

## The Epistemic vs. the Practical

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Let us begin with a familiar story:

### *Red Red Wine*

Your partner Phil has struggled with an alcohol problem for many years, but after promising you he's done, he has been sober for eight months, a new record for him.

Tonight Phil attended a departmental reception for a visiting speaker for the first time since joining AA. He stumbles home at 2 am, waking you up. You can't help noticing that there's a large wine stain on his sleeve. Phil notices your expression as you look at it, and says "Oh, that's embarrassing! I actually didn't have anything to drink. At the reception, the visiting speaker got very excited about metaethics, and while gesticulating wildly, she managed to spill her wine on me." (based on Basu and Schroeder 2019)

What should you believe in this situation? It looks like you have good evidence that Phil has been drinking – maybe he always used to have a wine stain in just the same spot when he was drinking, and you know that good people not only give in to addiction in just such social contexts, but also are apt to lie about it. A detached observer faced with such evidence might thus reasonably believe Phil has fallen off the wagon. But maybe as a partner and friend you shouldn't think so, given that friends give each other the benefit of a doubt, as Simon Keller (2004) and Sarah Stroud (2006) suggest. If so, what you *epistemically* ought to believe might differ from what you *practically* ought to believe. I'm going to argue that this tension cannot and need not be rationally resolved in the sense of combining reasons from the epistemic and

practical domains to determine what we *just plain* or *all-things-considered* ought to believe. Instead, a kind of Dualism of Practical and Theoretical Reason is true: both practical and epistemic reasons for belief are independently authoritative, potentially giving rise to conflicting demands that leave us subject to warranted criticism regardless of how we respond.

### 1. Formal and Authoritative Normativity

We use normative language in a broad range of cases. We don't just say "You ought to be kind to your brother", but also "You can't wear those shorts for dinner", "You should move the rook to f4", and "You must sign the contract on all of the pages". As these examples suggest, in ordinary talk we also use a variety of expressions to talk about deontic modality, but as is customary, I will focus on 'ought' here for simplicity. Linguists generally analyze such *formally normative* talk in terms of contextually determined standards that rank relevant possibilities (Dowell 2013). Since there's a wide variety of such standards, formally normative talk is cheap and widespread. We use it both for broad domains, such as aesthetics, and for specific activities, like games (Schroeder 2010).<sup>1</sup>

Where standard-relative demands are determined by the balance of competing considerations, we also naturally talk about *reasons* in a formal sense. For example, I'll say that a consideration that plays a for-necktie role in explaining why you etiquette-wise ought to wear a necktie (maybe the fact that the invitation says 'formal attire') is an *etiquette reason* for you to wear a necktie (cf. Broome 2013). After all, such considerations do seem to play the kind of roles that normative reasons characteristically do. As Barry Maguire and Jack Woods argue, "In the context of the relevant activity, [such considerations] are the sorts of thing that could be offered as advice, or justification, or used as reasons in reasoning" (2020,

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<sup>1</sup> To avoid complicating things, I'll ignore orthogonal debates about subjective and objective oughts.

228). So, if someone asks you why you're wearing a necktie, you could say "The invitation said 'formal attire'", you could reason from getting such an invitation to the conclusion that you etiquette-wise ought to wear a necktie, and so on.

Now, I can agree that according to etiquette, I ought to wear a black tie, and yet ask "But *ought* I wear a black tie?". As is commonly said, this second 'ought' is an unsubscripted one, a 'just plain' ought, expressing questions or conclusions about what I should *all things considered* do. As the example suggests, if I ought to F in a subscripted sense, it doesn't automatically follow that I all-things-considered ought to F. Indeed, without further reasons, it's fine for me to say in the etiquette case "I ought to wear a black tie, but so what?" That's entirely unsurprising, given how easy it is to generate oughts by way of conventions or the internal standards of success that many activities have.

To be sure, it's not only an open question whether I ought to wear a black tie if I etiquette-wise ought to do so, but also whether I ought to donate to Oxfam if I morally ought to do so. But setting moral error theory aside, it's not because moral reasons carry no weight without a further explanation, but because they might be outweighed by other *authoritative* reasons, such as prudential ones (which may lend their authority to reasons that would otherwise be only formally normative). Authoritative reasons are not merely formally normative, but carry genuine normative oomph. Exactly what that amounts to is hard to spell out, and it's one of the things I aim to get a handle on in this paper, but the difference in authority between the two formally normative domains of etiquette and morality is an intuitive starting point. It's a first-order question which domains of reasons are authoritative. I'll assume that at least morality and prudence are, as well as reasons of love and friendship. I'll stay neutral here on the metaphysical question of what *makes* some reasons authoritative – perhaps it is a *sui generis* kind of fact, perhaps it is that all agents must treat them as

reasons (or will be motivated by them) insofar as they are rational and fully informed, or something completely different.

Plausibly, the demands of etiquette bear on what I just plain ought to do just to the extent that I have moral or prudential reason to abide by etiquette. Still, it won't do to *define* authoritative reasons in terms of what bears directly on what we just plain ought to do (*pace* Mantel 2019, Maguire and Woods 2020). After all, consider the view known as the Dualism of Practical Reason, according to which there are two independent and equally authoritative normative domains, prudence and morality. As David Copp puts it, for such dualism, it is the case "that neither morality nor self-interest overrides the other, that there simply are verdicts and reasons of these different kinds, and that there is never an overall verdict as to which action is required simpliciter in situations where moral reasons and reasons of self-interest conflict" (2007, 285). I'm not saying this view is correct – indeed, I'll assume without argument that it's false. But Dualism of Practical Reason is certainly *coherent* in spite of denying that there is anything we just plain ought to do. But it wouldn't be coherent if reasons could only be authoritative in virtue of bearing on what we just plain ought to do.

So we need to find what I'll call the marks of authority elsewhere. I think that what is key to authoritativeness and identifying it is the *fittingness* of responses to compliance and non-compliance. While the notion of fittingness, as I'll understand it, is not relativized to a domain – it is 'just plain fittingness', as we might say – it is always the fittingness of one or another *kind* of response.<sup>2</sup> This is to be expected, if fittingness is understood in terms of a standard of correctness that is internal to an attitude, as it is common to think (e.g. McHugh and Way 2016). Consequently, an attitude can be fitting whether or not we ought to have it in any sense. For my purposes, the crucial thing is what the fittingness conditions of critical

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<sup>2</sup> It is also possible to be a *pluralist about fittingness* (Kauppinen 2014) and thus distinguish between, say, moral and aesthetic fittingness. This would require a further criterion for authoritative kinds of fittingness.

attitudes are. My claim about them is that only if we fail to do something we ought to do in light of some standard that is genuinely authoritative, it is *ceteris paribus* fitting to have a relevant critical attitude toward us, which is not the case for non-authoritative standards. That is, critical attitudes towards an agent are fitting only if the agent had sufficient authoritative reason to respond otherwise than they did.

To see how we can make use of this criterion, let's first consider the following scenario:

*Black Tie*

Etiquette-wise, I ought to wear a black tie to a formal dinner. But as it happens, given my deserved reputation as an eccentric, nobody minds in the least if I don't do so.

Thus, if I don't wear a tie, it won't hurt me or anyone else. What's more, it would be costly for me to wear a black tie, as I'd have to rush out to buy one instead of hanging out with friends whom I haven't seen since the pandemic started.

I'll assume here Philippa Foot's (1972) point that the demands of etiquette apply to you even if you don't care about them. My first claim about authority, then, is that in this scenario, I'm not in any way a fitting target of a critical attitude if I don't wear a black tie to dinner, even though I etiquette-wise ought to wear one (and I could do so). You can say, of course, that etiquette requires it or that it would be better in terms of etiquette to wear one, but that's not a criticism of *me*, unless it goes together with the claim that *I* had in this instance sufficient non-etiquette reason to do what etiquette requires (cf. Kiesewetter 2017, 26–27). This is parallel to deliberately making a chess move that makes it likely you'll lose, say exchanging your queen for a pawn, in the course of trying to entice a child to play more chess. Strictly from a chess perspective, we can say that it's a bad move and that chess-wise, you ought not have made it, and in that sense 'criticize' the move itself. But it doesn't follow that it is fitting

to have a critical attitude toward *you* for making it, when you lacked sufficient authoritative reason to make the best feasible move. In contrast, if you made a similar move in a championship game in which your interests are at stake, you might be criticizable in this way.

We can formulate the following general principle at work in these cases as follows:

*The Authority-Criticism Link*

If it is fitting to criticize S for failing to F when she ought to do so relative to domain D, the demands of domain D must be authoritative (and not outweighed by other authoritative reasons) or she must have sufficient further authoritative reason to comply with D's demands.<sup>3</sup>

My second scenario, *Life on Mars*, highlights a different mark of authoritative normativity:

Elon is a highly successful businessman who has dreamt of flying to Mars ever since he was a child. Some years ago, he started a side project that has now developed a rocket capable of taking him there. (It serves no scientific or other purpose.) However, completing it will cost \$3 billion, which he has, but could also use to eradicate malaria from East Africa, as he well knows.

I take it that all things considered, if he has to choose, Elon should give up his childhood dream and eradicate malaria. If he does fly to Mars, he is rightly subject to severe moral criticism as selfish and uncaring, since moral demands outweigh other authoritative reasons in this case. But importantly, unlike me in the scenario in which I rush out to buy a black tie when it serves no moral or prudential or friendship-related purpose, he has a kind of a defense available to him. It's an open question whether he merits being called *irrational* just

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<sup>3</sup> In independently developed work, Sebastian Schmidt (ms) defends a related thesis, according to which for a norm to be authoritative, it must be possible that a subject is criticizable merely in virtue of failing to comply with it.

for being selfish (cf. Williams 1981). And that's not just because his views may be internally coherent, but because he can appeal to authoritative reasons to defend his choice, even if they are in fact outweighed by other reasons. I'll say that he has a partial defense that shows he is exercising his capacity to respond to genuine reasons – briefly, *displays him as a substantively rational agent*, even if a mistaken one. So, because the prudential domain really is authoritative, when Elon decides to fly to Mars, he is responding correctly to genuine reasons rather than fetishizing prudence, even if he's giving them too much weight relative to others. That this type of partially rationalizing defense is in principle available shows that prudence is non-derivatively authoritative. The following principle captures this idea:

*The Authority-Defensibility Link*

If S Fs when a) she ought-relative-to-domain D to F while b) she ought *not* to F in light of all authoritative practical reasons, but c) she nevertheless has a partial defense that displays her as a substantively rational agent, the demands of domain D must be authoritative.<sup>4</sup>

I'll next use these marks of authority to investigate the status of epistemic reasons.

## **2. Why Epistemic and Practical Reasons For Belief Don't Combine**

Let's next turn to reasons to believe and their relationship to practical reasons. Like reasons for action, pro tanto normative reasons for belief are considerations that count to some extent in favour of believing. There are also considerations that count in favour of *suspending* belief, roughly adopting a stance of committed neutrality with respect to a subject matter. I'll accept

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<sup>4</sup> In somewhat similar vein, Benjamin Kiesewetter (forthcoming, 11) argues that reasons that provide partial justification in any domain are (in my terms) authoritatively normative. Because I agree with e.g. Maguire and Woods (2020) that non-authoritative reasons can provide domain-relative justification, I think more is needed to distinguish authoritative from non-authoritative reasons. Providing a partial defense as a substantively rational agent is one way to going beyond domain-relative justification. (For more on the relationship between rationality and reason-responsiveness, see Kauppinen 2021.)

here the common view that although these reasons are *normative*, for R to be a reason for S to F, it must be possible for R to be the *reason for which* S F-s (the Followability Constraint) and perhaps that it must be possible to *reason well from* R to F-ing (the Reasoning Constraint) (e.g. Shah 2006).

Some reasons for belief are unquestionably *epistemic*. In particular, *evidential* reasons for or against belief that *p* bear on the truth of *p*, perhaps making it more or less probable. Because evidence for *p*, when possessed by the subject, bears positively on being epistemically justified in believing that *p* or on knowing that *p*, it clearly amounts to an epistemic reason to believe that *p* if anything does (cf. Paakkunainen 2018, 125–126). It's uncontroversial that there are epistemic reasons in the formal sense in which there are etiquette reasons, even if not everyone agrees they're authoritative.

What about the various benefits and harms of believing, suspending, and disbelieving? Some of them may be *practical* reasons for belief, although the Followability and Reasoning Constraints famously rule out some of the most obvious consequences. Given belief's orientation to truth, that someone would give you a million dollars is not a reason *for which* you could believe that Nixon is still President. Such considerations are much more plausibly reasons to *bring it about* that you have the belief (e.g. Berker 2018). But there are more plausible contenders for practical reasons for belief, especially in situations in which evidence isn't decisive one way or another. Consider self-fulfilling beliefs (Antill 2019): it may be that you only succeed at a performance if you believe that you will succeed. Here, it seems possible to psych oneself up precisely by telling oneself "I will succeed if I believe I will, so I will believe I'll succeed!". And we might rightly believe well of friends in excess of evidence precisely because they're our friends (Stroud 2006).

Given that there are at least plausible contenders for practical reasons for belief, I'm going to assume for the sake of argument that they exist, though I have my doubts about



theoretical accounts of them (e.g. Rinard 2019). Now, if there are both epistemic and practical reasons to believe, it's a very real possibility that they *conflict* with each other.

Consider the following case based on Kate Nolfi's (2021) work:

*Public Defender*

Daphne is the public defender in a criminal case. Her evidence suggests it is overwhelming likely that the accused, her client, is guilty. Nevertheless, Daphne believes that her client is innocent, because she knows she is able to present a much more compelling defense in the courtroom than she otherwise could when she does so.

Should Daphne all-things-considered believe as she does? (I will assume throughout that insofar as ought implies can, she *can* believe for the relevant reasons, and has no excuse or exemption for failing to do so.) Assuming she has epistemic reasons against believing and practical reasons for believing, it must be possible to weigh her practical and epistemic reasons against each other either *directly* or *indirectly* for there to be anything she all-things-considered ought to believe.

The first question, then, is whether epistemic and practical reasons can be weighed *directly* against each other, assuming they are both independently authoritative. On the simplest picture, they might add up in the way that hedonic reasons weigh against each other on the basis of the quantity of pleasure or pain produced by each option. But there doesn't seem to be anything like a common measure in terms of which to compare the strength of evidence for a belief and any practical benefits or harms of believing so (or suspending). Such incommensurability is hardly decisive, though, since similar arguments could be made about weighing moral and prudential reasons against each other while granting they can be combined (Meylan 2020). Still, we might think that the situation is worse here for direct

comparison, since in this case we're trying to weigh *object-given* reasons to do with the truth of the content of the belief and *state-given* reasons to do with the (possibly instrumental) goodness or badness of believing regardless of truth or falsity, to use Parfit's (2011) terms.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, let's set these worries aside, since there a different, decisive challenge to direct weighing in terms of the *different combinatorial properties* of epistemic and practical reasons, pressed in particular by Selim Berker (2018). The crux is this: if you have equally strong practical reasons to, say, drink lassi and to drink kefir, it's rationally permissible to choose either option. In contrast, if you have equally strong epistemic reasons to believe that masks prevent infection and that it's not the case that masks prevent infection, it is not rationally permissible to believe either. As Stewart Cohen pithily puts it, "I am not rationally permitted to believe that a fair coin toss will land heads" (2016, 430). Instead, if you form any attitude, it should be *suspension*, which lacks a practical analogue – as Neil Peart said, if you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice. Because of these differences, even if we could somehow commensurate epistemic and practical reasons for belief, they couldn't be directly weighed against each other (e.g. Howard 2020, 2230–2232). Suppose, for example, that Renaldo has both an epistemic reason with strength 5 and a practical reason with strength 5 to believe that he will win and an epistemic reason with strength 5 and a practical reason with strength 5 to believe that he will not win. What should he believe, all things considered? If his epistemic reasons are weighed against each other, the outcome is that he should believe neither; if his practical reasons are weighed against each other, the result is that he may believe either. How, then, could we combine these contradictory verdicts, if we assume that both epistemic and practical reasons are

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<sup>5</sup> Parfit (2011) argues that the distinction between object-given and state-given reasons coincides with the distinction between right and wrong kind of reasons for an attitude. But even if some state-given reasons are of the right kind (Schroeder 2021), it doesn't follow that there's a natural way of weighing them against object-given ones.

independently authoritative? Alternatively, what principle for balancing all these authoritative reasons at once would not be *ad hoc*?<sup>6</sup>

Given the problems with direct weighing, it's a much more promising idea that practical and epistemic reasons weigh against each other *indirectly*, in particular so that epistemic reasons bear on what we just plain ought to believe only insofar as they bear on practical aims. Here's what I think is the most plausible model (drawing in particular on Maguire and Woods 2020, Steglich-Petersen and Skipper 2020, Mantel 2019, and Rinard 2015):

*Practical Ought Priority (POP)*

Whether S just plain ought to believe that *p* depends a) on the strength of her authoritative practical reasons directly for or against believing that *p* and b) on the strength of her authoritative practical reasons to comply with epistemic demands (or achieve epistemic aims, like believing truths and avoiding falsehoods) and thus derivatively on what she epistemically ought to believe, which is determined exclusively by her epistemic reasons for and against believing that *p* (or, alternatively, evidence for and against *p*).

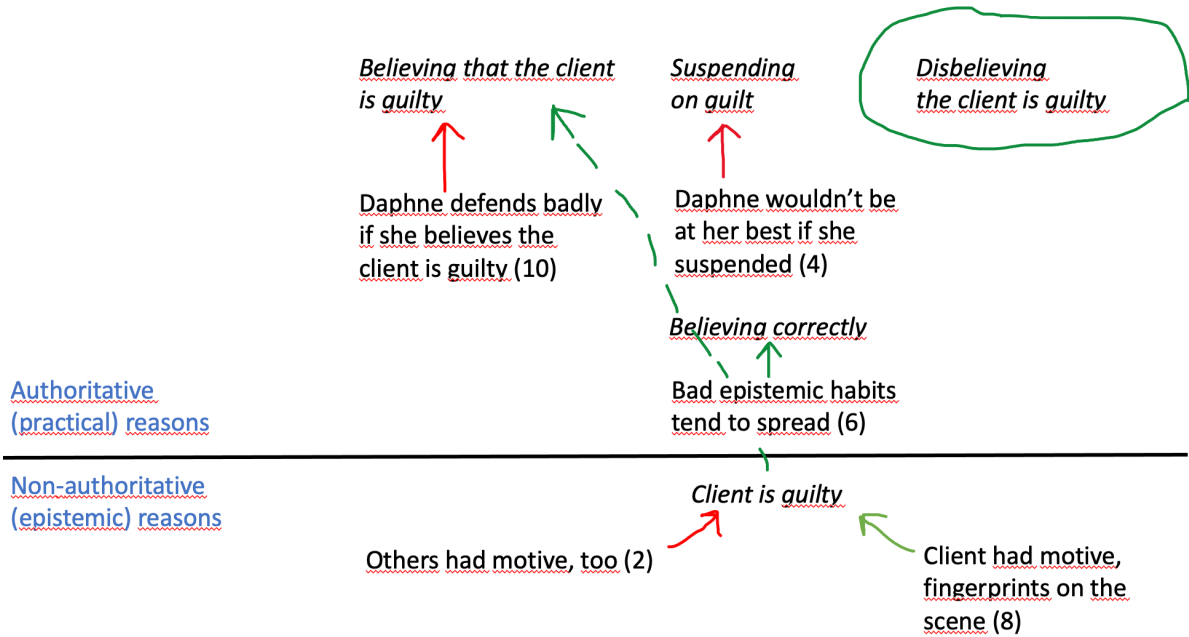
According to POP's two-tier approach, epistemic reasons interact only with each other to determine what we *epistemically ought* to believe, but this bears on what we *just plain ought* to believe only to the extent that we have practical reason to believe epistemically correctly, just as happens in the case of etiquette. So, unlike for traditional pragmatism, the epistemic

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<sup>6</sup> One influential proposal that seems to me to be *ad hoc* is Andrew Reisner's (2008, 24) early suggestion that what we ought to believe is determined by epistemic reasons only, unless significant enough practical reasons are at stake, in which case it is only practical reasons that count. It avoids the issue of different combinatorial properties only by avoiding combination, and replacing it with a threshold of practical significance. The same goes for Chris Howard's (2020) revised version of the proposal, which holds that different kinds of reason have lexical priority above and below the threshold.

domain remains autonomous in that there are (formal) epistemic reasons, and practical reasons do not bear on what we epistemically ought to believe.

It's easiest to explain how POP is meant to work by looking at what it says about Public Defender. Here's a picture of it, with green arrows indicating reasons for and red arrows reasons against, and numbers in brackets indicating strength:



On this model, only practical reasons bear directly on what we ought to believe. That Daphne would defend badly is a strong practical reason against believing her client is guilty, and that she wouldn't be at her best is a moderate reason against suspending. However, Daphne also has a practical reason to believe epistemically correctly about her client, for example because bad epistemic habits tend to spread, causing trouble later (this is a standing reason to believe whatever the balance of one's epistemic reasons favours). In virtue of that practical reason, where her epistemic reasons point to matters indirectly to what she should believe. In this case, they favour believing that her client is guilty, since evidence for guilt in the form of motive and fingerprints is much stronger than evidence against it. So, Daphne has a derivative practical reason to believe her client is guilty. Its strength presumably equals the

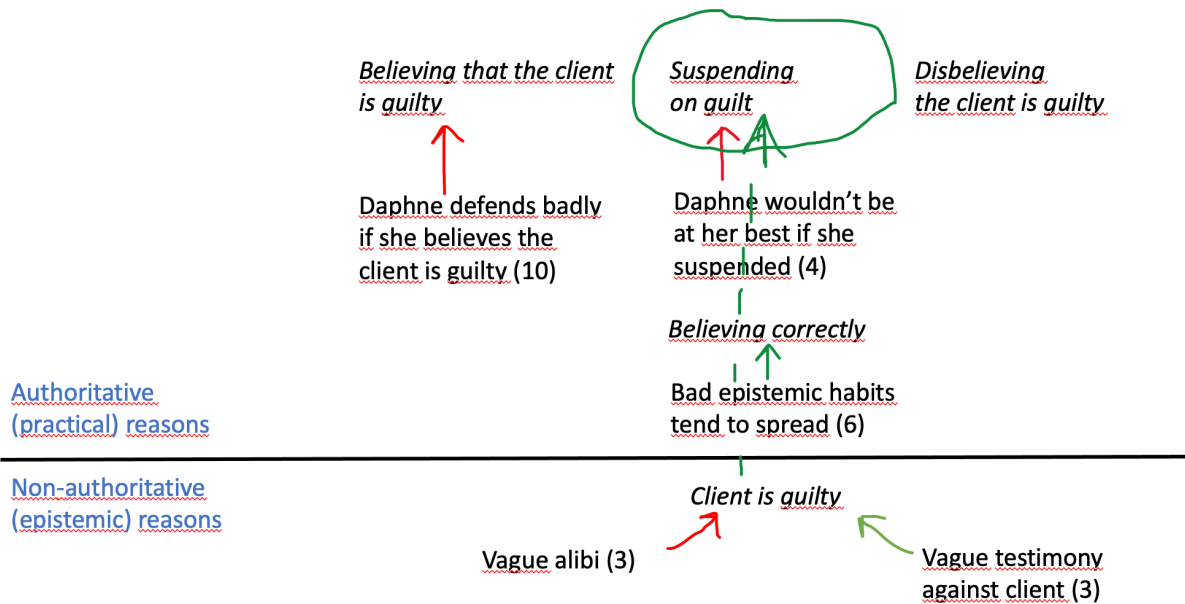
strength of her practical reason to believe epistemically correctly. However, since the practical reason to believe correctly is in this instance outweighed by the practical reason against believing in guilt, POP says that all-things-considered, she ought not believe that her client is guilty. This leaves open the options of suspending belief or disbelieving. Given that Daphne has a practical reason against suspending, the option she all-things-considered ought to take is disbelieving that her client is guilty.<sup>7</sup>

On this picture, then, epistemic reasons play a role in determining what one all things considered ought to believe in the same way as etiquette reasons do. If I have an etiquette reason to wear a tie, it weighs for wearing a tie at most to the extent that I have an authoritative practical reason to do whatever etiquette says. If that reason is outweighed by, say, the prudential reason given by discomfort of wearing a tie, I all things considered ought not wear a tie, however weighty the reason within etiquette. And this is basically why we should reject POP and other similar proposals for indirect balancing in the case of belief. They don't accord epistemic reasons their proper normative weight. One way to see this is to adapt an argument Berker develops against a related account he labels the 'double-weighting view'<sup>8</sup>. Consider first the following variant:

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<sup>7</sup> To be precise, there's also the option of forming no attitude at all toward the client's guilt. Let's postulate there's also strong practical reason against this and set the option aside.

<sup>8</sup> The double-weighting view is suggested in passing by Reisner (2008). It differs from POP in that according to it, there is always a practical reason of high weight to believe in accordance with epistemic demands. Chris Howard (2020, 2236) rightly objects that this is implausible.



Here all the reasons above the line are as before, but this time Daphne's evidence, which consists of a vague alibi and an equally vague testimony against her client, is evenly balanced, so she epistemically ought to suspend. Evidently, she has no reason to believe her client is guilty. In virtue of her reason to believe epistemically correctly, she has a fairly strong practical reason to suspend – strong enough to outweigh her reason not to suspend. Since she has no practical reason to disbelieve that her client is guilty, POP says that she ought to suspend, all-things-considered.

Now, this looks fine so far, but what happens if Daphne's evidence changes? Suppose she gets strong evidence her client did it after all, and the client's alibi is undermined. Surprisingly, this brings us back to the first scenario – her epistemic reason to believe in guilt, however strong, is outweighed by the practical reason to believe the client is not guilty, and she should disbelieve the client is guilty, given that there's practical reason against suspension. (The picture would look the same as fig. 1 above, except for even stronger epistemic reason to believe in guilt.) But, as Berker says in his parallel discussion, surely it can't be the case that getting *more evidence* for a proposition makes it the case that instead of suspending belief in it, we ought to *disbelieve* it (2018, 446).

Barry Maguire and Jack Woods reply on behalf of POP that this principle is only true for epistemic ought, not for just plain ought (2020, 236). But this stretches credulity, because here what we just plain ought to believe changes only because of change in epistemic reasons while practical reasons (including the reason to believe whatever she epistemically ought to believe) stay exactly the same – and yet we just plain ought to believe the *opposite* of where the epistemic reasons point to! It's not just that epistemic reasons have only indirect weight in determining what we just plain ought to believe, but they have *anti-weight* in such scenarios in which they conflict with strong practical reasons. That's a big bullet to bite.

It has recently been suggested that this outcome could be avoided if we take into account the putative fact that when our evidence points to  $p$ , suspending belief is epistemically *better* than disbelieving that  $p$  (Reisner ms) – it is an epistemic 'consolation prize', to use the language of Asbjorn Steglich-Petersen and Mattias Skipper (2020). They develop an instrumentalist version of POP that they claim yields the right result in the Berker scenarios on this basis. For them, evidence for  $p$  is an instrumental practical reason to believe that  $p$  whose strength is a function of the strength of the practical reason to believe correctly and the extent to which believing that  $p$  promotes the aim of believing correctly. As such, it can be weighed against other instrumental or non-instrumental practical reasons for or against believing that  $p$ . Crucially, they hold that in a case like the last Daphne scenario, suspension promotes the epistemic aims of believing truths and avoiding falsehoods better than disbelief, so that "there is more epistemic instrumental reason to suspend judgment about  $p$  than to disbelieve  $p$ " (2020, 1092). From this, they take it to follow that Daphne just plain ought to suspend rather than disbelieve.

But even if we grant that there are epistemic consolation prizes, it doesn't necessarily follow Daphne ought to suspend on the instrumentalist/POP account. After all, in my variant of the scenario, there is also a practical reason (of strength 4) against suspending. Steglich-

Petersen and Skipper grant that the epistemic instrumental reason to suspend is weaker than the epistemic instrumental reason to believe, since it doesn't promote the epistemic aims equally well. So if the strength of the (defeated) instrumental reason to believe is 6, the second-best instrumental reason to suspend might have strength of, say, 3. (We can certainly find cases with the right comparative strengths.) And that would mean it's defeated by the practical reason against suspending in the last Daphne scenario. In that case, the sophisticated instrumentalist view entails that she just plain ought to disbelieve. So it, too, entails that acquiring more evidence for a proposition can make it the case that one ought to disbelieve rather than suspend, and thus doesn't get around Berker's challenge.

The second, and more fundamental, reason to reject POP is that epistemic reasons bear what I called the marks of authority, and consequently are on par with morality and prudence rather than etiquette or chess. This means that contrary to what POP assumes, their normative force isn't derivative from some other authoritative reasons. This is ultimately *why* two-tier views like POP and epistemic instrumentalism yield wrong results: they silence or defeat epistemic reasons when they conflict with or lack support from practical reasons, *as if* they didn't have independent normative authority.

Let's start with rational defensibility. I'll grant for the sake of argument that Daphne in Public Defender is morally criticizable if she believes that her client is guilty, since it's morally important that she does the best job she can. However:

1. If Daphne has a defense against criticism for believing that her client is guilty that displays her as a substantively rational agent in spite of the balance of authoritative practical reasons favouring not believing in the client's guilt, she must have sufficient authoritative reason of some kind to believe her client is guilty. (From the Authority-Defensibility Link)



2. Daphne has a defense against criticism for believing that her client is guilty that displays her as a substantively rational agent in spite of the balance of authoritative practical reasons favouring not believing in the client's guilt.

(Specifically, Daphne's defense is that she has strong evidence that her client is guilty.)

3. The only domain on which Daphne has sufficient reason to believe her client is guilty is the epistemic.
4. So, epistemic reasons are authoritative.

Earlier, I claimed that in *Life on Mars*, Elon is a legitimate target of moral criticism, but has a partial defense as a substantively rational agent in virtue of the fact that his self-interest is a source of authoritative reasons. If anything, Daphne's epistemic defense for her status as substantively rational is stronger than Elon's prudential one. At the same time, just as in Elon's case, it's not a defense against *moral* criticism, but specifically against charges of substantive irrationality. Both contrast sharply with my lack of a similar defense if I make the costly effort to get a tie in Black Tie, since in the absence of authoritative reason to abide by etiquette norms, such effort manifests a kind of *fetish* for etiquette rather than rational agency. It's no fetish to believe what your evidence supports even if you morally shouldn't do so.

Take criticizability next. Here's the argument:

1. If Daphne lacks sufficient practical reason to believe epistemically correctly but it is nevertheless fitting to have a critical attitude toward her for believing what she epistemically ought not believe, epistemic reasons must be independently authoritative (and it can't be the case they're outweighed by other authoritative reasons). (From the Authority-Criticism Link)
2. Daphne epistemically ought not believe that her client is innocent.

3. Daphne lacks sufficient practical reason to comply with what she epistemically ought to believe.
4. If Daphne believes that her client is innocent, it is fitting to have a critical attitude toward her.
5. So, epistemic reasons are authoritative and aren't outweighed by other authoritative reasons in the scenario.

Here, too, Public Defender contrasts sharply with the scenario in which I fail to comply with the demands of etiquette by wearing a black tie. As I noted, no critical attitude towards me is appropriate in that case when I lack sufficient practical reason to dress correctly, as it were. But here, a critical attitude toward Daphne is fitting. Which critical attitude? As I've argued elsewhere (Kauppinen 2018), when it comes to epistemic accountability, then roughly speaking and other things being equal, it's fitting to *epistemically distrust* Daphne more in response to her norm-violation, even if there's no reason to doubt her honesty or cooperativeness. (More on this later.) More broadly, it's appropriate to downgrade her role in relevant epistemic practices on account of her falling short of relevant epistemic ideals. If she genuinely believes her client is innocent in the face of massive counterevidence, then before taking her word on matter of guilt and innocence, others had better double-check whether her practical interests are in play – to treat her with a degree of suspicion and possibly urge others to do likewise.

Together, I believe these arguments make a pretty strong case that the epistemic is an irreducibly authoritative normative domain.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, when it comes to determining what we ought to believe, epistemic reasons cannot weigh against practical ones only indirectly, derivatively from practical reasons to believe epistemically correctly.

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<sup>9</sup> It is a further, important question *why* that is the case. I cannot address it here.

### 3. The Dualism of Practical and Theoretical Reason

The next step is to draw a big picture conclusion from the previous section:

1. There are both epistemic and practical reasons to believe.
2. If there is something we genuinely, just plain all-things-considered ought to believe, it is determined by the balance of practical and epistemic reasons to believe either directly or indirectly.
3. Practical and epistemic reasons can't be directly balanced (because they combine differently).
4. Practical and epistemic reasons can't be indirectly balanced (because epistemic reasons are independently authoritative, so that their normative contribution doesn't derive from practical reasons to believe whatever the evidence supports).<sup>10</sup>
5. So, there is nothing we just plain all-things considered ought to believe.

The first premise is an assumption I haven't defended apart from appealing to some plausible cases, so I'll grant it's possible that there are no practical reasons to believe in the first place. But *if* there are such reasons, they don't combine with epistemic reasons to determine what we *just plain ought* to believe, so there is no such thing. Instead, they determine what we *practically* ought to believe. Epistemic reasons, in turn, determine what we *epistemically* ought to believe. This is the thesis I called the Dualism of Practical and Theoretical Reason (henceforth, just Dualism for short).<sup>11</sup> According to it, while talk of all-things-considered oughts to believe is certainly intelligible, it presupposes something false, namely that all

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<sup>10</sup> As a reviewer pointed out, I haven't argued against all possible ways of indirect balancing, so this premise stands only provisionally.

<sup>11</sup> It's surprisingly hard to find defenses of such a view. Kelly (2003, 619) articulates a version of it without clearly endorsing it. Fred Feldman argues for the existence of independent moral, prudential, and epistemic (etc.) oughts on the basis of general skepticism about the existence of just plain oughts (2000, 692–694).

reasons bearing on belief can be combined one way or another. It is worth noting that Dualism is compatible with POP being true of what we *practically* ought to believe, all-things-considered. Indeed, I believe it is the best model for this, because it takes into account our practical interest in believing epistemically correctly. What I insist on is simply that epistemic reasons also directly determine what we epistemically ought to believe, and that this ought, too, is independently and irreducibly authoritative.

In the rest of this section, then, I discuss four explanatory pay-offs of Dualism and a challenge that helps clarify it.

### *3.1 Two Deliberative Roles*

First, Dualism explains manifest differences in the *deliberative roles* of practical and epistemic reasons. To see this, let's start with the idea that the 'just plain ought' is also aptly called the *deliberative* ought, the ought we must comply with by forming the corresponding intention once all the reasons are weighed. Benjamin Kiesewetter formulates this nicely:

We can call the 'ought' that is provided by what we have decisive reason to do the deliberative 'ought', because it is the notion of 'ought' that figures in the question "what ought I to do?", as it is asked from the standpoint of deliberation, and in deliberative conclusions or all-things-considered judgements of the form "I ought to F". (Kiesewetter 2017, 9) More specifically, the deliberative 'ought' is the 'ought' appealed to in the common idea [...] that it is irrational not to intend what one believes one ought to do. (ibid., 10)

Consider a typical example of practical deliberation. To begin with, you ask yourself, against a background of cultural scripts and personal commitments that narrow down your menu of options to a few: "Should I stay or should I go?" Then you try to think of reasons pro and con

– “If I go there will be trouble”, “If I stay there will be double”. You conclude the deliberation with “I guess I oughta go”. If this really is the deliberative, unsubscripted ought, you’re now plausibly under an *enkratic* requirement of rationality that tells you to form the intention to go, or at least either to intend to go or rethink what you ought to do (see 3.2 for more on this). Then, perhaps, you form the intention and go.

All this is quite different from paradigmatic epistemic deliberation. First of all, the question you ask yourself might be: “Who fired the first shots of the First World War?” Then you look for evidence for various possibilities, and maybe eventually discover that Austria shelled Belgrade on July 29, before other powers had joined in. So you conclude by forming the belief that the Austrians fired the first shots.

This second process differs in at least two major ways from the first. First, we *don’t* typically even ask the question whether we ought to believe something, but rather just ask whether something is the case. (If we do ask whether we ought to believe, we’re probably focused on whether our evidence is reliable or sufficient.<sup>12</sup>) Second, if we do conclude that we ought to believe that *p*, it doesn’t normally result in an intention to believe that *p*, both because the intention is unnecessary (at this point, we typically already believe that *p*) and because it’s pointless (intending to believe that *p* rarely results in belief that *p*) (Feldman 2000; Shah 2006).

These are both significant differences from deliberation in which we seek answers to practical questions. They are easily explained if we simply admit that the epistemic ought, though authoritative, is distinct from the deliberative ought, the ought that generates a rational requirement to intend (or change one’s mind about reasons). If the ‘just plain ought’ is the deliberative ought, then that phrase is just a roundabout way to talk about the practical ought.

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<sup>12</sup> I owe this observation to Maria Lasonen-Aarnio.

### 3.2 Two Kinds of Enkrasia

Second, Dualism explains the *peculiarities of doxastic enkrasia*. It's clear that familiar enkrasia principles won't apply to beliefs about what one ought to believe, since they would require beliefs to be up to us in the sense of depending on intentions to believe. Yet many think that beliefs about what one ought to believe do generate a kind of rational requirement. To avoid begging questions, let's stick with Daphne. Suppose she believes she ought to believe that her client is innocent in virtue of considering both the practical benefits of believing so and the relative unimportance of believing correctly in this case. And let's say she simultaneously believes she ought to believe her client is guilty in the face of the overwhelming evidence. It seems, first of all, that she could coherently think these things, which is easily explained if her thoughts were described in terms of her believing that she *practically* ought to believe her client is innocent and *epistemically* ought to believe he is guilty.

Second, it's clear that if Daphne has such conflicting ought-beliefs, the conflict is not the same as between an all-things-considered ought judgments and a domain-relative ought judgments. After all, domain-relative ought judgments that are subsumed under an all-things-considered ought judgments *don't* generate any enkrasia requirements. It's not just there's no rational requirement to do what you believe you *etiquette-wise* ought to do, but also no rational requirement to do what you believe you *prudentially* ought to do. That's a reflection of the fact that reasons from these domains might be outweighed in arriving at the all-things-considered conclusion that takes them into account. In contrast, if I believe I epistemically ought to believe that *p*, many claim that I am under a rational requirement to believe that *p* (which, again, is not the same as a rational requirement to *intend* to believe that *p*). To be sure, it has often been noted that in cases of misleading higher-order evidence, I may

simultaneously have sufficient epistemic reason to believe that not- $p$ , which complicates matters – perhaps I’m simultaneously under two conflicting kinds of epistemic or rational requirement (Lasonen-Aarnio 2020). Be that as it may, at least the Dualist has a ready explanation of why the epistemic ought isn’t simply subsumed under some all-things-considered ought, beliefs about which would be the sole source of enkrasia requirements, and thus why we need two separate accounts of enkrasia.

### 3.3 *Mixed Responsibility-Responses*

What someone ought to do or believe has implications for how others should respond to what they actually do. In particular, when they fail to do as they ought, they may be liable to negative attitudes and criticism that expresses them. An important part of the case for Dualism is that sometimes a *mixed response* seems to be fitting.

Let’s begin with the different ways of holding someone responsible when they lack an excuse or exemption. When someone fails to do as they morally ought to do in cases where it’s also what they all-things-considered ought to do, *blame* in its different varieties may be the fitting response. It might consist in Strawsonian negative reactive attitudes like anger and resentment towards the person (Strawson 1962) or in Scanlonian modification of one’s relationship with the person (Scanlon 2008). The details don’t matter here. What is important is that different responses are merited when one fails to do as one ought to when the underlying reasons are prudential (perhaps the analogue is some sort of disappointment or even pity), and, most pertinently, when one fails to believe as one epistemically ought. On the latter issue, as I mentioned, I’ve argued in the past that holding S epistemically accountable for failures to comply with epistemic norms is a matter of reducing epistemic trust or increasing epistemic distrust in them in response, and more generally downgrading their role in epistemic practices, other things being equal (including faith in their moral uprightness),

and being disposed to communicate this to them if suitably situated (Kauppinen 2018). While I think this is an epistemic *analogue* of blame, others, such as Cameron Boulton (2021), go further and argue that negatively modifying one's default epistemic relationship to another in response to a norm-violation simply *is* a distinctively epistemic form of blame. Like blame, it's something that it's not nice to be the recipient of (cf. Fricker 2007) and that puts pressure on the recipient to conform to the relevant norms when made manifest to them. Either way, there's a distinctively epistemic way of holding people responsible.

Let's go back to Daphne again and ask whether it might be fitting to hold her somehow responsible for her belief. Let's first assume for the sake of argument that she ought all-things-considered believe her client is not guilty to do her job as well as possible. That should be a full defense against criticism – since we're assuming that there's only one authoritative ought, there's nothing she authoritatively ought to do that she's failing to do. As Nolfi says, Daphne's "believing that her client is likely innocent is to be praised and encouraged, not criticized, condemned, or rebuked" (2021, 6721). But as I've already pointed out, it is still fitting to hold her epistemically responsible – when it comes to the question of whether Daphne's clients are innocent, don't ask Daphne, and caution others against doing so! Why would that be, if she just plain ought to believe as she actually does?

Of course, the fittingness of such epistemically critical attitudes would be explained if it were the case that Daphne all-things-considered just plain ought to believe her client is guilty. But what if she did believe so, so that it would be predictable she'd give a lackluster defense? It might well be she shouldn't then be "praised and encouraged" for her belief, but instead "condemned or rebuked" from a moral perspective, as Nolfi has it (bearing in mind we're assuming that she *could* believe her client is not guilty). But why, if she just plain ought to believe the client is guilty, and does so?



For Dualism, there is nothing puzzling here. Whichever way Daphne goes, a mixed response is fitting, because she will either fail to believe as she epistemically ought (insofar as she forms a view on the matter<sup>13</sup>) or as she practically ought.

### 3.4 The Superfluity of ‘Just Plain Ought’

At this point, some might still insist that there simply *must* be a single answer to what we ought to believe, all things considered. But why? Let’s go back to the Red Red Wine scenario I started with. If you put yourself in the partner’s first-person perspective, you might feel torn. On the one hand, you might think: “That stain is from red wine, I’m sure of it, and he has a history of falling off the wagon.” On the other hand, you might think “He’s been trying really hard and I know deep down inside he’s a good man – wouldn’t it make me a bad person to suspect him or even suspend belief?” So you might feel a hankering to ask: “But what should I *really* believe?” even after you’ve concluded that you epistemically ought to believe he’s been drinking and that practically you ought not believe so.

Dualism says this is misguided. You should instead ask yourself what kind of question you’re really asking. If you’re anxious about what *you* should believe rather than about what *he* did, you’re probably really interested in the practical question. You’re not at bottom asking yourself “Did he drink or not?” but about what your stance should be. And, we’re stipulating, the answer to that question is that as a friend and partner, you shouldn’t believe he was drinking. The answer to the other question is that yes, in the light of your evidence he very likely has been drinking, so you should believe he has been drinking. It might be comforting to have a philosophical theory that tells you which question you really should ask or how the different reasons stack up against each other, but I’ve argued we can’t

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<sup>13</sup> This qualification is needed, because positive epistemic duties plausibly kick in only if we form some belief about the matter – we don’t need to believe everything we would be justified in believing (Feldman 2000, 679).

have that. There is one kind of comfort that I can offer, however: whichever way you go, you have a partial defense that displays you as a substantively rational agent.

What about the third-person perspective? Don't we need to know which way you ought to believe, period? Well, why would we need to know *that*? The question for us from the third-person perspective is how to react to your failure to believe as you ought. In this scenario, you inevitably will fail in one way or another, either epistemically or morally. This would leave us torn about how to respond, if there were just one kind of response to failing to believe as one ought. But as I've already argued, there isn't. So there is no real need for us to know what you just plain ought to believe, since mixed responses can be simultaneously fitting.

### *3.5 But Aren't There Cases in Which There Clearly Are Things One Just Plain Ought to Believe?*

According to Dualism as I've formulated it, there's no such thing as just plain ought at least when it comes to belief. But, some may object, aren't there clear cases in which one just plain ought to believe one way rather than another?<sup>14</sup> These purported cases come in several varieties. First, Eilis is going to believe either that it's raining or that it's not raining, has strong evidence that it's raining, and also has practical reason to believe it's raining. Surely, the objection goes, she just plain ought to believe that it's raining. Second, maybe Frank's practical reasons permit either suspending or disbelieving and he epistemically ought to suspend – isn't it the case that he just plain ought to suspend?

My response is that we can account for these temptations without appealing to a just plain ought that subsumes all authoritative considerations by making use of more informative notions based on interaction between various kinds of oughts. In the first case, it's true that

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<sup>14</sup> Selim Berker raised this objection.

Eilis has ‘every reason’ to believe it’s raining (as we might say) and no sufficient authoritative reason not to do so. If we parse it right, I wouldn’t object to saying that all things considered, she ought to believe that it is raining. But this requires interpreting ‘all things considered’ as ‘required by every authoritative normative domain’, not in the usual sense of what results from combining all authoritative reasons together. (It’s more like ‘all oughts point in the same direction’.) In the Frank scenario, it’s clear that there’s just one option, suspending, for which it is not fitting simpliciter to criticize Frank in any way – it is fitting to criticize him both epistemically and practically for believing, and epistemically for disbelieving, too. In this yet more special sense (‘no oughts point against it’), we could meaningfully say that it’s what he ‘all-things-considered’ ought to believe – even though there’s no ought simpliciter, and in the practical sense, also disbelief would be permissible. Nevertheless, it’s clearer to avoid the language of all-things-considered ought, since it is naturally read to refer to an ought simpliciter.

Finally, a third kind of scenario involves second-best options.<sup>15</sup> Suppose Gina has some epistemic reason to believe that  $p$ , almost as strong epistemic reason to suspend on  $p$ , and some epistemic reason not to disbelieve that  $p$ . At the same time, she has some practical reason to disbelieve that  $p$ , almost as strong practical reason to suspend on  $p$ , and very strong practical reason against believing that  $p$ . So, crudely, belief would be practically very bad and disbelief epistemically bad, while there’s very little to be said against suspending from either perspective. Shouldn’t Gina then just plain suspend, putting all these considerations together?

Dualism will deny this. But once we spell out what it says instead, the possible intuitive appeal of just plain having to suspend will recede. Dualism entails that if Gina suspends, she’s both epistemically and practically criticizable. However, it is fitting to criticize her only mildly both epistemically and practically, since the difference from the best

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<sup>15</sup> Berker and David Enoch pressed this objection.

option is so small. (This assumes, plausibly, that degrees of criticizability hang on the strength of reasons against belief.) If Gina either believes or disbelieves, she's rightly subject to significant criticism of one sort or another. So by doing something she in no sense ought to, she minimizes the overall level of fitting critical attitudes towards her. That's my explanation for why it looks tempting to say it's what she ought to do, all-things-considered. But we can say *that* without appealing to ought simpliciter, and thus without assuming that there are both epistemic and practical reasons for belief that we can directly or indirectly weigh against each other.

### **Conclusion**

I've argued that insofar as there are both epistemic and practical reasons to believe, there is nothing we just plain ought to believe, but rather both what we epistemically ought to believe and what we practically ought to believe. We've also seen that this Dualism of Practical and Theoretical Reason with respect to belief has various neat explanatory pay-offs. To finish up, I want to briefly consider what it might mean for debates about pragmatic encroachment, including moral encroachment.

Very roughly, then, we're talking about views according to which the epistemic status of a belief depends on moral or other practical considerations. Renée Jorgensen Bolinger (2020) helpfully distinguishes between two rationales for moral encroachment. The first appeals to the idea that it's rationally permissible to act on what we know or justifiedly believe (the Knowledge-Action Principle), and then concludes from the fact that rational permissibility of action varies with practical stakes that the same goes for knowledge or justification. Roughly, when the costs of error are high, we need more evidence for positive epistemic status. Famously, in Keith DeRose's (1992) Bank Cases, a person with some evidence that the bank is open on Saturdays and whose life savings are at stake intuitively

doesn't know that the bank is open on Saturdays, while another person with identical evidence but low practical stakes does know that it is open.

The second rationale is the idea that there can't be a conflict between morality and epistemic justification (No Conflicts Principle). This motivates a more radical form of moral encroachment when combined with the idea that some beliefs can in themselves wrong others, perhaps even if they're true (Schroeder and Basu 2019). In that case, there are beliefs that have very strong evidential support that we nevertheless epistemically shouldn't have, because we morally shouldn't have them.

If Dualism is correct, it undercuts this second sort of motivation for encroachment. There evidently can be conflicts between epistemic and moral demands, if they are both independently authoritative. So insofar as the case for radical moral encroachment relies on the No Conflicts Principle, it is undermined by Dualism. In contrast, Dualism is consistent with more moderate moral and practical encroachment motivated by the Knowledge-Action principle. With a suitable bridge principle, the epistemic permissibility of belief might depend on the moral or prudential permissibility of *acting* on it, even if it is independent from the moral permissibility of *believing*.

But it's worth noting that the influence of practical considerations of acting on belief on epistemic justification does have some worrying consequences. Among others, it follows from encroachment that even if your evidence stays the same, you can become epistemically justified in believing or even come to know that the bank is open on Saturdays *just because* an angel investor pays off your loans and thus lowers the stakes.<sup>16</sup> This sort of instability is pretty troubling, and we could nicely avoid it if practical and moral stakes only affected what

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<sup>16</sup> This point was made by Jaakko Hirvelä.

we practically ought to believe but not epistemic demands. But I'll have to leave further investigation of that issue for another day.<sup>17</sup>

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