical Studies 167: 201-219.

Hawthorne, John, Isaacs, Yoaav & Lasonen-Aarnio, Maria (2021). The Rationality of Epistemic Akrasia. Philosophical Perspectives 35 (1):206-228.

Horowitz, Sophie (2014). Epistemic Akrasia. Noûs 48 (4):718-744.

Hughes, Nick (2019a). Dilemmic Epistemology. Synthese 196 (10): 4059-4090.

Hughes, Nick (2019b). Uniqueness, Rationality, and the Norm of Belief. Erkenntnis 84: 57-75.

Hughes, Nick (this volume). Epistemic Dilemmas: A Guide.

Kelly, Thomas (2008). Evidence: Fundamental concepts and the phenomenal conception. Philosophy Compass 3 (5):933-955.

Kiesewetter, Benjamin (2017). The Normativity of Rationality. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lasonen-Aarnio, Maria (2020). Enkrasia or evidentialism? Learning to love mismatch. Philosophical Studies 177 (3):597-632.

Lasonen-Aarnio, Maria (2014). Higher-Order Evidence and the Limits of Defeat. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 88 (2):314-345.

Lasonen-Aarnio, Maria (2010). Unreasonable Knowledge. Philosophical Perspectives 24: 1–21.

Lee, Wooram (2020). Enkratic Rationality is Instrumental Rationality. Philosophical Perspectives 34: 164-183.

Leite, Adam (2008). Believing one's reasons are good. Synthese 161 (3):419-441.

Leonard, Nick. 2020. Epistemic Dilemmas and Rational Indeterminacy. Philosophical Studies 177: 573-596.

Littlejohn, Clayton (2018). Stop Making Sense? On a Puzzle about Rationality. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 96 (2): 257-275.

Lord, Errol (2018). The Importance of Being Rational. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Lord, Errol & Sylvan, Kurt (2020). Prime Time (for the Basing Relation). In J. Adam Carter & Patrick Bondy (eds.), Well Founded Belief: New Essays on the Epistemic Basing Relation, pp. 141-173.

Lynch, M. 2009. The Values of Truth and the Truth of Values. In A. Haddock, A. Millar and D. Pritchard (eds.), Epistemic Value. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mantel, Susanne (2018). Determined by Reasons: A Competence Account of Acting for a Normative Reason. New York, USA: Routledge.

McHugh, Conor & Whiting, Daniel (2014). The Normativity of Belief. Analysis 74 (4):698-713.

Miracchi Titus, Lisa & Carter, J. Adam (2024). What the tortoise should do: A knowledge-first virtue approach to the basing relation. Noûs 58 (2): 456-481.

Neta, Ram (2019). The Basing Relation. Philosophical Review 128 (2):179-217.

Onishi, Kristine H. & Baillargeon, Renée (2005). Do 15-month-old infants understand false beliefs? Science 308(8), 255-258.

Papineau, D. 2013. There are No Norms of Belief. In Timothy Chan (ed.), The Aim of Belief. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 64-79.

Scanlon, Thomas M. 2007. Structural Irrationality. In G. Brennan, R. Goodin, F. Jackson, and M. Smith (eds.). Common Minds: Themes From the Philosophy of Philip Pettit. Oxford University Press.

Shah, Nishi (2003). How Truth Governs Belief. Philosophical Review 112: 447-482.

Shah, Nishi and Velleman, J. David (2005). Doxastic Deliberation. Philosophical Review 114: 497-534.

Schmidt, Eva (2018). Normative Reasons for Mentalism. In Christos Kyriacou & Robin McKenna (eds.), Metaepistemology: Realism & Antirealism. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 97-120.

Schmidt, Eva (2023). Facts about incoherence as non-evidential epistemic reasons. Asian Journal of Philosophy 2 (2023).

Schroeder, Mark (2011). What does it take to "have" a reason? In Andrew Reisner & Asbjørn Steglich-Petersen (eds.), Reasons for Belief. New York: Cambridge University Press. pp. 201--22.

Schroeder, Mark (2021). Reasons First. Oxford University Press.

Silva, Paul (2017). How Doxastic Justification Helps Us Solve the Puzzle of Misleading Higher-Order Evidence. Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 98:308-328.

Silva, Paul (2021). Possessing reasons: why the awareness-first approach is better than the knowledge-first approach. Synthese 199 (1-2):2925-2947.

Simion, Mona (2021). Skepticism About Epistemic Dilemmas. In K. McCain, S. Stapleford, & M. Steup (eds.), Epistemic Dilemmas: New Arguments, New Angles. Routledge.

Smithies, Declan (2012). Moore's Paradox and the Accessibility of Justification. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 85 (2):273-300.

Stapleford, Scott & McCain, Kevin (2021). Epistemic Dilemmas, Epistemic Quasi-Dilemmas, and Quasi-Epistemic Dilemmas. In K. McCain, S. Stapleford, & M. Steup (eds.). Epistemic Dilemmas: New Arguments, New Angles. Routledge.

Steup, Matthias (2021). Defeaters, Higher-Order Evidence, and Epistemic Dilemmas. In K. McCain, S. Stapleford, & M. Steup (eds.). Epistemic Dilemmas: New Arguments, New Angles. Routledge.

Titelbaum, Michael G. (2015). Rationality's Fixed Point. Oxford Studies in Epistemology 5.

Turri, John (2010). On the relationship between propositional and doxastic justification. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 80 (2):312-326.

Weatherson, Brian (2019). Normative Externalism. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Wedgwood, Ralph (2013). The Right Thing to Believe. In Timothy Chan (ed.), The Aim of Belief. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Whiting, D. (2010). Should I Believe the Truth? Dialectica 64: 213-224.

Williamson, Timothy (this volume). Epistemological Ambivalence.

Williamson, Timothy (forthcoming). Justifications, Excuses, and Sceptical Scenarios. In J. Dutant & F. Dorsch (eds.), The New Evil Demon, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Williamson, Timothy (2011). Improbable knowing. In Trent Dougherty (ed.), Evidentialism and its Discontents. Oxford University Press.

Williamson, Timothy (2014). Very Improbable Knowing. Erkenntnis 79 (5):971-999.

Wimmer, Heinz & Perner, Josef (1983). Beliefs about beliefs: Representation and constraining function of wrong beliefs in young children's understanding of deception. Cognition 13, 103–128.

Worsnip, Alex (2018a). The Conflict of Evidence and Coherence. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 96 (1):3-44.

Worsnip, Alex (2018b). What is (In)coherence? Oxford Studies in Metaethics 13:184-206.

Worsnip, Alex (2021). Fitting Things Together: Coherence and the Demands of Structural Rationality. New York: Oxford University Press.

Worsnip, Alex (this volume). Evidence-Coherence Conflicts Revisited.